

One

7:30 A.M., Sunday, July 19.

Rubbing too little sleep from my eyes, I flipped the fax's cover sheet and stared.

Stop the killing!
You have until July 28 or you will regret it.
Golf can be dangerous!

The terse message was a shock but I have to admit, after seven years as a member of the Ladies Pro Tour and almost 18 months as a teaching pro, I had no quarrel with the last line. Some of these rich yahoos may sport the latest boron-graphite shafts with high kick points and modified hosels but look out for the ubiquitous banana slice!

The cover sheet read:

Riley,
Look into this, will you? It's the third I've received in the past few months. Probably some nut but with the Classic in ten days...? See you at the ferry terminal.

Pitts.

I shook my head. So typical of Peter "Pitts" Wyndamere, the man who is my best friend, my brother-in-law and, most recently, my boss. The guy waits months to tell me he's got trouble, then faxes his problem to me only hours before he arrives.

I whipped back to the message. Centred, near the top of the plain, white paper, was a small globe with an outline of North America visible. BioAction was printed in a semi-circle above and a thick, fat arrow curved along the Canadian-U.S. border. The words below were obviously cut and pasted from various newspapers. Though the letter size and fonts were different, the collage message was clear. Somebody was threatening Pitts.

Though early morning, the cinder track buzzed with golfers. Tee-off time for the First Annual Sea Blush Charity Pro-Am was in twenty minutes. Not enough time to deal with the facsimile but enough to check The Witch. Lately, the ol' gal had been yelping when struck. I yanked her out of my bag and peered at her stainless steel noggin. Poor thing - a lot of nasty nicks.

In Delaware, at the McDonald's Championship, Jennifer Wyatt - my best friend on Tour - had dubbed my club a sorceress. The McDonald's was the first time I used a Callaway Big Bertha driver and the first time I won a Ladies Professional Golf Event. Jenny's nickname was right on. I found my Callaway witchy 'cause she had tons of power but gave it capriciously. The former I learned early in the first round, upping my driving average by five yards to 250; the latter late in the second. The Witch had a mind of her own and, on the eleventh and fourteenth holes, my ball hooked violently, air-mailing stunned galleries.

I blinked back to reality. My touring days were over. All I had left were memories and a teaching job I never wanted. Thank God, for my new part-time job. Moonlighting as a coroner with the

province of British Columbia restores life to my days. Rubbing a thumb along her ribbed grey face, I gently placed my magician, scuffed head up, against the Pro Shop wall.

If British Columbia is a golf bag, and sometimes I think it is, then the new Sea Blush Golf Club in Nanoose - a tiny hamlet on Vancouver Island - is its most important club: the putter. Now some of you mainlanders may argue that the venerable Vancouver Golf Club or even the upstart Arnold Palmer designed course at the Chateau Whistler Resort deserve this accolade. Interesting thought but...naah. Maybe the sand wedge, perhaps even the driver but Sea Blush is the ol' flatstick. It's a 6,208 yard course which works with local topography, slicing through 150 acres of lush hard and softwood forest and snaking around eight natural ponds. Of course, being the Head Pro, I may be accused of prejudice.

The pièce de resistance is my Pro Shop. The Hut, as I call it, is a single story miniature version of the 12,000 square foot, two-level, window-choked panabode clubhouse which sprawls 200 yards to the west. The Hut's mine. Well, not literally but who else's moniker is burned into a rough-hewn chunk of dogwood nailed above the entrance? I used to think it odd to see my name, in lights so to speak, on a building. It was embarrassing enough on a golf bag but now *Riley Quinn, Canadian Professional Golf Association Member* is part of the Nanoose landscape. The life's not what I'd planned but I guess it's better'n kick in the head.

The sky was a pale, cloudless blue and though the temperature of twenty degrees Celsius was cool for mid-July, all but a couple of wimps were dressed in shorts. Not a breath of wind; A-1 conditions for golf. Groups of twos and fours gathered outside the side door, impatiently waiting for their clubs in storage. Two of my guys were lugging bag after bag through the double doors; still 20 or so members waited, their bright colours clashing. The whir and squeak of golf carts punctuated excited bits of conversation. Most teams wore matching sweaters or shirts. Thank god, my group had more sense.

