



STICKS

A GOLFER'S TALE

WALT
SAUTTER

Sticks
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By W. Sautter

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Prologue

I hope that you will enjoy meeting Bob Andrews and sharing his adventure. I believe that anyone who has played the game will see a bit of Bob in himself.

I wrote “Sticks” hoping that the reader could recognize some of his own foolish fantasies, that is, the two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar driver that you just knew would take ten strokes off your game or the miracle swing trainer that you saw on TV which would be your ticket to the perfect round.

If nothing else, I hope that “Sticks” puts an occasional grin on your face and causes a now and then nod of self-recognition as you read.

Enjoy and thanks for reading “Sticks”!

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Frequently Used Golfing Terms

(For the uninitiated)

Par – the expected score on a hole.

Birdie – one stroke lower than par Eagle – two strokes lower than par Bogey- one stroke over par.

Double bogey – two strokes over par.

Slice- a shot curving sharply away from the golfer.

Hook – a shot curving sharply towards the golfer.

Duffer – an average to below-average player.

Trap – a sandpit designed to make a shot difficult.

Pinnacle – a brand of golf ball.

Mulligan – an extra uncounted shot (cheating).

Chip – a short shot to the green.

Wedge- a club used for chipping.

Driver – a club used for long tee shots.

Tee shot – the first shot of a hole.

Irons – clubs used for shorter, intermediate shots.

Woods – clubs used for longer shots.

Rough – areas of longer grass adjacent to the fairway.

Fairway – areas of shorter grass leading to the green.

Round – a complete eighteen holes of play.

Lie – (1) the position of the ball before attempting to strike the ball.

(2) the score a golfer reports to his friends

Off The Books (OTB) – when a golfer refuses to continue scoring during a round to avoid further humiliation.

Clubhouse Trot – when poor performance causes a golfer to terminate play early and walks back to the clubhouse alone.

The Fling – the throwing of a club after a missed shot.

“Oh, Shit!”* – indicates the first poor shot of a series.

“Holy shit!!”* – indicates the second poor shot of a series.

“This game sucks!”* – indicates the third poor shot of a series.

“I quit! I’m taking up fishing”* – indicates extremely poor play indeed.

Notes on Informational Sources

* These terms are excerpts from the ranting of fellow duffers Chris Parish and Jack Parish. I hear them so frequently that I assume they are part of accepted golf terminology!

STICKS

Chapter One

“Traffic and weather every fifteen minutes on KAQO, but where’s the traffic today? There is none! Today’s Saturday and it’s six A.M. on the Larry Fine Show and I’m sorry that you have to be up to hear this – Well, not that sorry, otherwise I’d be outta work and –.”

Bob opened one eye and peered hazily towards the clock radio. Larry Fine was right. It was six A.M.!

He slowly reached over towards the clock, ignoring the pops and crackles in his back as he moved. He moved the final two inches and the room fell silent.

“In an hour and a half this torture will have been worth it when he was standing on the first tee at Rocking Ridge,” he told himself as he struggled towards full wakefulness. Methodically, he stretched the other, still partially dormant appendages, each one creating its own familiar little rhythm of snaps and creaks. He slid one foot to the floor, then the other and with what felt like superhuman effort, he pulled himself to a seated position on the edge of the bed. He stared aimlessly for a moment and then exited the fading fog into consciousness.

“Today will be a great day,” he thought.

“I am going to really kick some ass.”

“Today’s the day those guys are going to take a real whipping” he smirked.

He arose and walked straight downstairs, passing the bathroom and the kitchen on the way and walked directly to the garage. There they were, glittering in the early morning sunlight as it poured through the window.

Their beauty was blinding, all twelve hundred and fifty dollars of it. The sun gleamed from the nine iron, it danced from the seven and sparkled from the three. The soft leather bag accented the brilliant display with a touch of elegance that sent shivers down his spine.

Even the head covers on the woods cast their own special radiance completing the grandeur of the scene.

All the extra hours that he had spent at work in order to buy them now seemed a small price to pay for objects of such beauty and perfection, he thought.

Reluctantly, he slowly closed the door and wandered back up the stairs still somewhat awestruck and began his preparation for what he knew would be his greatest day ever.

Mindlessly, he shaved and showered, brushed his teeth and dressed, all the time imagining the taste of triumph that soon would be his. As he entered the kitchen, Maryanne sat sipping a cup of coffee with the paper spread before her.

“Watson is in the lead at the seniors” she announced.

“After today, I think he’ll have some problems” she paused and then continued.

“Because I read that the entire PGA was just issued a special bulletin about Bob Andrew’s new golf clubs and that they better be ready for some stiff competition” she continued laughingly.

“Seriously Honey, I wish that I could go with you today to see the look on Pete’s face. He’s sure not going to have that old Pete smile on his face when you get done with him” she commented.

“I think you’re right” Bob replied confidently. I know that those clubs cost a lot. I guess maybe we should have bought a new dishwasher” he added apologetically.

“But – well, it’s really wonderful of you to understand how much this means to me” he continued gratuitously.

“You’re a wonderful wife” he added and kissed her just as a car horn tooted in the driveway.

“By the way honey” she shouted as he opened the door to the garage, “Remember that I’m going to that house sale over on Houston Street this afternoon. If you get home before I go you can come with me. It will probably be at about two o’clock.”

“OK,” he replied hastily as he scurried into the garage. He hurried over to the golf bag, hesitated admiringly for a moment, and threw it over his shoulder. He pressed the garage door button and it rose ever so slowly, like the curtain rising on a Broadway stage, gradually revealing him in all his splendor to those waiting in the van.

He was a picture to behold, clad head to toe in perfect attire. He wore a bright blue shirt decorated with multicolored golf balls and tees with white pants and shoes to match. He stood proudly with his sparkling new bag over his shoulder, looking much like a page from “Golf Illustrated”.

He walked to the back of the van and Frank popped the door open. He carefully placed his bag on the floor of the van next to the other bags.

“A diamond among debris,” he thought as he stepped back and closed the door. He walked around and slid into the van next to Mike.

“Holy shit! You really went the whole route” exclaimed Mike.

“I never thought you’d do it. I thought it was just a lot of bullshit. I never thought you’d go for all that dough – but – they sure do look like some fantastic clubs!” admitted Frank.

Frank put the van in gear and they pulled out of the driveway and headed toward Rocking Ridge Golf Club.

“How did Maryanne take it?” he asked.

“No problem at all,

” boasted Bob.

“She says I deserve them, and I do” he added.

“What are we going to play today? Five-dollar Nassau?” asked Frank.

“Five dollars on the front, five on the back and five overall, plus a dollar on pars and two on birdies?” he continued as he turned and look at the other three.

“I’m feeling pretty lucky today” replied Bob. “Let’s make it ten, ten and ten, two fifty and five” he continued.

There was a short pause in the conversation. “OK, what the hell, I’ll go along with that” answered Frank.

“Me too” agreed Mike.

“All right by me” added Pete.

“Maybe I can win enough today so that I can get a new set of clubs like Bob” Mike chuckled.

Everyone laughed including Bob.

“Well, I’ve got to get the money to pay for them somehow and I guess you guys are it” Bob commented wryly.

After several more minutes, the course loomed ahead.

“We’ve got a seven forty-five tee time and it’s just seven-thirty. Perfect!” said Pete as they pulled into the parking lot.

Frank popped the rear door as they all quickly piled out of the van and hurriedly collected their bags from the back.

Bob led the pack like a drum major eagerly strutting towards the clubhouse. Pete and Frank followed more leisurely while Mike with his short, stocky legs struggled to keep up.

They reached the clubhouse, paid the greens fees and hustled out to the first tee.

“How are you fellows doing today? You’re all ready to go” said the starter in one breath.

“Good Don” replied Frank.

“Looks like you’re doing really good, Mr. Andrews.

That’s a beautiful set of clubs you’ve got there. They’ve got to be worth at least five strokes” remarked the starter.

“The guy who sold them to me said ten” Bob joked back with a broad smile.

“But – I hope he’s wrong. I’m looking for fifteen” he added as he walked ahead to catch the other three at the first tee.

Mike was going through his usual calisthenics warm-up routine looking as if he were preparing for the “Iron Man” competition. Pete was doing his usual deep knee bends and grunting out his usual moans and groans.

Frank rapidly swung his six and seven irons, which he held in tandem, with a methodical back and forth motion. Bob removed the headcover from the driver and pulled it from the bag. As he did so, just for a single moment, he had a fleeting thought of King Arthur drawing Excalibur from the stone. He held the club tightly. It had a perfect grip, a perfect balance, and a perfect feel.

“OK, let’s flip the tee and see who leads off” announced Pete and with that, he threw a tee into the air.

“Looks like me, then Mike, then Frank, and then you, Bob.”

He carefully placed his ball on its tee, took his customary two practice swings and addressed the ball. He drew back the club and swept the ball from its perch in one long, fluid motion.

“Straight and long. Beautiful!” cheered Mike.

“Hard act to follow,” said Frank as he stepped forward. Frank’s lean frame rhythmically moved side to side as he prepared for his shot. Then, he stepped forward to the ball and gracefully struck it from the tee with a wide, arcing thrust. The crack of the impact immediately announced the precision of the shot.

“Two good ones in a row” shouted Mike as he walked towards the tee with his driver in hand. He twisted his short stocky body sharply from left to right again and again as he prepared for his shot. He then quickly stepped up to the ball and struck it soundly.

“Not as good as you guys. Straight OK, but a little short! I’ll get you in the short game though. I always do” he remarked confidently.

Now it was Bob's turn. He felt his heart speed up a little as he took his place at the tee. He pulled a brand-new Pinnacle from his pocket and placed it on the tee. Then, he eagerly whipped the driver to and fro in long graceful arcs as he readied himself for his shot.

He stood motionless for a moment and then carefully drew the club back from the ball. The sunlight reflected from its shaft as it moved back over his shoulder. He reached the top of his swing and the club flexed hard with the energy of a crushing impact straining to be released. Down it came in perfect symmetry with the backswing, again catching and reflecting the sun's flashing rays. A millisecond later the head came slamming into the waiting ball.

An instant later, Bob looked up to see the ball rocketing forward from the tee towards the distant fairway. He watched it climb higher and higher in its flight.

Then ever so slowly, it began to move towards the right a little, then a little more and then sharply right. Down it

came. It struck the ground and catapulted towards the bushes adjacent to the fairway.

Bob felt a heavy feeling in the pit of his stomach as he helplessly watched it disappear under a clump of shrubs.

“Long but wrong. Those slices will kill you every time” sympathized Frank as they all started to walk down the fairway.

Bob began to walk too, but a bit behind the others. He’d hit many slices before but how could it have happened this time? With these clubs? Was all the testing, the engineering, the precision craftsmanship; the space-age materials still no match for his slice?

How could this be possible?

He arrived at the point where his ball had vanished beneath the bushes and began to probe the vegetation with his three-iron hoping to locate it. He jammed the club in and out attempting to avoid the long, sharp thorns that protruded everywhere. In spite of his best efforts, he felt

their sting each time he thrust. After repeated probes, the ball finally appeared deep within the heavy growth.

“Looks like a drop Bobby. Can’t hit out of that” advised Pete who had been helping him look for the ball. By this time the other two had taken their second shots. Mike made good his promise of a good short game and had expertly lofted his ball onto the green about two yards from the pin.

Frank was on the far edge of the green and Pete had a lie on the left fringe, closer to the cup than Frank but still just off the green.

Bob finished fishing the ball from the undergrowth, picked it up, held it over the drop area and released it. It fell lightly into a shortcut, grassy section of the rough.

A perfect lie!

He looked towards the green.

“One fifty,” he thought. “Looks like a seven.” He drew the shiny new seven-iron from his bag. Then, he purposefully aligned his shot, drew back and fired. The ball rose high as

a perfect projectile, higher and higher towards the green and then began its descent. Bob watched its flight with every muscle straining as if to influence its path. Down it came, landing amidst a gusher of sand spraying into the air.

“The God damn trap,” he said to himself out loud in disgust. He jammed the club back into the bag and stomped off in the direction of the bunker at the left side of the green. When he reached the trap, he could barely see the ball, which had embedded itself deep into the sand. Only the number four and the letters “P-i-n” on the ball peered visibly from beneath the mound, which had swallowed it.

He stared down at it for a long moment with his hands on his hips. Then, he reached into the bag and ripped the sand wedge from it. He firmly positioned his feet in the sand, drew the club back and came down squarely on the ball driving it still deeper into the bunker.

An audible groan arose, almost in unison, from all of them on the green. Bob looked up. He could feel the flush in his face and the muscles in his neck tighten. He repositioned himself over the submerged ball and again hacked at it. This time he successfully dislodged it from the sand and pitched it onto the green. It landed by the pin and rolled twenty feet beyond.

By now, his stomach had begun to grind, and he could feel a fiery heat moving up into his chest. His disappointment was quickly turning into anger.

Each member of the foursome began to putt. Mike, again true to his prediction of a good short play, lagged his ball to within inches of the cup and then proceeded to par the hole.

Pete putted from the far fringe just a little too hard and followed with two additional putts for a five.

Frank rolled his ball to within a foot of the cup and parred the hole.

Bob carefully looked over the putting terrain noting the subtle bends and weaves of its surface while trying to anticipate every jog and turn that the ball might follow on its path to the cup. Then, he stepped up to his ball, checked its alignment several times and carefully tapped it on its way with the putter.

The ball moved forward curving to the right then to the left just as he had thought but as it reached the cup it rolled again to the right missing the lip. It continued to roll and stopped five feet beyond.

Bob again moved up to the ball this time muttering to himself as he walked. Again, he aligned his shot with tortuous precision. Again, he gently touched the ball with his putter.

It rolled to the cup, struck the left edge, rolled around the lip, tilted sideways and finally fell into the cup.

“Four!

Par!” proclaimed Mike as he reached for the scorecard.

“Likewise,” responded Frank.

“Five!” shouted Pete with somewhat less enthusiasm than the other two.

Mike recorded the scores as they were announced. Then he paused and looked at Bob.

Bob looked back and replied to his questioning stare with a faint “Seven”.

The group walked towards the second tee. Bob dutifully trudged along trying to appear interested in their conversation. He feigned attention, while thoughts of the previous hole churned over and over in his head.

“How could I have played all those shots so poorly?” he asked himself.

He always played at least a six and most often better on that hole, and now, a seven? Maybe it was just a streak of back-to-back bad luck shots.

“Even great players have a bad hole now and then,” he thought.

Despite his attempts at rationalization, he felt the burning heat of anger begin to well up in him.

“Calm down,” he thought. “Don’t let yourself get upset and blow the next hole too.

Remember, it’s only a little bad luck. Things will change. Probably on the next hole, if you just relax” he told himself again. He took a deep breath and held it for a few seconds and exhaled fully.

There, now he felt a bit better.

The other three continued their discussion with Mike and Frank recounting the details of their play on the previous hole, each boasting more than the other. Pete chimed in now and then about how close he had come to also parring the hole.

Bob said little.

When they reached the next tee, the sign read “Three hundred and sixty yards – par four.”

It was picture perfect, a lush green fairway, tended by two large traps on the left, trees on the right and a small pond behind the green in the distance.

“Pars are up first” announced Mike with an air of pride in his voice.

“I’ll go first” he added and stepped eagerly up to the tee. He aimed carefully and swung. The ball was propelled upwards, straight and long.

“Nice shot!” yelled Frank as he stepped up next.

He took several practice wings and moved to the ball. He struck it cleanly with a long smooth stroke.

“Not real long and right. A little slice! It’s in the right rough but it’s O.K.” remarked Mike.

Then Pete moved into position at the tee. He hovered over the ball for a second, drew his club back and pounded it solidly.

“Down the middle but too high and short. It’s only about one seventy” he commented to himself out loud.

He lightly thumped the clubhead on the ground as he left the tee, less than satisfied with his performance.

It was Bob’s turn next. He teed up the ball and methodically executed several practice wings. Then he

moved to the ball, stood over it, hesitated momentarily, pulled the club back and fired. Down it came with full impact just cutting under the ball and driving a large divot skyward.

The ball shot straight up from the tee, rising almost vertically. Up and up it went. Finally, it stopped and fell to the dead center of the fairway.

“A three-hundred-yard shot” scoffed Frank. “A hundred up, a hundred down and a hundred out” he mocked.

Bob’s heart sank. “Son of a bitch” he yelled and slammed the clubhead sharply into the ground.

“Give the guy a break” quipped Mike.

“He’s having a bad day” he added sympathetically. Bob could feel his temples throbbing and his heart starting to pound harder. He could feel his anger mounting, rising up from the recesses of his gut and exploding into his head. He clenched his jaw and tightened his fists. He threw the driver into the bag so hard as to make all the other clubs vibrate together with a loud, resounding, shuttering noise.

He grabbed the bag and stormed off in the direction of his ball, unappreciative of Frank's humor and without a word. He walked in silence with head down, never glancing up from the ground. When he reached the ball, he yanked the three wood from his bag. He immediately squared his stance up to the ball and without hesitation savagely swung at it. He topped the ball and it dribbled about fifty yards down the fairway where it again awaited his arrival.

He followed with the three wood in hand, marching in a numb cadence toward its location.

Upon reaching it, he stopped and drew several slow, deep breaths vainly trying to regain his composure.

"It's still your shot" shouted Pete from his forward position by his own ball.

"I think I know that!" Bob snapped back. He took his stance over the ball. Again, he sucked in several deeper breaths. This time it seemed to help, at least a little. He

waggled the club behind the ball and then pulled back and fired. He hit it cleanly and squarely.

It leapt from the club like a bullet, straight ahead, hitting the green in the distance and bouncing out of sight.

“Great shot!” cried Pete. “Had to be two hundred and twenty yards!” he added.

A faint smile broke over Bob’s face and he proceeded towards the green with his head a bit more erect and his chin held a little higher. The other three continued their play. Pete played his second shot to the green as did Frank. Mike landed in the trap on the left and then all four walked up the hill to the green.

As they walked Bob strained to see his ball. He even walked up on his toes a bit, trying to peer over the elevated lip of the green attempting to see it. They moved closer and the entire putting surface then came into view. Two balls on the green, one in the trap and no sign of the fourth! Bob’s eyes scanned rapidly back and forth over the periphery of the green and around the traps. It was

nowhere to be seen. Soon, everyone was milling about searching for the lost ball.

Suddenly, Pete shouted from the edge of the pond at the rear of the green.

“Here it is. Bring your ball retriever.”

Bob’s stomach turned. That beautiful fairway shot had landed and bounced off the green into the water.

“Some bullshit” he muttered as he walked towards the pond. “I can’t fuckin’ believe it” he shouted as uncontrolled obscenities deluged from his lips.

The words sprang from his mouth and the frustration within him erupted completely. Frustration changed to anger and then anger rapidly turned into a blind rage. He stamped his feet in heavier and heavier steps as he walked. He clenched his right fist and hammered it repeatedly into the palm of his other hand as he approached the submerged object.

There it was staring up at him from the murky bottom through a foot of water at about three yards from the

bank. He stood on the bank, peering down into the pond with humiliation and embarrassment crashing in on him. His vision blurred, a dry hard lump swelled in his throat and he gritted his teeth together.

Then, suddenly in a fit of uncontrollable rage, he reached into his bag and ripped the driver from it. In the next moment fragments of graphite showered everywhere, exploding from its shattering shaft. He flung the broken handle and club head with its protruding, splintered shaft high into the air. Both came down in unison, landing with a resounding splash in the pond. Without hesitation, he again tore another club from the bag, sharply snapped its shaft over his knee and cast the broken pieces into the pond. One club followed another and another each yielding an ear-splitting crack as the shafts flew into a thousand fragments that sprayed everywhere over the surface of the water.

Pete, Mike, and Frank stood dumbfounded, with their mouths opened and dazed stares as Bob continued his

maniacal rampage. After most of his clubs had been dispatched, he grabbed the entire bag with its remaining contents and cast it too into the water. It was done. The very thing that he had so highly venerated just hours ago, now, by his own hand, was no more.

There he stood, hands hanging at his sides, breathing heavily, and sweating profusely. He stumbled backward from the edge of the pond and sank ankle-deep into the soft mud near the bank. Lost in the fatigue and confusion of the moment he hardly even noticed.

Then without a word, with head bowed and his eyes staring straight at the ground, he took the first stumbling steps of the long, trance-like walk back towards the first tee.

“Wait a minute! Wait!” shouted Frank.

“How are you going to get home?” he yelled. Mike and Pete said nothing. They remained motionless, still spellbound by the spectacle they had just witnessed.

Bob never looked back. He trudged step after step with the squeak and squish of his mud-filled shoes sounding a doleful beat as he walked. He had left home that morning filled with optimism and anticipation and now this is how it ended. He continued to walk straight passed the starter and all those waiting at the first tee, in silence. Everyone stared in bewilderment as he tramped passed them.

It was a five-mile walk home but Bob didn't care.

Somehow, this was to be part of the punishment for his foolishness. He wasn't quite sure which was more foolish, his unwarranted belief that he could actually buy the skill that he didn't really have or his childlike tantrum when his expectations failed to be fulfilled. In either case, he knew he was a fool and that feeling was a heavy weight which he carried as he walked.

He thought back to what he had just done. How could he ever face those guys again? How could he face Maryanne and tell her what he had done? How was he going to face himself, the buffoon that he was?

But, as he thought back to the events that had just occurred, he somehow felt, just for an instant, a flash of bittersweet pleasure. He no longer would have to endure that nagging fear of impending failure that sometimes welled up in him as he stepped up to the tee. No more would he have to endure self-ridicule for having missed a crucial putt. No more self-doubt plaguing his every stroke. No more self- chastisement, and despair. It was all behind him now. In a strange way, just for the moment, he felt a paradoxical sense of freedom.

But then again too, gone was the thrill of that great drive, the really long one, and a beautiful seven iron to the green, the one that lands two inches from the hole. Gone too, was the excitement of the ten-yard putt that just creeps over the lip and tumbles into the cup on its very last lazy turn. And the chip from the fringe that hits the pin and drops into the cup for birdie, it too was now in the past. All of it was gone!

His emotions churned. Over and over tormenting thoughts raced through his head as he plodded down the road towards home.

He walked home in a mindless stupor. He was living and reliving every second of his actions.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, the long, painful journey ended, and he arrived home. He stopped in front of the house, reluctant to enter, fearful of openly confronting his guilt before Maryanne.

A car was missing from the driveway. She wasn't home.

"Thank God! Thank God!" he thought.

He walked around the house into the backyard and sank into a deck chair, exhausted physically and emotionally by the morning's events. He closed his eyes; eager to escape the torture that was nagging at his thoughts. He immediately fell into an uneasy sleep.

"What are you doing home so early?"

The voice came piercing through the sleepy shroud and startled him into consciousness. He shot up with his back

straightened against the chair and snapped open his eyes. There stood Maryanne.

“And what happened to your good shoes?”

It looks like you’ve been doing construction work instead of playing golf” she said quizzically. “Well – I got home early” Bob replied sheepishly.

He wasn’t really sure what to say next. Should he blurt it all out and get it over with, he asked himself. Or should he just pretend nothing had happened and postpone the inevitable misery that was sure to come?

She sat down across from him.

“How did you play? How did the new clubs work out?” she asked enthusiastically.

There was a long pause. To Bob, it seemed longer than the waiting time in the dentist’s office. His thoughts raced through his mind as random fragments, colliding with each other in mental explosions, never solidifying into any complete logical sequence.

Should he tell her, or shouldn't he? Then, in an instant, the conflict ended. Like a timid diver perched above icy water, he finally summoned the courage and dove headlong.

"Oh! What the hell, she's going to find out anyway" he thought and in the next moment, the entire story with every grotesque detail spewed from his lips.

He told the whole story from its hopeful beginning to its miserable end in one long, nonstop, continuous stream of words without even so much as a pause for breath.

She sat in stunned disbelief as he spoke. When he finished, she sank back into her chair speechless, with a bewildered look spread across her face. She remained seated there for a long moment, with a muted, sullen stare in her eyes.

"Twelve hundred and fifty dollars! What a price to pay to become the laughingstock of the neighborhood" she wanted to scream at the top of her voice. But then, she looked up at Bob. She could see the embarrassment and anguish pouring from his saddened gaze and somehow,

as furious as she was she couldn't bring herself to torment him further.

She swallowed hard to stop herself from blurting it out. Then, she looked straight into his eyes and mustered all the compassion that she could find.

"I don't know what to say," she said in a soft, controlled voice. "You'll have to work this thing out yourself. You are an adult, I think, and you should start acting like one" she continued within an admonishing tone as if speaking to a child. She didn't know what else to say.

"Now let's forget any of this ever happened" she concluded with a childish air. Then she arose and slowly walked into the house leaving him alone with his agonizing thoughts.

Chapter Two

About a month or more had passed. Bob had swallowed what little pride he had left and called the other three to apologize. They being longtime friends, readily accepted his regrets and tried to laugh it off. Bob knew deep inside, however, that in spite of their best attempts to make light of the incident, he would always wear the mark of a fool. And with that knowledge, he refused their every effort to convince him to play again.

All three had called, each assuring him that they understood completely and that they themselves had often been tempted to do the very same thing that he had done. Each pledged to never mention the incident again if only he would reconsider. All three had extended the courtesies and kindness of their friendship to the limit. Since that day Bob hadn't touched a club or a ball or even watched a golf match on TV. He even found it impossible

to listen to the golf scores during the sports reports on the radio. He found himself immediately changing the station the moment they began. The very mention of the word "golf" sent shivers down his spine and made his stomach roll.

"Golf Digest" arrived in the mail as usual. He didn't even tear off the wrapper. It went straight into the garbage can without so much as a page being turned.

It was strange to get up on a Saturday at eight-thirty. It sure felt better than six-fifteen. He hadn't slept this late on summer Saturdays in years.

Maryanne too took some pleasure in Bob's newly found free time. Many of the little chores that had gone undone for so long and had been a continuous source of irritation to her now became an amusement for Bob. He lost himself painting the kitchen, trimming the hedges and tidying up the garage, all of the things that had taken a distant back seat on Saturday mornings of the past.

As time moved on, his memories of that sordid incident drifted deeper and deeper into oblivion. Oh, there were still times when he had nightmarish flashbacks but thankfully they were becoming less and less frequent. More often, however, there were visions of that, he had to admit, he still fondly missed. That perfect tee shot, the soaring five iron to the green landing inches from the cup as if magically guided there by an invisible hand. These haunting memories were hard to readily forget. He missed the thrill of the long, low three iron into the wind and the pride and exhilaration of the final putt in a winning round. When feelings such as these erupted, he consciously attempted to erase them from his mind with a sudden recall of that dreadful morning months ago. He would relive every agonizing minute and instantly knew that no amount of pleasure could ever be worth paying the price of that pain again.

“Bob” Maryanne called to him as he readied himself for his now familiar, weekly regiment of yard work and household chores.

“I’m going to that house sale over on Monroe Street this afternoon. Why don’t you come along with me?”

Maryanne had been a house sale fanatic most of her life. She started as a child in her mother’s arms and had never stopped. She and her mother used to make a ritual of reading the ads in the newspaper every Friday night in preparation for the next day’s adventure. They would set up a schedule for every Saturday extending from early morning into the late afternoon. Often, they would travel hours to satisfy their “house sale appetite.” They never really bought much. They were hopelessly addicted to browsing, many times covering four and five house basements and attics in a single day.

Maryanne’s mother had died two years earlier, but Maryanne continued alone to make the weekend

pilgrimages regularly. It was as if somehow, she was keeping part of her mother's spirit alive by doing so.

Bob hesitated at her invitation.

He had gone with her many times during winter months, especially just after her mother had died but that was simply to help ease her pain. It really wasn't the kind of thing that interested him. After a short time of browsing, he became bored and he found it difficult to conceal it from her.

"Come on!" she insisted. "We'll only stay a little while" she prodded. "I'll buy you whatever you like" she continued to coax convincingly.

"Well - alright!"

He finally surrendered. It wasn't as if he had other plans anyway.

The house was an old two-story, with a large, open, wraparound front porch, bounded by an old spindled railing with missing spokes. It had several large peaked gables and was clad in dark brown, wooden siding in

need of painting. Its gutters clung desperately to the edge of the roof and several of the downspouts, having become detached from the house, swung freely in the light breeze. It was circa nineteen twenty or earlier, but it still managed to retain some of its bygone elegance even through a deteriorated exterior. The long, steep, stairs creaked ominously as they walked up, sounding as if they were threatening to collapse at any instant. They made their way, timidly, to the porch with Maryanne in the lead. As they reached the top, they encountered a small frail figure, seated in an antiquated rocker, gliding back and forth with a slow measured rhythm. He appeared every bit of eighty if not more. His weathered hands were darkened with age spots and protruding veins.

His long, gaunt, unshaven face was covered with coarse, grey stubble and his severely receded white, hairline exposed clusters of brown patches above his forehead. He sat quietly with his hands folded in his lap, dressed in clothes that although clean, had long outlived their

usefulness. His eyes were sunken in their sockets but a bright glimmer radiated from their recesses when he spoke.

“How are you folks today?” his voice quaked slowly.

“Here for the sale?” he queried. “It’s been pretty slow. Just go and look around for yourselves. Let me know if you see anything you like. I’ll be right here” he continued without even waiting for their replies to his questions.

Bob and Maryanne nodded politely and entered the house. The place was neat and clean but furnished in the style of the forties with heavy draperies over the living room windows and large overstuffed chairs and sofa as of the era. They moved through the dining room brushing passed the high-backed chairs with faded cushions that surrounded the table. Maryanne’s eye darted to and fro as they walked, noting the items which she planned to examine more carefully upon her return. The kitchen too looked like a page from a nineteen forty-eight “Life” magazine advertisement.

Again, it was neat and clean but sorely lacked all the basic modern conveniences.