Today we were playing a shotgun Pro-Am: thus, a teaching pro and three amateurs wait at each hole. When the gun sounds at 8 o'clock A.M., each group plays 18 holes, finishing one hole behind the one on which they started. My group, the Frequent Flyers, was to tee off from Number 6, a dogleg right which finished a hundred yards beyond the practice putting green. I stuffed the fax into the junk drawer pocket of my bag.

"Yo, Riley!"

Stifling a yawn, I turned. Thomas Kent, Pitts' son-in-law and minority owner in Sea Blush - thus by definition another boss - was striding towards me. A tightly knit white golf sweater and crisp black shorts draped his filament-thin body.

"We've got like 15 minutes," the young estate lawyer said, running long fingers through his sleek, cap-like black hair. Though not attractive, Thomas's angular features, strong jaw and sleek body are fascinating. Like the golden sea lions slithering through the Pacific surf, Thomas is quick and fluid.

"Where's Joel?"

"Don't know. Juet coming to see us off?"

Thomas stiffened. The ever-present Ray Bans shielded his dark eyes. "No," he said brusquely. "Too busy."

"Oh." I fiddled with my clubs. Sea Blush's Assistant Club Manager, Juet Wyndamere, always managed to nip out of the Clubhouse when Thomas was playing. Something amiss in newlywed heaven. "Is everything...?-"

"Fine," he snapped. "Just fine."

I nodded and concentrated on sliding The Witch's protective sock over her head. When I looked up, I had to grin. Thomas bristled then looked behind, following my eyes. Struggling up the path was our new Course Superintendent, David Deugo. Though a course super for years, David, or Dai as he's called, was a neophyte golfer. Why he wanted to play in our foursome was beyond me. Both Thomas and Joel are 4 handicappers.

Dai was battling with one of my old ten-inch leather bags, filled with rental clubs. I'd offered to lend him a smaller one free of charge but he wouldn't have it. Fortunately for him, we were using power carts.

Thomas glanced at me with uplifted eyebrows, made a steering motion with his hands then moved on around to the back of the hut. Dai stepped beside me and, with a supreme effort, carefully lowered the red and white bag. He rubbed his right shoulder, then yanked off a ball cap and ruffled his black hair. At 5'10", Deugo is a whisker taller than I am. But with my busby-like curls, I'll bet we look the same height. Of course, at a slightly soft 195, he's got 50 pounds on me.

I don't know about you but I look at hair and eyes first. Then, if they make the grade, my eyes'll travel further down. I've glanced at Dai a couple of times and made it past his head.

"Man, that weighs a ton! Don't know how you carried it."

He caught my quick look. His dark blue eyes widened, sparkling in the sun. Dai scrambled to recover. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to insult you. It'd be heavy for anybody."

Looking into his round, weathered face is like looking into the face of my high school counsellor: open, attentive, eyes soft with concern. The guy's awfully nice but he always says the wrong thing. "It's heavy, all right. It's why I don't use it any more."

I tapped my smaller, canary-yellow nylon bag. "This baby's the latest: lightweight, waterproof and enough velcro pockets to do the Pacific Rim Trail. Sure you don't want one like it?"

"No," Dai replied, suddenly flashing a wide grin. Much better looking than my counsellor. "Can't play worth crap but at least I'll look the part."

"Don't know about that," a deep voice said. We turned to find Joel Sanderson, the last of our foursome, strolling toward us.

Joel epitomizes two ridiculous male symbols: the Ken doll and the hyper-fit TV aerobic evangelists. The twit is what the gals on the Tour call "a nice piece." Deeply tanned, despite the latest craze of ultra-violet warnings, Joel's chest and arm muscles nudged through a turquoise Cardin shirt - so chosen to match his eyes. It did. He was one of the few players wearing pants. In fact, I've never seen the new owner of the Island's largest car dealership in shorts - some rumour about weak calves. Never understood it. I'm a shorts person, not skirt and not bloody likely a dress; I live and die in shorts. Can't breathe properly otherwise.