Throughout were the signs of constant care amidst the scars of many years of use. The newly waxed linoleum on the floor bore a deep strip of wear down its center and long cracks extended across the vinyl surfaces of the sparkling clean kitchen chair seats. The faded pink Formica on the counter surfaces had long lost its shine and the wooden cabinets bore dozens of retouching marks. Maryanne meandered and poked about the place in her usual painstakingly, deliberate manner. Bob wandered down into the basement. The treads flexed and groaned as he descended. The place was heavy with the smell of age. A single, naked light bulb at the foot of the stairs cast a dim light over a pile of ancient paint cans, newspapers, and magazines. Off in the far corner, hardly visible in the shadows he noticed what looked like a small workshop. He carefully made his way closer, eyes squinting and occasionally stumbling in the dark, all the while diligently

searching for an unseen light switch. Then, what felt like a pull string gently slid across his face. He reached up, grasped it, and sharply snapped the light on above him. The illumination flooded the area revealing an assortment of vises and tools carefully positioned over two, long narrow workbenches. Lying on the benches, along with the tools were several golf clubs in various stages of construction. One vise held an old wooden driver with the soleplate removed while another clamped a shaft fitted with neither a club head nor grip. Several aged golf bags in the corner held collections of random clubs in each. Bob looked over the workshop with keen curiosity. "All this stuff belongs in an antique shop," he thought. There wasn't a fiberglass or graphite shaft in the place. All of the woods were made of the old persimmons; no metal woods were to be found. Even the irons were old, solid construction. There wasn't one cavity-back or perimeter-weighted iron in the place.

“It’s the kind of stuff you’d expect to see in the forties and fifties, I guess,” he thought to himself.

In spite of its obvious antiquity, he found himself intensely interested as he continued to examine the contents of the shop. He inspected each and every item on the bench and as he did, he found himself becoming more and more curious. Soon, his curiosity drew him deeper and deeper and he found himself digging through the contents of every cabinet and shelf, every closet and drawer. Each was packed more tightly than the one before with the odds and ends of an obvious craftsman. He drew forth one tool after another, holding each up to the light, trying to guess its use as he examined it. After an hour or so, with his fascination exhausted, he ended his investigation and returned to the first floor.

Maryanne was still roaming about the second-floor bedrooms. He should have known better, he told himself. This was going to be a lot longer than she had led him to anticipate.

Resigned to his fate, he walked out to the front porch and seated himself in a chair adjacent to the old man. The old man continued to methodically rock back and forth, appearing almost oblivious to Bob's presence.

After a silence, the old man spoke.

"See anything you like?" he asked.

"That's really my wife's department. I'm just along for the ride if you know what I mean?" Bob replied.

"Oh yeah, I know. I was married for forty years. I know" he answered. There was another long silence.

"Are you a club maker? Golf clubs I mean?" Bob asked, trying to twist the silence into a conversation.

"Saw my workshop down there, huh?"

The old man turned and looked at him as he spoke.

"Yes," Bob replied.

"Used to be. Can't even get downstairs anymore.

The legs you know, they aren't the best anymore. I don't think the hands would work too good either and besides,

everything is different now. Metal woods, graphite and all. You know what I mean” he continued.

“I thought it was pretty interesting, kinda almost like a golf history lesson of sorts – like a museum,” Bob said flatteringly.

“You play?” asked the old man.

“I used to” Bob answered.

“What do you mean – used to?”

“Well” it’s a long story,” said Bob hoping to discourage any further inquiry.

There was a long silence.

“Looks like we’re going to have plenty of time. I haven’t seen your wife for over an hour. Go ahead. Shoot!” the old man urged.

“By the way young man, my name’s Merle Arthur. What’s yours?” he added and reached overextending his long, thin hand in Bob’s direction.

“Bob. Bob Andrews”, he replied as he grasped it and squeezed gently.

“Alright, Bob then let’s hear it.”

Bob hesitated. He didn’t want to recount his story to anyone, much less a stranger. But somehow the old man’s face drew the words from his lips. Reluctantly, he began to speak, slowly at first and then more and more freely as his tale unfolded. Soon, he found himself confessing every lurid moment of the entire experience from start to finish, omitting not even the smallest detail. He told about the new clubs he had bought, his marvelous expectations and how the whole thing had ended in catastrophe. It was as if he was a repentant sinner and the old man was a priest. The more he spoke, the better he felt, relieved of his foolishness, as if shedding his burden of embarrassment. Merle sat silently and expressionless as he listened to Bob’s tale, never indicating approval or disapproval, sympathy or disdain but instead absorbing and digesting every word.

“I always wanted to play the game well and I guess when I bought those clubs I tried to buy the skill I didn’t really

have. I should have known that you can't just buy talent off the shelf. I didn't really appreciate that then but now I sure do. I wish I had known. I could have saved myself a lot of suffering" he concluded somberly.

Finally, he finished, feeling fatigued by the narration and wrenching emotions it conjured up.

After a short pause, the old man spoke.

"I always wanted to be a good player too. I mean really good, and then finally when I had the chance it was too late for me. I just ran out of time. I got too damn old just when I could have done it, I mean done it big" he said in a melancholy tone.

He stopped and stared into space for a moment. Then he continued.

"I'm ninety-two years old now. I've been taking care of myself since I was sixteen. My wife's gone. She's been gone for ten years now. We had a boy but he never made it back from Vietnam. All my friends and my brothers and sisters are gone too. It's just me and me now guess."

Again, he paused with an idle gaze.

“I’m to the point where I can’t handle being alone anymore. I just can’t do it. That’s why I’m selling this place. I’m going to - I guess you’d call it, an old age home. You know, where I can get some help with the stuff I can’t do anymore. I hate to admit it, but it looks like the body went before the brain, if you know what I mean? I guess it’s better than the other way, the brain first I mean.

Oh shit! You don’t want to hear all this crap about me” he suddenly admonished himself for his ramblings.

Then he paused and turned his head towards Bob and peered straight into his eyes.

“Like I said before it’s too late for me” he mused.

“But maybe it’s not for you” he added with a mysterious smirk.

“Go down the cellar. In the back, by my workshop, in one of those cabinets on the right, on the bottom, you’ll find a grey golf bag with clubs in it. Bring it up here” he instructed in a sturdy commanding voice.

Bob knew exactly the bag he was talking about. He had inspected the entire shop, top to bottom and he had especially noticed the bag and its contents. The clubs in it seemed to be different, different from any of the others he'd ever seen, but he couldn't say exactly how or why. Without a word, Bob rose dutifully at Merle's command and walked to the basement. He found his way to the cabinets at the rear of the shop and removed the old but well-preserved leather bag from it. The club set it contained was from the fifties, like most of the other items in the shop but again he noticed an unexplainable uniqueness about it.

As he lifted the bag, he could tell that there was something special about them in spite of their age. They were not special in appearance but special in the sensation he felt when he touched the bag. Bob pick them from their resting place and carried them up to the porch. He placed them against the railing in front of the old man.

Merle reached over, drew the driver from the bag, slipped the cover from the clubhead and cradled the club gently in his hands.

“Son, these don’t look like much. They’re old and out of date but they’re different. When I say different, I mean there’s none other like them, anywhere.”

He held the club up closer for Bob to examine as he continued to speak.

“Here, let me show ya. See this shaft and head. Look at it real close” he demanded. Bob leaned even closer to look at it more carefully, as the old man instructed. It was a metal club head and a metal shaft. That’s odd he thought. Metal woods didn’t even exist until the eighties as far as he knew. Well, maybe the old man just put a new head on an old shaft. So what!

The old man thrust the club up closer to him and bid that he looked again more carefully. He obliged and to his surprise, he noticed, that upon closer inspection, it did

indeed look different than anything he'd ever seen. It wasn't just a new metal head on an old shaft.

The metal, or what looked like it might be metal, had a faint purple cast to it and a very light gold fleck embedded in it just under its deep, lustrous surface. Bob took the club in his hands and searched meticulously for other oddities as Merle began to speak.

"Back about fifty-eight, a guy came to me to get a set of clubs made. At the time, I was one of the best-known craftsmen around. I would make them from scratch. I had a lathe in the basement and I would machine the heads out of stock, right to specs. Not many guys can do that. Most of them, they just got the heads from a manufacturer and maybe they trim 'em up a bit and then they just stick 'em on the shaft. Put a grip on it and you're done, you know what I mean? I was different though, I was a club maker, not a club assembler.

I made sets for lots of the pros in the old days. I made sets for Sarazin, Parkes and even Nelson one time. They all

knew me and what I could do, and they came here. All those guys, some of the greatest, sat on this very porch with me like you're doin' right now" he said waving his thin, bony finger excitedly.

Then, he paused for a moment, regained his composure and continued.

"Well, anyway, like I was saying, this guy came to me, he said his name was Max Goodhoff.

He wanted me to make him a set of clubs. He said he heard about my work and that's why he came to me. He wanted me to use this special material that he brought with him. He had some small blocks and some small round pieces of it.

I wasn't sure how the stock would work.

I didn't even know what it was. I never saw anything like it before. And besides, I thought the guy was nuts.

Nobody ever brought their own materials to me before.

The first thing I told him it was going to cost him a bundle and if he wasn't a pro, well, what's the point of spending

all that money? But that didn't seem to bother him any. He didn't even flinch. He said he wasn't any pro but whatever it costs, he was good for it.

Now, I thought that was a little strange but then when I ask him about the kind of club he wanted me to make for him, it got really strange. He said he didn't care! Just make the best kind I could. Make a set that I would like. That was weird! Any guy that I ever met, that was going to pay what he was paying, would always tell me down to the last detail what he wanted. This guy just says, 'Make whatever you want!'

After we went through this stuff in the basement, we went upstairs, and I offered him a beer. Ever know a Kraut that didn't want a beer?

We had one beer, then another and another. Do you know what I mean? Pretty soon we were both shot.

Then, he starts tellin' me this crazy story. He said he was a Jew and he escaped from Germany at the start of the war. He was a scientist over there, a 'polymer chemist' he

called himself. Then, he says the stuff that he gave me was a top-secret, experimental material that he'd been working on for Hitler in the old country. When he left, he took it and the old formulas, with him.

He said this stuff had what he called a 'memory'. He said it could actually learn and remember?"

"Learn and remember what?" interrupted Bob.

"Well, he said that it could remember what it had done before and do it better and better each time it did it again. Like, he said, if you made car springs out of it, the more you rode, the better they would work and after a while, the car would ride with no bumps at all, perfectly smooth, all the time. It would learn how to take all the bumps perfectly.

I asked him if it was such great stuff, why didn't he just sell it to some company or the government and make a lot of money? When I asked him that, he got a scared look on his face.

He said he couldn't because the other scientists he was working with back in Germany were Nazis. They thought this material was going to help them win the war and they were plenty mad when he took off with it and the formulas too. He heard through the grapevine that all during the war they were trying to find him, to get it back and kill him for taking it. He said he changed his name and laid low. He told me he was still scared even then and that was an easy fifteen years after the war was over. He said he thought that they were still after him.

He said he was getting tired of being afraid all the time. He said he didn't have enough guts to let anybody know about the stuff but then again, he wasn't going to just throw it in the garbage either.

He said he really liked to play golf and he thought maybe clubs made out of this material could eventually learn the right swing like car springs would learn how to take the bumps.

It was kind of a crazy experiment he said. You know, those scientist guys are always experimenting, and besides what else was he going to do with it anyway?"

"If he was so afraid, how come he told you all this?" Bob asked.

"That's what I asked him. He just said he had to tell somebody. He'd been carrying this in his mind for years and had to tell somebody and I was it. He just trusted me I guess. And, of course, the beers helped I'm sure.

I guess it's kinda like the reason I'm telling you right now. Everybody's got to unload once in a while."

"And you believed all this crap?" asked Bob incredulously.

"Are you kiddin'? Of course, I didn't. I thought the guy was nuts or maybe just drunk, but then I thought, he's a scientist, a German scientist at that, like that rocket guy, Werner von Braun, you know. And then too, there was two thousand dollars in it for me and back in the fifties, you know how much money that would be today, maybe

ten thousand. I sure wasn't going to argue with the guy and tell him I thought he was nuts, even though I did.

“Would you?” answered the old man emphatically.

“Not really” agreed Bob.

“He left a deposit of a thousand bucks that night and I started the very next day, early. It took me more than a month. I worked sometimes day and night. I went through a bunch of blades on that lathe but look at that club.” He pointed with a touch of pride to the driver, which Bob was still holding.

“I bet I made the first wood ever that wasn't wood.”

He took the three wood from the bag and slowly rotated it in his fingers, allowing the bright sunlight to dance over its surface.

“Beautiful!” responded Bob, admiring the workmanship.

“I finally got them all done. I was ready to call him and deliver the job.

That very morning, I picked up the paper and what do I see? He's dead! The son of a bitch is dead!

There it was, right in the obits. I always read the obits the first thing. It's a habit. Done it for years.

There I see it, 'Max Goodhoff, German Refugee, Dead of Suicide at 61'. I gotta tell ya, I about died too.

First of all, I didn't believe he committed suicide. I think they finally got him and now I was a little scared - Well, a lot scared!

What if they come after me? I mean I got the stuff they killed him over. And second, now I'm out a thousand bucks and like I said, a thousand bucks was a lot of money in those days, and besides, I'm stuck with a set of clubs that I don't even really want.

I tried callin' his number to find out a little bit more about what really happened to him but all I got was his wife and she didn't speak any English. I was stuck. So, I figured I'd just have to take my chances, try to forget it and hope for the best.

I put the set away, right in the cabinet where you found them, and I didn't bother with them for, I bet, five years. I gotta tell you though, I was pretty nervous for a long time. I couldn't sell them. I was afraid to let anybody know that I even had them for fear that, whoever did in Max, would get me next.

Maybe I was paranoid, I don't know. Maybe it was my imagination and the guy really did kill himself. Who knows?

Well, anyway, even after I wasn't so afraid anymore, I was still stuck with the clubs. I still couldn't sell them. In those days everyone wanted high polished persimmons woods and irons like Ben Hogan irons. I could never have sold these things and even if I could, I knew that I would never get the money for the amount of work that I put into them. I would probably wind up almost giving them away and I just couldn't do that.

I knew, I sure couldn't tell anybody the crazy story that I just told you. They'd think I was nuts. So, I just chalked the whole thing up to experience."

"So why are you telling me this crazy story, as you call it, now?" asked Bob sarcastically.

"Like I told you before, there are some things, that after a while you just have to tell somebody, whether they believe you or not.

I'm ninety-three years old next year, God willing, and now I don't give a damn anymore what anybody thinks including you. Either you believe me, or you don't, but I got to get it out" he snapped back and turned away from Bob brusquely.

There was silence.

Then, the old man slowly turned back towards Bob and continued.

"One day for some reason, I still don't know why, I said to myself, you put all that time and effort into those clubs

and they're just layin' in the basement. Why not at least try them?

So, I took them to the driving range that used to be over on Route twenty-three, and I tried 'em. At first, they were like any other real good clubs. Nothing was really different about them. They did have a good feel. Why shouldn't they, I made them, I thought to myself. So, I kept hittin'. I hadn't hit balls in years and it was fun. Then, I started to notice something a little different. On every shot I took, the ball got a little bit straighter and a little bit longer too. Not a whole lot to start with but a tiny bit better and better each time.

I hit one bucket of balls then I got a second. A big bucket was only fifty cents in those days.

On the second bucket, I was maybe five yards longer than the first, I mean, every shot. 'Well, on the second one you were warmed up', I thought to myself, 'that's why you did better.

So, big deal!

I went home, and I was feeling tired and my hip was acting up. Now it's shot but it was just startin' in those days. Arthritis, you know, sometimes I had the sciatica for a couple of days at a time and then it would go away for a stretch.

You see, I really couldn't get out and work the clubs like I wanted to and give them a true test. Then too, my wife was getting sick about that time. She had diabetes.

It started when she was in her fifties and it took twenty years to kill her.

Anyway, I finally got a chance to go back to the range and try the driver again. I started right where I left off the time before, I mean with distance and being straight, and mind ya, I'd been away for almost two months. By the time I left this time, I got even better yet. I musta gone back there at least a dozen times and by the time I was done, I was hitting two eighty sometimes three hundred, one after another. I got so good, that guys would stop their hitting

just to watch me and I was well over sixty-five years old then!

After working the driver, I started to think to myself, 'I'm pretty damn good at this game after all. As a matter of fact, I'm great!'

Then, I decided I was going to go to the course and play a great round. At this point, I didn't play that much anymore because of what I told you before, about my arthritis and my wife's problems but anyway I decided to play. I figured, the way I hit those tee shots at the range, I'd probably be in the low seventies at least."

"How did you do?" interrupted Bob, trying to show interest in the old man's fantastic tale. "Eighty-seven" replied Merle in a disgusted tone.

"Are you kidding?" answered Bob in surprise, humoring the old man.

"Yeah! Eighty-seven. The driver was the only club that worked. Every tee shot was fantastic. Three hundred, three ten, right down the middle.

I even could fade and draw the ball whenever I wanted to, but all the other clubs were terrible. I played my usual game, except for the driver. I was a great club maker, but I never was a good player. I always wanted to be, but I never was” he said with a faint sigh.

“So, what happened?” asked Bob with feigned curiosity.

“I know what happened” answered the old man. “The other clubs hadn’t learned how to play yet. I didn’t work them enough. Oh, they got a little better as the round went on because I was using them during the game but that wasn’t enough. Then, I began to understand. I knew what the problem was. I knew what Max was talking about. That round killed me. My hip was out of shape for a couple of weeks.

I could hardly walk. I felt terrible for the longest time. It must have been two months before I got back into the kind of shape, so I could go back to the range again.

When I went back I worked on the three wood. I started off like usual, nothing special. You know, slices, a dub

now and then, but again, the more I worked the club, the better it got and after a few times at the range, it was just like the driver. I couldn't miss with it, two sixty, two seventy every time. Then, I started working every club in the bag. After a while, I got all of them to be perfect, right down to the putter. It took a long time though. With all the problems I had like I told you, it took a lot of my time and I couldn't get to the range every day like I wanted to. It must have taken two years and a couple of hundred dollars at the range and the pitch and putt courses to finally get everything right." He paused.

"Then, just when I'm ready to put it all together on the course, I had this stroke" and he pointed to his left hand resting on the arm of the rocker. He reached over with his right hand and lifted it an inch or so above its resting place and released it. It fell lifelessly back to its original spot.

"See what I mean. It wasn't as bad as it could have been though. Strokes can really be nasty, but it was just enough

to ruin my dreams. I took it pretty hard at first. I bet I was depressed for six months, I mean 'Get the gun the depressed'. All I could do was sit and look at those clubs in front of me and wonder what would have happened if I didn't have the god damn stroke.

That was all I could think about, day after day, week in and week out.

Then one day, I don't know why, I said to myself, 'Christ you better snap out of this stupid self-pity crap. Your wife needs you and you better start taking care of what you have to take care of, and like magic, I snapped out of it. I took those clubs right downstairs and put them where you found them, and I haven't seen them again until right today.

I asked you to bring them up here because I want you to have them. I want you to do with 'em what I wanted to do and couldn't" said the old man and he reached out and grasped Bob's hand with his.

"That's very kind of you" replied Bob appreciatively.

“But, why do you want to give them to me?

You don’t even know me” he added with sensitive curiosity.

“Well,” said Merle, “I’m going to Restful Pines next week.

It’s a nursing home. They like to tell me that it’s a senior citizen living center, but I know it’s a god damn nursing home. I said I’d never go to one, but I can’t make it on my own anymore. I lasted as long as I could and maybe a little longer than I really should have, but you know what I mean, it’s over now!”

“Don’t you have a son you could give them to?” asked Bob sympathetically.

“Like I told you, my boy never came back from Vietnam” he replied tersely.

Bob didn’t reply. He didn’t know what to say. There was a long lull in the conversation. Then the old man began to speak again.

“About ten years ago, I told my nephew that same story that I just told you and I offered to give them to him. He

said he always thought that I was kind of “eccentric”. I guess it was a nice way to say he thought I was a little nuts. I could tell by the look on his face when I told him the story, he thought I was over the edge. Well, anyway, he said he would take them to give them a try. I suppose he said it to humor me because he was supposed to pick them up the next day but never did.

After that, I thought, what the hell if my own nephew doesn't believe me and thinks I'm crazy then who else would? So, after that, I just decided not saying anything to anybody again and I didn't, not until now anyway.”

“Why now? Why me?” asked Bob.

“I kinda figured that you're my last chance.

I can't just throw magic like this in the garbage can and ride away.

When you told me your story about how much you ached to really play well, I thought to myself, here's a guy who deserves a break.

You've got a sincere look about you too. You've got the look of someone who will give an old man's dream a chance and when you give my dream a chance, you will give yourself the chance of a lifetime. Trust me, I'm telling you the truth."

Then, he looked straight into Bob's eyes and gripped his hand firmly.

"Am I right young man? Do you trust me? Do you believe me?" he asked sternly.

Bob mustered all the sincerity that he could and responded unfalteringly.

"I believe you, Merle.

I promise to help take care of the clubs and I'll do the best that I can do by you. I'll let you know how I do."

"If you're telling the truth son, you won't have to let me know. I'll read about you in the newspapers" remarked the old man soberly.

How could he destroy the old man's fantasy? What purpose would be served by that kind of cruelty? What

would it cost him to take the clubs home and put them in the garage with all the other assorted house sale trash that Maryanne picked up weekly? Merle would be pleased, and he'd feel better for not having crushed the last dying hope out of an old man. Just at that moment, Maryanne appeared on the porch, carrying a picture and a large brass lamp.

"How much for these?" she asked.

"Marked right on the bottom there. Mrs. Alom said that she marked everything on the bottom. She's my neighbor across the street. She's helped me for the past ten years. Without her, I would have quit a long time ago.

What's it say?" he asked as he bent over looking at the tag on the back of the picture that Maryanne was holding.

"Oh, there it is. Eight for the picture and -" She turned the lamp over and faced the bottom towards him.

"Fourteen for the lamp" he announced.

She reached into her purse and pulled out the money.

“Twenty-two, even” and she handed it to him. Then, she looked up and spied the clubs against the railing just as Bob reached for the bag. She hesitated for a moment.

“How much are those?” she asks slowly pointing to the bag.

“Nothing!” responded Merle instantly.

“Nothing! They’re something I’m giving your husband.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“I won’t take a dime for them. Just promise that you’ll do with them what I couldn’t. That’s all” he answered.

“I promise,” said Bob and he picked up the bag, swung it over his shoulder and left with Maryanne.

They put the items in the trunk of the car and got in.

“What was that all about?” she asked inquisitively.

Bob started the car, slowly pulled from the parking place and immediately began to tell her the old man’s story.

Maryanne listened and marveled at the absurdity of the tale as he related it from start to finish.

When they arrived home, Maryanne hung the picture on the wall in the den and put the lamp in the garage with her accumulated house sale hoard. Bob put the bag in the far corner of the garage, in the exact same spot where his prized, new clubs had once stood.

He turned and began to walk away. Then, suddenly he stopped and looked back at the bag. He recalled the sincerity in the old man's eyes as he had told his story and just for a fleeting moment, Bob wondered.

He paused, shook his head slowly, turned and walked out of the garage leaving the clubs standing in the corner.

Chapter 3

“Bob, Mr. Harper wants to see you” Jean, Harper’s secretary announced as she poked her head through the office door.

“Whenever you’re ready” she added.

“Harper, the boss! What could he possibly want?” thought Bob nervously. He frantically shuffled through his memory searching for a reason.

“Oh, maybe it’s that Jeffries case” he speculated. He had some trouble with that one. The accounts receivable wouldn’t come out right and he couldn’t figure out exactly why. He had spoken to Harper about a week or so ago. Harper had probably found the problem.

“Sure, that’s it” he surmised with some sense of relief. Moments later he arrived at Harper’s office and was ushered in.

It was a grand setting indeed, with a huge, oaken desk, deep walnut paneling and thickly padded Oriental

carpeting throughout. Harper sat behind the desk like a king at his court.

He motioned Bob forward with a wave of his hand and a much too congenial smile. "Bob! How are you today?" he queried cheerfully like an old friend, which he was not.

He was being greeted with the enthusiasm generally reserved for a class reunion.

Harper's sudden pleasantries left Bob uneasy, to say the least.

He had spoken with him many times but always as it had related to business. The only social conversation that he could recall was at a Christmas party two years ago and even then, the discussion quickly shifted to accounting and how LIFO was superior to FIFO in some tax applications.

"What's going on here?" Bob wondered almost out loud.

"Sit down Bob," said Harper with a broad, artificial smile spread across his face. He pointed to one of the overstuffed sofas near the desk.

“I understand you’re a pretty good golfer” he began in an inquiring voice.

“Well, I don’t know how good” Bob, replied with uncertainty. “I haven’t played in quite a while” he added.

“Let’s put it this way then, you’re the best we have around here from what I gather. I can’t seem to find anyone else in the office who even plays, except for Marge Fullerton” he said with a raised eyebrow.

“I need someone to round out a foursome this coming weekend. The guy who usually plays with us has back trouble and won’t be up and around for at least two weeks. The guy we usually call to sub is in L.A. for a month.

How about it? Can you help us out this weekend?” asked Harper in an expectant tone. Bob hesitated for a moment.

“Today’s Friday - That means tomorrow” he mused out loud.

Before he could respond, Harper interrupted his audible thoughts.

“You sure would help me out and I never forget someone who’s there when I need them. You can help me now and like I said I don’t forget people that help me if you know what I mean” he said emphatically.

Bob knew that the converse of Harper’s statement was equally true. One who didn’t help Harper when he asked did himself a serious disfavor, of that he was sure.

“OK” responded Bob, almost reflectively.

“Eight o’clock then. I’ll pick you up at your house. It’s twenty-seven Kensington Road, right?” remarked Harper.

“Yes” agreed Bob.

“Now, I want you to take the rest of the day off so you can do some of the things that you had planned for tomorrow.

I don’t want you to show up with anything on your mind except good golf. I really appreciate this” Harper

concluded as they walked to the office door. “Thanks again” and he slapped Bob soundly on the shoulder.

Bob returned to his office still mulling over what had just transpired. He continued to think about the situation as he

prepared to leave for the afternoon as Harper had suggested. He was collecting his papers neatly at the corner of his desk when Eric, the accountant from the office next to his, appeared at the door.

“What! You’re promoted?” he asked wryly.

“Not really” replied Bob, “Harper needs a golf partner for tomorrow and I’m it.”

“Hmm, first step to the top. Play golf with the boss, huh? I’ll get your sign made over the weekend. ‘Bob Andrews - Vice President’” Eric jested

“Oh sure. Why not make it Bob Andrews - President” Bob fired back.

“Remember one of the first rules for success is - play golf with the boss. A second rule for success with most bosses is - don’t play good golf with the boss.

What I mean is, make sure you don’t beat him.

I understand he’s not what you would call a ‘good loser’” ended Eric soberly.

“No chance of that anyway. I haven’t been on a golf course in months and the last time I was – well, I don’t even want to go into that” Bob replied abruptly.

Bob pulled into his driveway and pressed the garage door opener. The door slowly rose to allow a beam of sunlight through the opening. It reflected brilliantly throughout the garage. He drove the car in, clearly noticing there in the corner, barely visible amongst the clutter, Merle’s clubs with their lustrous shafts protruding from the pile.

“They’re not exactly Pings. But they’re all I got!

Maybe a good spit-shine and some elbow grease will get rid of the dust and grime and make them look a little better” he thought to himself.

He stopped the car and shut off the engine. He left the car, went directly to the clubs and immediately took them to the basement for their refurbishment. He placed the bag on the floor next to the sink, took out a can of metal polish, some cleaner, a brush and a couple of soft rags.

He pulled the driver from the bag, grasped it by the grip and waggled it back and forth a little. It had strange electricity about it. Somehow, it felt different; different from any club he had ever held. It yielded an immediate presence of firmness and control. It had a feeling of confidence about it. It had a 'just can't miss' sense that radiated through him. It was that sensation he had when everything was going perfectly right when he knew he was playing his flawless best. It continuously flowed from the club as he held it. He recognized that feeling, as the same one he had that day he shot his best game ever, the eighty-one at Green Branch, four years ago.

He had that elusive sense of complete control, there in the palms of his hands. That which usually came only in brief, unpredictable spurts was now all his, that feeling of certainty and mastery he had always sought. It filled him completely. He was overwhelmed by the strength of the emotion and he reveled in it.

He proceeded to remove each club from the bag. Everyone gave a similar sensation as he wrapped his hands around the grip. Carefully, he wiped and polished each. With every stroke of the cloth, he gathered increased reverence for the power the clubs seem to impart. As he worked, his imagination soared, and his enthusiasm swelled.

“What if the old man was right? Could it really be possible?” he asked himself.

He paused for a moment with a vacant stare.

“Of course not!” he answered out loud in a convincing tone and then continued his work. By the time he finished, he was filled with anticipation for Saturday’s game. The very act of handling the clubs seemed to have somehow lifted him to exalted heights. The cleaning then completed, he tucked each of them gently back into the bag with a curious new sense of supreme confidence.

The alarm went off at six forty-five and Bob walked from the bathroom to silence it. He’d already been up for over half an hour, impatiently waiting for Harper’s arrival. All

night long, his head had been filled with delightful dreams of soaring drives, lofted chips to the green and precise “on the money” shots. He was filled with the thoughts of that excellent performance that he knew he was soon to enact. Try as he might, he could think of almost nothing else. He was obsessed by his own thoughts of yet unsubstantiated, prowess. Occasionally, however, a fleeting thought of his last outing did creep into his consciousness.

Almost as quickly as it arose however, he banished it from his thoughts with an overpowering rush of self-certain enthusiasm. He was so consumed with confidence that he knew nothing short of perfection would be possible.

He hurriedly showered, shaved, and dressed in his best golfing attire. Then, he went downstairs and began to prepare his usual breakfast of toast and coffee.

Soon, Maryanne appeared in the kitchen doorway, still wearing her nightgown. It was apparent that she was not yet fully awake. She frequently rubbed the sleep from her

eyes and repeatedly yawned as she spoke. In spite of her sleepiness, she continued her admonishments of the night before. They spilled forth like a litany of cautions and precautions.

“You’re going to remember that this is only a game!” she said rhetorically.

“You can’t let yourself get out of control again. Remember you’re playing with Mr. Harper” she continued incessantly.

“I know” replied Bob tired of her cajoling.

“At least this time I don’t have a twelve hundred dollar set of clubs with me” he added jokingly, in hopes of stemming her volley of chastisements.

“Remember, I didn’t even want to play. I’m only going because I’m under orders from Harper” he continued, attempting to feign indifference and disguise his true keen anticipation.