Joel put his thick, hairy arm around my shoulder and squeezed. Almost too hard but not quite. His hair and eyes are so unreal, I've never bothered to look much lower. "You're going to have to do a lot more than carry a big bag to impress this lady, Dai. Ol' Riley's the best, you know." Joel spoke quickly, sharply hissing the s's and h's.

The creep bugged me. Had I known him better, I'd have ripped his arm off. Pitts' partner for many years, Joel had just returned from 20 or so months sojourning in eastern Canada. For Pitts' sake, I was going slowly but one of these days, Mr. Business is going to push his handsome mug and 35 per cent ownership in Sea Blush too far.

Patches of red bled through the tan on Dai's cheeks. I deliberately picked Joel's arm off my shoulder. "Nobody needs to impress me."

Thomas whizzed around the corner in an open golf cart. He jerked to a stop, leapt out, grabbed my bag, all the while shouting, "Get a move on! We've less than five minutes. Dai: the other cart - Number 17."

The group ready and waiting at the first tee hooted at us as we raced by. Thomas slammed the pedal to the floor boards and thrust his thin body forward, urging on the little electric motor. His left leg twitched impatiently.

His anxiety made me think of my first time at Qualifying School. Now, there's a place where officials are sticklers for time. What a misnomer! There's no actual schooling at Q-School. Instead, there you are, in Palm Springs, California, playing golf in the rain against some of the best women in the world. All 200 plus wannabees with the same goal: to play on the Ladies Professional Golf Tour. But first, you've got to make it through one of two regional qualifying rounds. Then, it's onto the finals in Daytona Beach, Florida, scrambling to be one of the dozen or so top scorers who are invited to join the Ladies Professional Golf Tour.

It didn't help that I was a dew-sweeper: first off with no time to practise. Never got the feel for the putter. The wet weather had dampened my nerve as well as my spirit and I was three over par on the front nine. Got back some concentration and birdied two then parred the next four holes. Sitting pretty, I think, only one over. Then my playing partner jumped in the cart and scooted over to the porta-john.

So I'm standing there, on the next tee, putter in my hand, waiting. The official sitting to my right starts looking at his watch. We've got 14 minutes to play each hole but from his pained expression, you'd think I was Rip Van Winkle. I panicked and sprinted the 50 yards to the cart to snatch my three wood. My partner comes out of the john - a little breathless, still tucking in her golf shirt - sees the club in my hand and says accusingly, "I was coming, Riley." I tried to slow my breathing as we raced up to the tee and I concentrated hard on that little white sucker but cold-topped the ball anyway. Missed the cut by two. Another year down the drain.

Of course, today was just a Pro-Am, with 54 of the Island's bitchin' business best doing the fairway shuffle with the local pros. So I was the only female pro...what else is new? There are only a handful in all of Canada. Recently, I read a study which claimed that a million females play golf in Canada and are a nudge over 50% of the total new player population. So, where are they? Toronto?

We heard a distant crack. The Eagle Beagles, at the first tee, let out a joyous whoop. The scramble was on!

The sixth hole wrenches right around a flat pond. Despite the stand of arbutus which guards the fairway left about a third of the way down, there's little doubt about which club one pulls to initiate this 359 yard par four.

Roughly, a scramble format works like this: throughout the round, each team plays the best shot of all four players. So, every player drives a ball. The team then chooses the best shot and marks its location, often using a wooden tee. The players collect their respective balls and take their second shot from the tee marker - no more than a club length away and no closer to the hole. The game continues in the same fashion, hole after hole. Each player attempts to putt out. If all four miss the putt, a stroke is added to the team's score. The team continues to putt until a ball drops into the hole.