“Don’t worry! Everything will work out just fine. I’m sure!” he said confidently as he walked over and kissed her on the cheek.

Suddenly, the sound of a car horn came from the front of the house. He gulped down what remained of his coffee and raced to the garage.

He hurried over to the bag and upon seeing it, hesitated for just a moment.

“What would Harper think?” he thought.

In spite of his careful cleaning, the clubs and bag still look like a garage sale special.

“Oh, what the hell! It’s too late now” he said to himself with a sigh.

He reached out and grasped it by the handle. As he did, he felt a tingly surge pulse up his arm and into his body. It was a warm, glowing radiation that filled him and involuntarily tightened his hand on the grip of the bag. He lifted the clubs and sensed a flow of energy enveloping

him. He felt almost fused with them as if he and the clubs were becoming one.

Then, in the next instant, as quickly as it began, the emotion subsided leaving him bewildered but even more confident.

The car horn tooted again, shaking him further into full consciousness. He opened the garage door and walked to Harper's car with the bag in hand.

It was a huge, black BMW sitting proudly in the driveway with Harper sitting pompously behind the wheel. The deck lid sprang open and Harper motioned him forward.

"We'll meet the other two guys at the club" he shouted.

Bob put his bag in the trunk, slammed the lid, came around to the front and slid into the passenger seat.

"Sure appreciate your filling in today Bob. It looks like today's a beauty too" he said, trying to make small talk as they pulled out of the driveway with a chirp of the rear tires and headed towards the country club.

Bob had been to Rock Brook Country Club many times and knew it well. He caddied there as a boy, working countless loops over three summers. Needless to say, he certainly knew its difficulty.

They pulled through the huge, iron gates, up the long, circular drive to the front of the clubhouse.

“Good morning Mr. Harper” greeted the valet walking up to the car. Harper and Bob got out and walked into the clubhouse to meet the other two members of the foursome.

Harrington was a short, balding man, a bit on the stocky side, whom Harper introduced as his attorney. The other one was quite the opposite in appearance, tall and slim; sporting a deep, dark suntan and thick, black hair, heavily streaked with gray. ‘Shots’, as he was called, was a neighbor and longtime friend of Harper.

The four sat and ordered coffees, except for Shots, as they waited for their carts and equipment to be ready. He ordered a bloody Mary, which helped to satisfy Bob’s

curiosity as to the origin of his nickname. They were called shortly and walked to the first tee where all was ready.

“Everything OK gentleman?” asked the starter. Harper replied with a smile and thumbs-up sign as the four stepped forward and drew their clubs from the bags.

“Playing the same as usual?” queried Harrington.

“Sure, why not?” answered Harper.

“Wait! We’ve got to explain this to Bob” interrupted Shots.

“It’s twenty dollars a hole for low score, extra twenty for birdies, extra ten for pars, fifty for low total on the front nine, fifty for total low on the back nine and a hundred for low overall total” he recited rapidly in one long breath.

Bob’s mind responded like a cash register, flashing numbers everywhere. The way he figured it, with some really bad luck, this round of golf could cost him five hundred dollars or more! He swallowed hard. His palms began to sweat.

What could he do? He certainly couldn’t refuse. The choice was no choice at all, that was obvious.

“Well -” he began with nervous hesitation.

“No problem!” interjected Harper, slapping Bob on the shoulder.

“It’s easy money. These guys are like a scholarship fund sending my daughter to Cornell Law School” he added with a convincing laugh as he quickly stepped up to the tee.

He took a wide stance over the ball and stood almost motionless, wagging his club in a small arc. Then, after a long moment, he drew the club back slowly and then brought it down sharply, striking the ball with a loud crack. It leapt from the tee, careened down the right side of the fairway and landed in the rough, about one hundred and fifty yards from the tee.

“Not the best Elliott!” commented Harrington.

“It’ll have to do” answered Harper with some disgust in his voice.

“You’re up Bob” announced Shots.

Bob stepped forward uneasily carrying his driver.

“That’s an odd-looking club you’ve got there,” remarked Harrington.

“It’s custom-made” stammered Bob somewhat apologetically.

“Custom-made in nineteen fifty-five!” remarked Shots sarcastically.

“My uncle was a club maker. He made the set for me. They mean a lot to me” Bob quickly added.

Then, hoping to lend even more sincerity to his initial response, he continued, “I’ve had them for years. They’re great clubs. I wouldn’t trade them for the best you can buy.”

He set his ball in position on the tee and took his stance over it. He looked up at the tee marker. It read, called – “Par Four – Three Hundred and Thirty-five Yards.”

He wrapped his hands firmly around the grip.

An overwhelming composure began to sweep over him. A sensation of power and control filled his thoughts and he pulled the club back and fired at the waiting ball. The

clubhead landed squarely and solidly, propelling the ball forward like a rocket from its launching pad. It flew straight down the fairway rising higher and higher as it traveled.

“That looks like it’s almost on the green!” shouted Harrington excitedly.

“Christ! That’s some drive!” exclaimed Shots, walking up to the tee, while still gazing in amazement towards the distant green.

Both Shots and Harrington took their respective turns at the tee each with adequate but unspectacular results.

Then, along with Harper, they also took their second shots with none landing on the green.

As the foursome moved closer to the green, they found Bob’s ball, sitting directly in line with the pin about thirty-five yards from the fringe.

Bob pulled out a pitching wedge and stepped up to the ball. Again, he had a feeling of complete control. He took two brief practice swings and then gently chipped the ball

in a low shallow arc onto the putting surface. The ball landed lightly and rolled towards the cup, ever more slowly as it traveled. Closer and closer to the hole it moved and then with its last rotation, it plunged into the cup with a hollow “thunk!”

“An eagle! Jesus Christ! He got an Eagle!” shouted Harrington almost uncontrollably. Bob looked at the cup with a surprise equal to that of the others. He was sure that this mysterious, newly acquired air of confidence would probably help him to play better but never did he expect a miracle such as this! He, like the rest, was awestruck.

“Great hole!” exclaimed Harper unable to restrain himself. Then, when all the excitement finally subsided the others finished up.

“Scores?” requested Harrington who sat with a pencil and the scorecard ready.

“I know yours Bob” he laughed.

“Harrington?” he called.

“Five” came the reply.

“Elliott?” he asked.

“Four” Harper answered.

“And I got five” Shots announced to Harrington who then recorded the final score.

“Looks like Bob won that one going away” he added admiringly.

“That’s for sure! You had two fantastic, back-to-back shots” praised Harrington.

Harper didn’t appear nearly as amused or elated as the others and said little. They drove on to the second hole with Harrington still chattering incessantly about Bob’s eagle.

“Par Five – Five Hundred and Twenty-five Yards” read the sign posted at the tee.

“I guess we know who’s up,” said Harrington wearing a broad smile.

Bob walked up to the tee box. Again, feelings of poise and complete confidence rushed over him. Again, he struck

the ball solidly and true. Again, it fired from the tee, at what seemed nearly the speed of sound, sailing straight and long. It landed far down the line, just passed the dogleg turn, near the two-hundred-yard marker. It struck the fairway and scampered left, around the bend, rolling an additional fifty yards beyond its landing point.

“That one is at least two-fifty or more!” yelled Shots.

“Some hit!” he added.

The three others then took their turns at the tee, none reaching, much less passing the distant dogleg. When Bob arrived at his lie, he found it exactly at the two-hundred-yard marker in the middle of the fairway. He looked it over and reached for his five wood. He withdrew the club and held it by the grip.

It felt awkward and uneasy, nothing like the driver had felt. Something was wrong. He replaced the club in the bag and selected the four iron.

As soon as his hand touched the shaft, he could sense a thrust of energy surging from it. He knew this was the correct club.

He drew back and hammered the ball into a graceful arc, landing it at the edge of the green. It hit and rolled softly towards the cup, stopping ten yards from it, on the wide, expansive surface.

The others, after struggling with their second, third and even fourth attempts, finally reached the green. Harper seemed anything but pleased by his own performance, in spite of his lying three at the fringe.

On his turn, Bob lightly touched the ball with the putter, propelling it end over end, causing it to creep ever so slowly towards the waiting cup. It rolled closer and closer, finally stopping just one rotation short of the lip. He tapped it in for a birdie amidst the boisterous accolades of Harrington and Shots.

Harper too, offered his congratulations, seemingly motivated by courtesy rather than admiration. It was obvious in the tone of his voice.

“Scores” again chanted Harrington at the conclusion of the hole.

“Bob – four” he recited and then waited for the others to call out.

“Six” shouted Shots.

“I got a five” announced Harrington with some pride in his voice. Oh, what about you, Elliot?” he asked Harper after a short silence.

“Six” replied Harper in a quiet tone.

They continued to play through the morning and into the early afternoon with Bob’s play drawing gasps and exclamations of astonishment on almost every hole.

Finally, the game ended, and they walked into the clubhouse for the “watering hole.”

“That was some great round!” exclaimed Harrington as he pulled out the scorecard and pencil from his shirt pocket.

“Let’s see” he mumbled as he diligently examined the card. Shots proceeded to order a round of drinks as Harrington calculated.

“Sixty-nine!” he pronounced enthusiastically - “That’s three under par!”

“Best damn golf I’ve ever seen, except for TV,” said Shots, as he walked back from the bar shaking his head.

“Eighty-one, Elliot. Good as usual, but not the best like usual. Far from it!” chided Harrington looking up from the scorecard at Harper, with a faint smirk on his lips.

“You’re usually top banana but this time you’re just one of the bunch like us. Looks like Bob cleaned up” he said sarcastically.

“Shots, your usual eighty-four. And I got eighty-five. - Not bad!” he said in a self- congratulating tone of voice.

Harper sat in a moody silence as Bob collected his winnings. The conversation continued to center around Bob’s stellar play while they finished their drinks and prepared to leave.

“That was pretty good playing” commented Harper in an obligatory tone as they rode home from the club. “You never told me that you were that good” he continued solemnly.

“I’m usually not” responded Bob with sincere modesty.

“Today was an exceptionally good day” he explained.

“I’ve never even played in the seventies, let alone the sixties. I guess it just all came together today.”

“I’d say so!” snapped back Harper, apparently unconvinced of Bob’s modesty.

Bob couldn’t wait to see Maryanne and tell her of his amazing performance. He won over four hundred and fifty dollars but even more importantly, he’d played a charmed game, the best of his life for sure. Harder for him to believe was how effortless it all had been, how natural the experience had felt. It was if he couldn’t make a mistake not even if he tried.

When they arrived at his house, Bob carefully lifted his clubs from the car trunk with a sense of regard they so

rightly deserved. He held them admiringly and carried them as one might carry a religious article. He took them to the basement and placed them in the cabinet at the foot of the stairs. Then, he proceeded to search the drawers of his workbench for a padlock. Upon finding one, he secured the cabinet door and put the key in his wallet. When he got to the kitchen, Maryanne was nowhere to be found. Only a note remained. "Be back at four. Sandwiches in the fridge."

He was still too excited to eat. He walked into the living room, snapped on the TV and sat uneasily before it. He rolled mindlessly through the channels one time, two times, then three times as the excitement of the morning raced through his head. Every nerve in his body was still on fire and his mind throbbed with the delight at the thoughts of the day's events.

"Was this just one of the luckiest days of his life?

Was it a day on which, that one in a million chance came true? A statistical quirk? A point in time when every lucky

shot that he would ever have throughout his entire lifetime, converged into one glorious morning?

Or was it something else? That feeling of overwhelming confidence and self-certainty that enveloped him every time he picked up one of those clubs, was that luck too? How could it be?" he thought.

He had to talk to the old man again. He had to be sure this wasn't just a crazy dream. He struggled to recall the address. Maybe if he drove towards the old man's house he'd remember. He got into the car and drove slowly towards Monroe Street.

There it was number thirty-seven, with its spindled railing and wooden stairs.

He recognized it immediately. Out in front, the garbage was piled high, everything from old paint cans to an antiquated kitchen chair with broken legs. On the lawn stood a large black and yellow sign - "Schindler Real Estate - House for Sale."

He stopped the car, got out and walked up the stairs to the porch. He was greeted by dead silence. He put his hand above his eyes and peered through the living room window into emptiness. The place was deserted. He pressed the doorbell, vainly hoping, that it might be answered. He could hear the muted echo of the chimes through the heavy front door, then more silence. He waited and pushed again. Nothing!

Suddenly through the silence, a voice startled him from behind.

“Can I help you?” the voice questioned. “Are you with the real estate people?” it continued.

Bob turned to face a middle-aged woman, with a garden rake in one hand, standing at the foot of the stairs.

“I was just cleaning up around my shrubs and I happened to see you here” she explained.

“I’m looking for Mr. Arthur” Bob replied.

“You’re not going to find him here” she answered casting her eyes down briefly.

“He died about a month or so ago. He passed away right there” she said and pointed at the empty rocker next to the door.

“He was sitting in that rocker. He used to sit there for hours, all the time in the summer. That’s where I found him.”

“You found him?” Bob replied with surprise.

“Yes. He was having a house sale that day. He was selling everything. He was going to an upstate nursing home. He was over ninety, you know. He never made it to the home. It was for the best though. He never wanted to go to a nursing home. Who does?

He never even finished the house sale.”

She paused for a moment and regained her composure.

“He was a nice old guy. Kinda strange sometimes, but nice. I knew him for years, ever since I moved here. That’s over twenty years ago.

He liked to tell stories a lot and you know what, I liked to listen to them. Most of them were pretty good. I think they were good because he really believed them.

Oh, well!"

She swallowed hard and looked at Bob. "Why did you want him? Are you a relative or something?" she asked.

"No. I bought something at his house sale and I just wanted to talk to him about it" replied Bob.

"Well, if you want your money back, you've got a problem. They can't find any of his relatives. Don't think he really had any left.

It's too bad. It looks like the state's going to get the money from his house when it's sold, that is after all his bills are paid up" she said.

"No, I'm not looking for any money back. I just had some questions" Bob responded.

"Maybe I can answer them for you" the woman volunteered.

"No, thank you but I'm sure you can't" he replied.

Chapter Four

Bob got to work a bit early that Monday morning and found Eric and three others sitting at a table by the coffee machine in the lunchroom. He eagerly waved Bob over as soon as he entered.

“Before you even get coffee, tell us, how did the golf with Harper go? Are you our new manager yet?” he asked with a broad, playful grin.

“It went pretty good. As a matter of fact, really good” Bob answered.

“I played the best round of my life” he added proudly.

“Well, that’s great but – let me ask you a more important question then. How did Harper play?” Eric asked with a more serious look on his face.

“OK. Not bad” Bob responded unconvincingly.

“All I want to know is did you beat him?” Eric said pointedly.

“Yeah” acknowledged Bob.

“Beat him big?” continued Eric.

“Well, pretty big” replied Bob without elaboration.

“I sure hope your good round wasn’t a bad round if you know what I mean. You do remember what I told you about Harper, don’t you?” Eric said with a grimace.

At that moment, Jean, Harper’s Secretary walked into the room.

“Mr. Andrews! Mr. Harper would like to see you when you have a minute” she said.

Bob immediately looked at Eric and Eric looked back in wonderment.

“OK” replied Bob and without delay, he walked to Harper’s office. He entered the room with Harper seated behind the desk.

“Bob, I just want to thank you for filling in on Saturday.” He paused. Then, he asked, “Are you all right for this Saturday?”

This time his words had a hollow ring about them; not at all like those of his first invitation. He did, however, smile broadly as he spoke, but the strain required to maintain it showed through. Bob instantly recognized the tension in his voice and it made him feel uneasy.

He, too, however, managed to force a persuasive smile and thanked Harper heartily for the second invitation.

Then, he proceeded to deluge Harper with compliments and expressions of gratitude, in hopes of taking the edge off the situation.

Evidently, it worked, for by the time he left, Harper had mellowed a bit. He even admitted that it was Harrington and Shots who had insisted that Bob play again on Saturday.

“It looks as if Eric was right after all” thought Bob as he left the office. Eric had been with E.W. Harper & Co. for over fifteen years. He certainly wasn’t the most competent of employees, as Bob well knew. He had worked with him frequently and found him to be less than adequate on

numerous occasions. Eric had survived and prospered in his job in spite of his incompetence by always knowing what to say and to whom to say it and when to say it. He was a savvy political animal and Bob knew it. The more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that it would probably be smart to play more poorly the next time and let Harper win.

Then, suddenly he stopped himself. "Wait a minute! This is really crazy!" he thought.

"Here are I am planning not to play my best and let a low eighties golfer win on purpose! Who am I kidding? I got real lucky one time and now I think I'm a pro! I'll be fortunate to be in the high eighties much less beat Harper. I should just hope that I don't embarrass myself, much less worry about winning" he told himself.

Odd as it seemed, he returned to his desk, somewhat relaxed in the thought that he might play inadequately, let alone win.

The week shot by and Saturday morning came clear and bright. The horn blew in the driveway and Bob piled in the Harper's car for the ride to the club.

He, Harper, Harrington, and Shots again arrived at the first tee precisely at the same time as the week before, not a minute off.

"Bob after last week's showing you're the first man up" announced Harrington.

Bob smiled, nodded acknowledging and stepped forward to the tee. He nervously reached out and drew his driver from the bag. Almost instantaneously, he could feel his anxiety begin to dissipate. A surge of power and certainty pulsed through him from the grip of the club as he clenched it. He moved to the tee as if entranced. He was an automaton controlled by its power.

He addressed the ball, drew back the club and slammed it with every ounce of strength he could muster. The ball took off skyward, rocketing down the fairway and striking within yards of the green. It bounced and then bounced

again onto the green and continued rolling towards the cup. It stopped just three feet from the lip.

“Jesus Christ! That’s three hundred and fifteen yards!” exclaimed Shots.

Bob eagled the first hole. It wasn’t as if he had wanted too; it was out of his control. Once his hands tightened around the grip of the club, it was no longer possible for him to do anything but fire a perfect shot.

No matter how much he tried to diminish his effort, perfection still resulted. At this rate he wouldn’t just beat Harper, he’d destroy him. He stepped up to the second tee with the cheers and congratulations of Shots and Harrington in the background. Once more, an overpowering force enshrouded him and once more. He struck a flawless drive, this time even further than the first. Again, as it had done the week before, the ball struck the fairway and turned to the left around the dogleg traveling three hundred and twenty-five yards towards the pin.

Harrington, Shots, and even Harper stood in amazement as the ball did its magic. In spite of the consequences, he knew the game was out of his control. The longer they played, the more his anxiety melted into complacency. Try as he might, Bob was unable to relent, and he played better and better at every hole throughout the eighteen. "Final scores! Shots, eighty-three. I got an eighty-six. Not the worst!

Elliott, you shot a seventy-nine. Pretty good! Bob, sixty-two! Jesus!" exclaimed Harrington.

"You did it again, really did it," said Shots.

Where did you learn to play that way?"

"It - it just comes naturally, I guess" Bob sputtered. He really didn't know what to say. He was as astounded as they were, but he didn't dare show it. He was thrilled to the core with his newfound skill but condemned to silence as to its rightful nature, lest he be called crazy. Now, he finally knew how the old man must have felt with the truth forever trapped within him.

He and Harper rode back to Bob's house. Little was said. The mood was uneasy.

Foreboding hung ominously in the air as he left the car. It was amplified by Harper's polite but terse goodbye.

When Monday came it was dark and dreary. A light, cold drizzle fell on the windshield as Bob drove the long road to work.

The weather mirrored his premonition of the day's events. He arrived at work and purposely avoided his usual morning coffee stop. He went directly to his office to begin his work. He just couldn't bear Eric's admonishments and jests. Not now, especially now that he was so sure that Eric had probably right. Worse still, it would be particularly painful, to be chastised for something over which he had no real control.

He entered his office and there was on his desk, neatly placed at the center, a large, white envelope, addressed to "Mr. Robert Andrews - Confidential."

Hesitatingly, he reached for it without even walking to the far side of the desk. Reluctantly, he picked it up and without opening it, examined it carefully as if trying to find a clue to its contents, without suffering the torment of actually reading it. Then, he tore it open ever so slowly, all the time surmising its message. He withdrew the note and read.

“We regret to inform you that due to the current staffing situation we will no longer require your services.

Although your termination begins at the receipt of this letter, your salary and benefits will continue for two additional weeks.

Thank you for your work here at E.I. Harper & Co. Good luck in your future employment efforts” signed, “E.I. Harper, President, and C.E.O.”

Bob stood motionless with the paper clutched in his hand.

“What now?” he thought.

His efforts to find new employment during the following weeks were met with a shower of rejections.

“You’re overqualified!”

“You’re under qualified!”

“Call us next week!”

“We’ll call you next week!”

Along with a litany of “nos” and “maybes.”

The phone never rang. He cleaned the house, washed the dishes, did the laundry, straightened out the garage, mowed the lawn and trimmed the bushes. Did everything but get a job!

He sat in the kitchen in a trance-like stupor. Maryanne’s salary carried the bills but then what did that make him?

“A fool!” he thought to himself.

Why did he have to be such a show-off? He had been warned and he did it anyway. He knew Harper wasn’t one to take kindly to even the slightest chagrin and he did it anyway! He had rebuked himself again and again for his foolishness, but all the time he knew, deep inside, that it wasn’t really his fault.

As long as he used those clubs there was no way that he could have lost to Harper or anyone else, for that matter. Enough! He'd tortured himself enough, he thought. He'd been through all of this, over and over. If he thought about it for another instant, he was sure he would go mad. He wiped his hands over his face and rubbed his eyes forcing himself back into full consciousness.

"There's no sense in job hunting- not today" he mused. He'd been to every agency, replied to every classified ad and called every contact he knew. What was left? He did all that he could do. He walked down to the basement, unlocked the cabinet and picked up his clubs and went to the course.

Green Valley wasn't exactly the Rock Brook Country Club. There weren't any valets. As a matter of fact, he could hardly find a parking spot. He finally settled for one at the far end of the lot. He grabbed the bag from the trunk and walked the long walk to the clubhouse. It was Thursday afternoon and the place was mobbed.

He walked up to the starter. The starter looked at him and immediately responded to his unspoken question.

“Two hours, unless you’re a single and want to lose some big money. Then I can hook you up right now with those three guys” he said as he pointed towards the first tee.

“What do you mean by big money?” asked Bob.

“Twenty-five dollars a hole” he replied.

Bob paused for a moment and then pulled out his wallet.

There, tucked under his driver’s license were the five new one-hundred-dollar bills that he’d won two weeks ago.

Without hesitation, he slipped the wallet back into his pocket and promptly joined the three at the tee.

“I’m Bob Andrews” he announced. “The starter said you guys could use a fourth.”

The big one, seated on the golf cart with a cigar clenched tightly in his teeth, answered. “Did he tell you that we’ll take anybody’s money, even yours!” he growled.

“We’re playing twenty-five a hole, twenty for birdies and fifteen for pars. Can you cover that?” interrupted the

shorter man next to him on the cart as he puffed on a cigarette.

“Yeah, the starter told me.

I’m good for it” replied Bob.

“Not that we don’t trust you, but we’ve got to see it,” said the fat one smugly. “We don’t like gettin’ stiffed and you’d like stiffin’ us even less if you know what I mean” he added in a threatening tone.

Bob reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet containing the five, crisp hundred-dollar bills. He took them from his wallet and waved them in front of the three. “Looks like game time,” remarked the third man who was methodically swinging his driver back and forth in a short rhythmic motion.

“I’m Sal. That’s Billy and the big boy over there is Sam.”

Bob put his bag down and withdrew his driver. “Did you ever play this game before?” grunted Sal in his deep, gravelly, voice. “It don’t look like it with those clubs you

got there. What did you do, find those things on the curb on your way over here?" he snickered.

"Leave the guy alone and let's see him play" snapped Billy.

By this time, Bob was beginning to have some second thoughts. What if he lost the whole five hundred? What if he'd really just been lucky those other times after all?

Doubt and insecurity struggled against confidence and certainty to take control, as he waited his turn at the tee. A tumult of contradictory emotions swept through his mind and he fidgeted nervously.

Sal stepped up first and struck a well-positioned drive, far down the fairway. Sam rolled off the cart and waddled to the tee box.

"You're last Bob.

You gotta earn your honors when you play with us" he grunted, as he bent over to place the ball on the tee. Then, after a titanic struggle against the forces of gravity, he righted himself and grasped the driver. He stood at

address, red-faced from the strain, with his protruding abdomen nearly blocking his view of the ball.

His backswing was short and chopping but he managed to put his entire weight into the downswing and the ball blasted from the tee, straight down the middle, passed Sal's.

He paused, with his eyes following the ball. Then, after a moment or two of self-congratulation, he swept the perspiration from his forehead and left the tee, breathing short, rapid breaths of exertion.

Billy slid from the cart carrying his driver, just as Sam returned to it.

He walked to the tee, carefully placed his cigarette on the grass and teed up his ball. He executed several smooth, flowing practice swings then quickly moved to the ball and struck a long, straight drive down the fairway. Bob uneasily stepped up next. He grasped his driver, stood before the ball and hesitated. He paused anxiously awaiting that surge of electricity, that pulse of self-

assurance that he'd learned to expect and had relied upon. He firmed his grip.

Then it came, a strong burst more consuming than ever. A broad smile spread over his face and he ripped the club back and then downward in one continuous, powerful motion, pounding the ball with every fiber of muscle in his body. The missile bulleted from the tee, soaring higher and higher and rapidly faded into the sun's brilliance, as a tiny speck in the distance.

"Jesus! I lost that one" said Sam.

"Yeah, I lost it too. Can't really tell where it went" added Billy and with that, he piled into the cart next to Sal and raced down the fairway.

Sal and Bob followed on foot. They walked down the fairway and the three balls came into view more clearly. All were in the middle of the fairway all within twenty yards of each other.

As they approached, Sam was already preparing for his second shot.

“I don’t see yours,” he said to Bob while he adjusted his stance. “Better check those bushes” he grinned and motioned towards a large clump of hedges in the nearby right rough.

Bob ignored the suggestion and watched him fire a high arcing six iron into the sand trap at the left, front of the green.

“God damn it” he muttered under his breath. The other two took their shots with Sal striking the rear fringe and Billy just short of the trap at the right. The party preceded forward.

“You shoulda looked in those bushes like I told ya” taunted Sam. “I don’t know where else it coulda gone” he continued in a singsong, irritating voice.

Bob didn’t even reply. He just walked forward confident that his shot had been straight and true.

As they approached the green the image of a small, white object appeared from a patch of deep grass the mowers

had missed. It was in the middle of the fairway, about twenty yards from the green.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Sal.

“Here’s his ball,” he said as he gazed back down the fairway towards the tee. Billy took out his scorecard.

“This hole is three hundred and sixty yards. That means this shot is about three hundred and thirty-five!” he announced.

Sam’s face dropped, and a more sinister look swept over it.

“Hey, Bob” he shouted, “Either you got lucky on that shot and I mean real lucky or you’re sandbaggin’ us,” he said ominously.

Bob didn’t respond to his comment but felt uneasy about its disquieting tone. He proceeded to take his second shot, pitching his ball to within inches of the cup and birdied the hole.

The others fell short with two pars and a bogey.

Approaching the second tee the mood was tense and little

was said. Bob teed off first and again drove to within a pitching wedge of the par four green.

The other three again fell short and he easily birdied that hole too. At the conclusion of the round, Bob had won thirteen of the eighteen holes and tied one. His winnings totaled three hundred and twenty-five dollars.

“Fuckin’ ringer” muttered Sal as he handed Bob his money.

The others too paid begrudgingly. The three headed off toward the parking lot complaining loudly to each other as they walked.

Bob packed his glove and ball into his bag, stopped at the snack bar, grabbed a Coke and walked to his car at the far end of the lot.

He felt good. The thrill of the win still burned inside of him. He played well, and he picked up some good money that would certainly help out now that he wasn’t working. He didn’t feel quite the sense of failure that he had when the day began.

Maybe this was a way to supplement his lack of income until he got a job!

“Maybe this could even be a job!” he mused. It sure seemed like easy money. As a matter of fact, he could probably make more doing this than working. He began to multiply some numbers in his head as he approached the car. “Let’s see, three hundred – if I played four times a week –” he thought as he got into his car.

Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder through the car window.

He turned towards the open window to see Sam’s burly, red face staring straight into his. “We don’t like guys coming down here and puttin’ on like they’re just hackers with old clubs and an old bag to play the part and then fuckin’ us over. We don’t take kindly to no fuckin’ hustlers” he shouted. And with that, he drew back his hand and drove his fist squarely into Bob’s nose.

A flash of pain splashed over his face as he recoiled back from the impact. In the next instant, he found himself

sprawled across the passenger's seat, wedged against the far car door. A warm, sticky, salty-tasting fluid was running down over his lips and his nose felt a throbbing numbness.

"There's something to remind you next time you plan on trying to screw us."

Sam then turned and got into an old gray Cadillac with Sal behind the wheel and drove off.

Bob looked down to see a patch of red spreading over his shirt. His nose felt as if he'd been swimming underwater for hours, stuffed and engorged with liquid like a loaded sponge was packed into each nostril. He reached for some tissues and sopped up the blood as best he could. Then, he started the car and drove home with one hand on the wheel and the other hand attending his leaking nose.

Chapter Five

A week had passed. His face was still swollen and showed little sign of the rapid healing for which he had hoped.

The doctor said it would probably be two weeks for the swelling and about three for the broken nose to completely heal. He sat around doing little. He wouldn't be able to go on any job interviews with his face looking like it did. That was for sure and besides the phone hadn't rung in over a week anyway. He felt not only physically but also psychologically beaten. He couldn't get a job and now he couldn't even play golf. What if he ran into those guys again or guys like them? Maybe they wouldn't be so gentle next time.

His vacant gaze remained frozen to the flickering screen. His jaw hung limp, his face emotionless, and his thoughts impenetrable. What would he do now? What could he do?

He sat in front of the television, hour after mindless hour, endlessly rolling from channel to channel.

“It's first and ten on the New York twenty- seven” the television blared its incessant banter.

Suddenly, the phone rang. Bob jumped up startled by its unexpected intrusion. He pushed the mute button on the remote and picked up the phone.

“Hello, Bob? Bob Andrews?” the strange but familiar voice on the other end said.

“Yes” reply Bob hesitatingly.

“This is Harrington, Harrington Rollins. Elliott Harper's friend! We played golf together a couple of months ago.”

“Oh, yes. I remember” interrupted Bob, now eager to find out the reason for the call.

“Let me tell you why I called you.

One of my corporate clients is cosponsoring a PGA tour tournament next month. The other day, one of their guys started talking about the tournament and the different players they knew.

He began talking about all the pros that would be there. Then, in the conversation, I just happened to mention you. I told him how you played the best damn golf I've ever seen. He was impressed by what I told him."

There was a brief silence on the other end of the phone.

"Oh well, what the hell, let me get right to the point. As a cosponsor of the tournament, my client gets to pick a few amateur players to participate. Based on my recommendation, they would like you to enter. It would be your chance to really show that talent of yours.

Besides, if nothing else, you get a free trip to Hawaii and honestly Bob, I think you can get a lot more than just a free trip from this."

Then he quickly added, "I don't need you to decide right now. I want you to think about it. Talk it over with your wife and call me tomorrow. It could be the chance of a lifetime!" Bob sat stunned as Harrington spoke. He could hardly respond.

“Yes, sure – I’ll call you tomorrow” he replied, half stammering as he spoke.

With that, Harrington recited his phone number as Bob wrote it down. He hung up the phone and fell back into a chair.

“The chance of a lifetime!” -Harrington’s words echoed through his head. The more they reverberated within him, the more he knew Harrington was right. This was the kind of thing that one could only dream about, and it came right out of nowhere. He could hardly believe that it was happening to him. He sat dumbfounded.

He’d have to discuss it with Maryanne, but she’d always stood behind him. It wouldn’t be any different now, he was sure.

The next morning, he awoke more tired than when he went to bed. He’d tossed and turned all night, not so much from nervousness, but from anticipation. He was up at seven-thirty and fidgeted near the phone for over an hour, eagerly waiting for nine o’clock to arrive.

Harrington would be in his office by then. Nine o'clock came. He grabbed the phone dialed the number. He was connected immediately with Harrington.

"Well, are you going to play some golf?" Harrington asked enthusiastically.

"I think so!" Bob answered, bursting with excitement.

"Great" he replied. "I've got a thousand dollars on you to take a place in the top twenty and I think I just made a thousand. You're like money in the bank in my book. It'll make up for all the money you took from us those times at the club" he said laughingly.

"Now, let me call the sponsor back and I'll make all the arrangements, transportation, hotel, and a caddy. You've got to have a caddy and I'll make sure you get the best. A real good caddy can make all the difference.

I'll get back to you with all the details as soon as I can. You just sit tight" and with that, the conversation ended.

Bob hung up the phone with his heart pounding and his imagination racing wildly.

The days crawled by. Each day he awoke, walked down to the kitchen and immediately scratched a broad black mark across the calendar date, inching one day closer to the fifteenth, the day he was to leave.

Harrington, true to his word, had seen to all the arrangements. He received his hotel confirmation and two first-class plane tickets, one of which he paid for himself.

He wasn't about to allow his clubs to travel anywhere but right next to him on the plane. Harrington, too, had hired a caddy as he said he would. He said he got one that would certainly "keep his driver straight" whatever that meant? He said he booked a seat next to Bob on the plane and that they would meet on the flight. He said the caddy's name was Joey and that's all he would say.

Finally, the fifteenth arrived. Bob paced nervously in front of the window waiting for the airport limo to arrive.

"I sure wish you were coming," he said to Maryanne who sat at the kitchen table trying to disguise her own nervousness.

“Well, suppose something happens. I mean suppose, well, you know what I mean” she began apologetically.

“You mean suppose I don’t place. Suppose I screw it all up” replied Bob attempting to read her thoughts and doing it quite well.

“I think I should keep my job. I can’t do that and go with you too” she answered, again with an apology in her voice.

“I know you’re going to do great” she added immediately.

“I know you’re right. I think I’m going to do okay, but you’ve got to be realistic too. The best players in the world will be there. It sure won’t be easy.” Suddenly, he drew back from the window upon seeing the airport limo arrive.

“It’s here! I gotta go! Wish me luck!” he blurted as he rushed to grab his suitcase and clubs.

She hugged him tightly for an instant and whispered, “Good luck” as he headed for the door.

Chapter Six

Bob arrived at the airport, checked his suitcase and carried his clubs onto the plane. He put them in the seat next to him and sank into his own seat. He closed his eyes and drifted for a moment. He was flooded with a mixture of anticipation and intimidation whirling through his mind. Several minutes passed. It felt like hours.

He slowly opened his eyes and glanced up to see a tall, slender woman about twenty- five, standing next to him. Her short, blond hair exposed exquisitely fine features, high cheekbones, large, green eyes and full red lips. Her tank top blouse hung loosely over her large, rounded breasts and the satiny fabric of her slacks clung softly to the full curvature of her hips. A clear, sweet scent enveloped her and her smile radiated warmth.

“Hi! I’m Joey! Josephine Fluore” she said, “And you’re Bob Andrews? Right?” she continued.

Bob spontaneously straightened himself up in his seat, startled by her unexpected appearance. “This is Joey? The caddy Harrington talked about?” he thought.

“Yes -” he stammered.

She smiled again, turned and lifted her bag to the overhead storage compartment. Her slacks gracefully slid up over her full firmness, exposing the roundness beneath as she stretched over him. Then, she seated herself. “I know what you’re thinking” she began.

Bob hoped that she didn’t.

“Some caddy!” she mocked sarcastically. That was partly right, he thought.

“Let me make you feel better” she continued.

“I’ve been around the game since I was born. My father was a professional golfer, so I was raised on a golf course. I can remember when I was four or five, he used to practice putting and I used to go and get the balls out of

the cup and bring them back to him. I would do that for hours. I loved it and so did he.”

“When I became a teenager, I caddied for him. I did that for six years.”

“Who is his caddie now?” Bob asked curiously.

“Well,” she replied with downcast eyes.

“He died four years ago. He had just got it all together. He won a few minor tournaments and he was getting ready to make a big move and then it happened. He got cancer!”

She paused and swallowed hard before continuing.

“It started as a lump in his left shoulder.

He tried to beat it, you know, pretending that if he just kept playing, it would go away. It didn’t. Even I thought he could beat it, but then when the doctors wanted to amputate his arm, he just gave up.”

“He never would let them operate. He said he’d rather die and he did!”

She paused again, a long pause this time.

“But that’s enough of that. Let’s talk about you and how we’re going to win this tournament” and with that, she took out a course map and spread it before them.

It was a beautiful flight and by the time it ended, he felt as if he knew Joey for years. She had winning ways that made him comfortable right from the start. Her charm and intelligence parlayed her good looks into an unbeatable combination.

His nervousness quickly faded. Throughout the trip, she bolstered his confidence with a voice of experience. By the time they landed, he felt relaxed and assured.

They were greeted at the airport by a fellow named Jack, a representative of Covell Corporation, the sponsor, just as Harrington had said they would. Jack guided Bob and Joey through the maze of meetings and formalities preliminary to the event. Bob shook more hands and smiled more smiles than he’d done in his lifetime. He met and touched those who he viewed only the day before, as unapproachable titans of the game. The more he

experienced the exhilaration, the more he longed to become one of them.

Tomorrow, he would begin his first step towards that lofty goal.

Now, he was more eager than ever.

The sun rose brightly, and the air was sweet. It was a perfect day for golf or for just being alive, for that matter. He dressed hurriedly and met Joey at the coffee shop for breakfast. She entered, attired in white shorts and blouse, wearing a golf visor with a name "Andrews" emblazoned across its brim. "It pays to advertise," she said with a grin. They arrived at the course early and together walked the entire eighteen. Bob could tell immediately that she was no amateur. She carefully scrutinized each twist and turn of the course, examining every fairway and rough, checking the grass texture and depth with almost scientific precision. She wrote page upon page of notes, describing every aspect and contingency of the terrain no matter how minute it appeared. She sketched every green, carefully

evaluating possible pin placements and breaks at various locations noting how each would be played from anticipated lies.

Bob soon began to appreciate, not only Harrington's sense of aesthetics but also his assessment of competency in selecting her as his caddy. With the inspection over, they walked to the practice tee. When they arrived, Bob stepped up to the tee box and looked out over the practice field noting the two-fifty, three hundred and three fifty-yard markers in succession.

Joey pulled the driver from the bag and held it out to him. As she held it, a curious look covered her face, as if she was experiencing something unusual, something strange. She said nothing, but her expression revealed her perplexity. Bob accepted the club and began his warm-up routine, swinging the club back and forth.

Then he was ready. He struck his first shot. It soared straight and long, landing just in front of the three-

hundred-and-fifty-yard marker. He fired the next and the next each falling at, or beyond that same location.

Joey stood awestruck by his power and consistency. He hit several more, this time bouncing them off the marker itself, five out of seven times. Joey gazed in astonishment as he completed his practice with the driver. He handed it back to her and requested the seven iron. Once again, an enigmatic look spread over her face as she drew it from the bag.

“These clubs look different and they have a funny feeling too. I can’t exactly explain it” she said looking at the seven iron as she held it.

Bob quickly replied as he had so many times before, how they had been made especially for him by his uncle who was a club maker. He had told that same white lie so often in the past, that by now, he was beginning to almost believe it himself. She said nothing but nodded agreeably. Bob proceeded to take the seven and with pinpoint accuracy, lofted high, arcing shots down onto and striking

the one seventy markers, time after time. She stood in amazement.

“What’s the matter? Never seen anybody hit golf balls before?” he asked with a sly smile.

“Not like that” she replied with admiration in her voice.

With his work completed on the practice tee, they moved to the first tee of the course and waited for Bob’s turn.

When it came he performed with a machine like precision, shot after shot, guided flawlessly by Joey’s expert advice and the enchantment of the clubs. One after the other, his remarkable shots sent the ball blasting towards the flagstick in a direct, unaltered path.

When the round was over, the scorecard read sixty-six, with four consecutive birdies on the fifteenth through the eighteenth holes.

“Great practice round” cheered Joey. “Four rounds like that could win it” she added optimistically.

“I was feeling good towards the end there and I think I can do even better tomorrow” Bob responded with

certainty and shot sixty-three in his second practice round. Now, both he and Joey felt his chances of winning were no longer a dream but a reality. The next day they would begin to find out if they were right.

It all relied upon how he could deal with the crowd, the excitement, the media pressure and most importantly, the intimidation of playing against the legends that would be there. When he thought of the challenge that awaited him, his stomach turned, and he could feel cold perspiration in his armpits. But once his hands wrapped around the club grips, all uncertainty and fear instantaneously vanished from his thoughts, leaving only confidence and conviction. That night, he prayed harder than ever that the magic of the old man's club would continue to serve him.

Chapter Seven

He'd seen crowds like this before but only on television that is. He'd even been to a couple of professional tournaments and seen them firsthand but being at the center was much different. When his foursome was called, he walked to the first tee surrounded by three of the game's giants.

"Hey, Nick!

"Dave! - Dave!" roared from the crowd.

"Greg let's see you show your teeth today" came the cries from the gallery amidst the chatter of camera clicks and cheers.

If it was not for the occasional "Who's that with them?" being whispered quietly here and there, he would have thought himself to be invisible. The closer they approached the tee, the weaker his legs began to feel, the more wildly his head spun and the more rapidly his

stomach quivered. All three preceded him at the tee; firing drives, each more magnificent than the one before it.

Then, it was his turn. Joey pulled his driver from the bag and handed it to him with a wink from her long, lacey eyelashes and a smile from her full red lips. He grasped the club tightly. Instantly, he felt the pounding anxiety begin to drain from his body.

Without hesitation, he stood before the ball, drew the club back and slammed it with every fiber of muscle he possessed. A roar exploded from the crowd as the club swept over his left shoulder and came to rest. He looked up to see the ball bullet skyward, sailing far beyond those of the other three.

“Three hundred and fifty yards!” someone from the crowd yelled.

“Maybe three seventy!” came another cry.

“I think maybe it hit the green!” came a third, incredulous voice.

As the morning turned to early afternoon, he had parlayed one stunning shot upon another, amidst the gasps and cheers of the myriad of fans lining the course. Finally, he walked down the eighteenth fairway to the shouts of “Andrews! Andrews! Andrews!”

No longer were the names of the others even audible from the throng. The rest of the course was all but deserted. The teeming multitude of pushing, shoving fans, now surrounded only the eighteenth, hoping to get a glimpse of golf history and its new hero.

Finally, came his last putt.

The cheers of the crowd filled the air incessantly, as he rolled in a thirty-footer and left the green.

Joey raced towards him, hugged him, and whispered in his ear among the screams and shouts.

“Fifty-four! Fifty-four, the best eighteen ever played!”

They pushed their way through the crowds to the clubhouse. When the cards were tallied, he shot a fifty-four, five better than anyone had ever played. Ten

consecutive birdies, another record and two eagles for good measure! Bob couldn't believe it himself.

By the time the tournament finally ended, all the great players both past and present had faded into obscurity by comparison. He shot fifty-four, fifty-six, fifty-seven and a fifty-three in the final round for a total of two hundred and twenty, a full thirty-seven strokes better than the previous record anywhere. The scorecard showed thirty-one birdies and five eagles over the four days.

In one fell swoop, he'd toppled almost every record ever written. He emerged from the locker room that final day into a deluge of reporters, floodlights and television cameras, all crying out for the slightest acknowledgment. The barrage of questions shot nonstop from the assembly and he fielded them one after the other like an all-star third baseman during batting practice. The entire time he stood, clutching his putter tightly in his hand as he answered.

"Bob!

Bob, when did you start playing golf? We'd never heard of you before this week!"

"Is this your first tournament play ever?"

"What was your amateur record?"

"When will you play your next tournament?" Question upon question ricocheted back and forth across the room. His responses remained truthful throughout – that is – as truthful as possible, without actually disclosing the incredible secret of his spectacular play.

Who would have believed him anyway? After almost an hour, he finally succeeded in satisfying their endless stream of interrogations. Then, much to his relief, the press conference came to an end.

He left Hawaii the next morning, still uncertain in some respects, as to what actually happened. He sat on the plane with his mind rambling. He couldn't be sure if it was all real or some strange, beautiful delusion. At times, he questioned his own sanity. Each time he doubted, he

looked down at the headline of the newspaper which he held to reassure himself that it was all true.

He arrived at home that afternoon to find his house in full, festive array. Balloons flew from the lampposts; multicolored streamers covered the windows and a huge red white banner over the door read “Welcome Home Super Champ.” The place was alive with people, some familiar and some not so familiar. It seemed as if everyone he knew, and everyone he could ever know, was there. He pulled into the driveway and cheers filled the air. It was as if he had single-handedly won the Super Bowl.

He scanned the crowd as he opened the car door. His eyes immediately fell upon

Harrington. Who was that standing next to him but Harper, with a smile plastered from ear to ear? Upon seeing him, Bob’s stomach heaved a bit, but in spite of it all, he managed a smile. He emerged from the car.

Maryanne burst towards him from the crowd. She threw her arms around him and held on tightly. Bob held his

trophy high with his right hand and waved his putter with his left.

“Oh, you’re wonderful” she cried as she rocked him to and fro in her embracing grip. Harrington approached him and slapped him soundly on the shoulder.

“That was some great performance, Bob. They’ve already got you picked to win the Open and the Master’s” he shouted over the noisy crowd as it engulfed the three of them.

After a moment or two, Bob gently pushed them back and addressed everyone there, thanking them and especially Maryanne and Harrington for their loyalty.

With his speech completed, he began to make his way through the crowd, shaking hands accepting their good wishes. Within a few minutes, he found himself face-to-face with Harper.

“Bob! Listen! I want to talk to you about your job” he began sheepishly. “You know, I really couldn’t do

anything about it. We just had to make some cuts and, God knows, I tried my best to save you, but I just couldn't. It really wasn't my fault. There wasn't anything I could do" he whined.

Bob looked him straight in the eye. Harper quickly cast his gaze downward. There was a short silence.

"I understand" Bob replied in a disinterested tone.

Harper instantly looked up with pleasant surprise.

"Well, listen then" he began in a rapid, nervous voice,

"We do have a spot open for a public relations representative and we would like you to consider it," he said.

"I'll let you know Elliot" he replied with obvious disinterest. Then, he turned and walked away with Harrington following.

"Bob, I've got calls about your playing again in two weeks in a celebrity tournament in California. It's for charity and there will be a few bucks in it but even more important, it will be great exposure for you again" he said. "All

expenses will be paid, of course. All you have to do is show up and 'wow' them again."

Bob stopped and turned to him.

"That sounds great and if you think I should do it, then count me in. So far, you've set me straight at every turn, that's for sure" Bob replied appreciably with a smile and a long, firm handshake.

"Okay then, I'll call them in the morning," said Harrington.

He and Harrington continued to make their way through the mob of people towards the food table set up in the backyard, stopping every five feet or so to accept the deluge of accolades and good wishes from the crowd. Bob smiled what seemed like a thousand smiles, kissed a thousand kisses and shook a thousand hands as he walked.

Throughout the following week, the telephone rang constantly.

The calls came for shopping mall appearances, for talk show engagements, for product endorsements, for charitable contributions, from financial consultants, and countless fans seeking advice on everything from putting to interpersonal relationships. After six days of torment, he got an unlisted number.

He went to Rock Brook each day and played an obligatory practice round. He knew that practice really had little to do with his success, but he enjoyed playing now more than ever and besides they made him an honorary member of the club, dues free! He reveled in the excitement and enthusiasm of the small crowd of faithful fans that followed him around the course each day. They acted as his own, private cheering section.

Two weeks passed quickly, and Bob readied himself for the trip to California. Maryanne planned to come along this time. Her boss had insisted that she go, especially since Bob had accepted his invitation to play a round with him when he returned. Maryanne was eager. She had been

patiently counting every day until their scheduled departure. Bruce Willis was going to be there and so was Kevin Costner.

They were both her favorites and they were playing as celebrity guests in the tournament along with Bob.

Then, the very night before they were to leave, the phone rang. Barbara was Maryanne's sister. Barbara had been the epitome of the feminist movement, that is, up to about three years ago. She was thirty-seven then; thirty-seven and counting. She was counting the time she had left to 'fulfill her biological purpose', as she put it and have a baby.

All of a sudden, her VP job at Chase wasn't that important and she began a long, arduous trip towards pregnancy.

After two years and several thousand dollars, it was done.

The baby was to be born at any time now.

Maryanne had to be there. No excuse, not even Bruce Willis and Kevin Costner would ever suffice. She had made a promise to Barbara and to herself, one that she

could never break. She would be there, not only for Barbara but also to carry with her their deceased mother's spirit to the birth.

Bob left for Palm Springs the next morning, alone. Joey was there to meet him. She had been in Atlanta with her ailing mother ever since they'd come back from Hawaii. Her mother had never fully accepted her father's death and she had been in a state of depression for three solid years. Now, although things were not good, they were improving and that made Joey a bit more cheerful.

They met at the hotel as they had planned. Again, as before, they went to the course and began pacing off every step, taking page after page of notes and measurements. Again, her attention to every detail amazed him. They walked down the eighteenth just as the sun was beginning to set. The dark, elongated shadows made the task increasingly more difficult as they finished.

With all the information collected, they went back to the hotel to discuss the strategy for that coming Thursday.

They entered Bob's room together. Bob slumped into the chair at the foot of the bed and kicked off his shoes.

The trip along with the four-hour tour of the course with Joey had taken its toll. He was tired and hungry. He leaned back and put his feet up on the bed. He reached for the phone and dialed room service.

"Bob Andrews in three eleven. Send two BLTs.

Okay with you, Joey?" he said with the phone still held against his ear.

She nodded.

"Oh yeah, and two bottles of the beer with that, okay?" he spoke as he looked at her.

She nodded again.

"Yeah, Bud's alright," he said and hung up the phone.

"About ten minutes," he told her.

Joey also removed her shoes, propped up the pillows against the headboard of the bed and sat stretched out on the bed. They began to review the notes, hole by hole.

As they spoke, Bob suddenly felt her foot beginning to rub against his. He slowly looked up from his papers on the clipboard in his lap. She was looking straight into his eyes. He gazed back, into her deep, green eyes and in an instant, he could feel his pulse beginning to race and his breathing became heavier. A warm nervousness spread over him and the dryness in his throat caused him to swallow hard. "Joey" he stammered, and she spontaneously leaned forward towards him.

"Yes," she replied with amorous anticipation in her voice. He remained silent but rose from his chair, moved to the bed and sat next to her. He reached for her hand, held it and gently caressed it with his other hand. She ran her fingers softly down his cheek.

"Bob, I know this isn't right. I tried to stop myself but I can't and - I don't want to stop" she confessed breathlessly.

He paused. His heart was pounding, and his mouth was dry. He struggled to speak. He knew what he wanted to

do but a voice deep inside his head screamed loudly for him to stop.

Then, as if he was watching a movie, he saw his hand move, out of his conscious control, to her breasts. He saw himself unbutton her blouse and draw it open.

She responsively reached back and unhooked her bra, allowing her soft, warm breasts to fall from it into the blouse opening, exposing her large, rose-colored nipples.

The voice in his head cried even louder and his heart pumped even faster. He felt himself beginning to draw back a bit as the voice continued its deafening reproach.

The conflict raged within him. His conscience wrestled back and forth in a titanic struggle.

Suddenly, hammering into his consciousness came the startling sound of a knock at the door. Shocked by the intrusion, Bob instantly sprang into a seated position.

He remembered 'room service'!

Upon the recollection, his anxiety waned, and he arose and went to the door. He unlocked it and opened it. As

the door swung open, it revealed not room service but instead Maryanne standing in the doorway.

Behind her was the bellman with suitcases in hand.

Bob stood stunned before her with his wrinkled shirt, partly pulled from his pants and his mouth dropped open.

He was struck mute by her unexpected appearance.

“Barbara had her baby just an hour after you left. A boy, six pounds, 10 ounces and perfectly healthy. John Luke, they named him. I stayed for a couple of hours and wished them well and then after I knew everything was all right, I jumped on the next plane” she explained with a playful grin.

Bob just stood there still dumbfounded.

“Well, aren’t you going to let me in? This man is getting tired of holding the bags” she added motioning towards the porter behind her.

Bob reflectively stepped back but ever so slowly.

“Sure” he choked out.

Then, from within the room came Joey's voice. "What's taking so long?" she yelled and with that, she poked her head around the corner of the door meeting Maryanne face to face.

Both of them instantly recoiled in shock at the unexpected sight of the other. Bob's heart stopped, and his stomach wrenched like never before. His brow took on an immediate glistening luster as huge droplets of sweat poured forth.

Maryanne pushed her way forward into the room. Joey stepped back in response. There she stood, frozen still, in the middle of the room, clothed only in her unbuttoned shirt with her discarded bra lying in full view on the bed. Maryanne stopped, took a long, disdainful look at Joey, and then turned and without another word, pushed her way past Bob. She rushed straight through the door, slamming it with all her might as she left. Bob raced to the door and opened it to see her disappearing down the corridor.

“Maryanne! Maryanne! You don’t understand. Nothing happened!” he yelled vainly down the hall.

She didn’t even turnaround but simply exited into the stairway at the end of the hallway, while the porter slowly followed still carrying her bags. Bob remained in the doorway with a vacant stare, then closed the door and returned to the room.

“Bob – I’m sorry – I didn’t know she was there – I didn’t mean -”

“It’s not your fault” he interrupted with a sigh. He sat down in the chair by the bed.

“You’d better go back to your room. I’ll take care of this – somehow” he said unconvincingly. Joey quietly dressed and left for her room.

What the hell am I going to do now? He couldn’t even talk to Maryanne. He didn’t know where she would stay or even if she would stay. She might even go back home. One thing he did know however, there would be a long, sleepless night ahead of him.

He arose the next morning, still groggy from the tortured night. He stumbled out of bed and reached for the phone. If Maryanne had gone home, she would certainly be there by now.

He dialed the number and the phone rang and rang and rang some more.

“Hello, this is Bob Andrews. Maryanne and I can’t come to the –”

Bang! He slammed the phone into its cradle. She wasn’t home, or she wasn’t answering.

He called the front desk. No Maryanne Andrews was registered. Now what? He sat for a moment with his head pounding and his palms sweating.

“Don’t do anything stupid. Not now. Just be calm and think this out logically” he thought to himself.

He could straighten this whole thing out. After all, nothing did happen! He’d just continue along as best he could and worry about it after the tournament was over.

There, it was settled, he told himself. He felt some relief then, having if nothing else, at least postponed the inevitable consequences that lay before him.

“An innocent man should have nothing to fear” he consoled himself and with that solace, he called Joey to begin his first practice round.

They met in the lobby and went to the course. Bob walked to the practice tee to wait for Joey and his clubs.

“Bob! Bob!” he heard her yell.

He turned to see her running towards him at full speed.

“Bob – Your bag and clubs are gone!” she shouted breathlessly.

“Maryanne came down here last night, just before the course closed and took your clubs!” she yelled, still in a struggle to catch her breath.

“How could she? How could they let her take them?” he shouted.

“The man in the locker room said he sure knew what Bob Andrews’ wife looked like, with all the times he’d seen

you on TV with her. She said you wanted your clubs in your hotel room for safekeeping, so he gave them to her” answered Joey.

Bob was frantic. Certainly, he could not play without them. Not just any clubs would do, that he well knew. Maybe she was home now after all? He’d call again. What else could he do? Maybe he could convince her to bring them back for Thursday or he could even go back home and get them. He had plenty of time, two days to do it. He went to the phone and called. The phone rang. Once, twice, three times. Then, he heard her voice. He was relieved. Now, all he had to do was convince her of his innocence or at least shake her belief in his guilt.

“Maryanne, this is Bob.”

“I know who it is!” came the frigid reply. “I want to explain everything” he began humbly.

“Explain it in a letter so my lawyer can read it” she interrupted.

Now, he realized that any explanation that he might be able to offer would be unacceptable. That was obvious by the tone of her voice and her sharp, callous response.

“Where are my clubs?” he asked, realizing that apologies and deliberation were going nowhere.

She said nothing. The silence came from the telephone.

“Where are my clubs?” he asked again more forcefully.

Again, silence prevailed. Then she answered.

“In the garbage! I threw them in the garbage, and if I could I’d put you in there too” she replied angrily. “I stopped the cab on the way to the airport and threw them in the first dumpster that I saw” she continued.

“No! No! How could you do that? I didn’t even do anything” he started to answer.

A resounding crash of the telephone receiver slamming into its cradle at the other end reverberated in his ear. He slowly laid down the receiver, with his heart pounding.

He sat with a vacant stare, as confused thoughts of disbelief raced through his head.

Chapter Eight

Weeks had passed. The anguish lingered. The whipsaw of his unprecedented success and the abrupt, dizzying plummet into the depths of failure had left him stunned. He lost twenty pounds.

Maryanne had left him. In the beginning, he called almost hourly, but she never replied. Even now, he called at least once a day, but still no response, just the same answering machine voice every time.

He was living alone, a third-floor walkup at the YMCA and hadn't even touched a golf club since that fateful day over two months ago. He sat quietly and motionless.

"Want another one?" asked a familiar voice.

"Sure - why not?" Bob answered.

The bartender took his glass and slowly walked towards the taps.

Bob sat, hands folded, still staring. He reached mechanically, into his shirt pocket, as he had done dozens of times before and withdrew a tattered scrap of newspaper. He carefully unfolded its wrinkled edges and perused it again for the hundredth time.

“Young Golfer in California is Up to Par” it was entitled. “A California teenager has become the world’s latest golf sensation. Roy Jackson was, until recently, an unknown ghetto youth and now he stands at the pinnacle of golfing success, having won two major tournaments in the past month. Both times Roy shot scores rivaling even those of the legendary Bob Andrews.

Roy’s father, a Los Angeles sanitation worker, found the boy’s first set of clubs in a dumpster and the boy still uses them today with the utmost of skill.

‘It’s something about the feel of these clubs that makes me play my very best. They’re like no others’, commented Roy with a grin after just completing an eight under qualifying round at Sea Crest Country Club.

Interviews with several noted golf authorities suggested Roy is destined for big things, possibly even wearing the green at Augusta next year.”

Bob sighed deeply, folded the article and slid it back into his pocket.

The bartender returned with a beer and placed it in front of him.

“Bob – how are you doing?” he heard a voice from behind him.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned slightly to see Fred.

“Get me a beer too Mickey” he shouted to the bartender as he slid onto the stool next to Bob. “I’ve got something for you” Fred announced proudly.

“And a story that might give you a chuckle too” he added. He reached down and picked up the brown, paper bag he brought with him and placed it on the bar.

“About two years ago, Marge was over on the other side of town, over by Washington Street – Monroe Street I

think! She was looking for a set of andirons for the fireplace. She wanted those big brass kinds and they were sky high in the stores, about two hundred and fifty bucks. She saw a house sale ad in the paper and they had the andirons listed, so she went. They were exactly what she wanted, in perfect shape, like new and only fifty bucks. An old guy was moving out, lock, stock and barrel, selling everything. The price was great, so great that she kinda felt guilty about it, you know what I mean? Fifty bucks was almost like stealin' them.

Then, when she was paying him, the old man asked her if her husband played golf. She told him that I was thinking about starting and I was talking about it a lot then, but I never really did. Three kids, you know, you never really have any time.

Well, then the old guy told her this way-out story about how he had these real special golf balls. He said that a German scientist who escaped to America from the old country made them before the war. He said the balls could

make anybody a great golfer. Kinda like magic golf balls, I guess. Some story, huh?"

"Oh yeah – some bullshit!" replied Bob with raised eyebrows.

"Well, anyway" Fred continued, "My wife, like I said, was feeling a little guilty about the price of the fireplace stuff and she felt sorry for the old man too. So, she bought them."

As he finished the story he pulled an old, shabby box from the bag. He carefully lifted the fragmented lid to reveal a dozen, sparkling, white balls, each bearing a small, gold, six-pointed star.

Bob gazed in amazement as the details of Fred's story echoed in his mind.

"I want you to have them. Can you use them? I can't" said Fred.

Bob's hand trembled as it moved slowly towards the box. He picked up one of the balls from the box and clutched it tightly in the palm of his hand.

Suddenly, he felt a familiar surge of energy shoot up his arm and radiate through his body.

A broad smile slowly spread over Bob's face.

THE END