Usually, in a scramble, you tee off worst player to best. That meant Dai up first. I felt a little badly for him. We've been practising but he hadn't even played a full 18 holes yet. Carefully, methodically, he

set his stance then waggled his driver back and forth as I'd taught him. He took the club head back well but, like most rookies, broke his left wrist early and chopped down. The ball squirted off the tee and trickled about 150 yards to plunk into the little lake on the right. We three remained silent but a capped-tooth smile split Joel's face.

"Pig!" Dai said, under his breath. He marched off the tee, studiously avoiding my eyes.

"Don't worry about it, man," Thomas said. "Next time."

Thomas and Joel flipped a Loonie to see who teed-off second. Joel lost and grudgingly stepped into position. A strong, compact man, he does everything the same way: punching with grace, power and a lot of flourish. No one on the tour waggles the club quite like Mr. Business. Joel slammed his drive dead straight, about 255 yards and stood posing for an extra second, pretending to watch the Wilson ball leap forward. I knew he was eyeing our reaction. For Joel, an audience is essential.

Dai responded in kind. He loped over and clapped the proud Papa on the back - just what Mr. Business craved.

Thomas cocked an eyebrow and stepped into position. No time wasted, no lengthy pre-shot routine. Thomas Kent's delivery is quick. He's wire-thin but wire-strong, using a high kick point on his graphite shaft and every ounce of his 165 pounds to control it. His drive rolled a few feet short and to the left of Joel's.

Dai shook his head and whistled softly.

I took a deep breath but got caught in a yawn. Shaking my shoulders lightly, I walked to the middle of the tee and looked down toward the hidden flag. Pitts' fax dashed into my thoughts. I've been in a ton of tournaments; seen some right disasters, usually due to weather. Tournament organizers bust their butts for an entire year for seven days of golf. Everything's organized just so...but no one controls Ma Nature. I'd done a lot of fretting about the next couple of weeks but never dreamed about a glitch like a threat to Pitts. Who or what was BioAction?

"Hey, Riley! Gonna play or pose?" Joel snapped.

I flushed, and quickly nudged the little mystery into a holding slot. No time now. Using my ball - a Titleist 3 - I shoved an extra long tee halfway down into the firm grass. I rotated my left wrist; a little stiff but no pain. Then, as always, I went through my pre-shot routine: walk behind the ball; pick out a target; grip the club and visualize the shot; align the club face with the target; step into stance; waggle the club three times; and let'er rip.

The Witch's extra-large sweet spot's hard to miss. Especially with the swing my Dad taught me. It's so classic, that early in my pro career, I earned the nickname: "the lefty Patty Sheehan." To be compared with one of today's best was awesome. I was thrilled; my father less so. "You're Riley Quinn," he said sharply, "not some clone of Patty Sheehan's."

The Titleist flew past the yellow Pro-light and bounded yards beyond the Wilson.

Man, golf's a gas!

Then Joel chipped a nine iron within five feet of the pin and Thomas neatly stroked it in for a birdie. To put it simply, golf's a game of par. The goal is to hole the ball in as few golf strokes as possible.

One under par.

We combined some great shots to birdie 7 and 8, two short holes, a par three and four.

Three under.

Then we parred 9, 10, 11. Shooting par's a snap when you can choose between four shots. Even so, I had a tough chip in on 9 but though the wrist tweaked, I managed to keep my hands and weight

just right. The ball jumped high and danced back to within two feet of the pin. There are advantages to being a lefty.

We ran into a bit of trouble on 12, a notoriously tough hole when both Joel and I sliced our drives. Mine, of course, spun left. His careened right and landed in the middle of the thirteenth fairway. The fool kicked at the grass and pounded his driver into the ground. We watched quietly. Not a good sign.

Thomas's drive wasn't much better, hooking left. The ball hit a clump of evergreens and dropped from the sky, a piddly 130 yards out. Dai surprised us with a dead straight worm burner and beamed for the next five minutes when the group chose to take his shot. Unfortunately, we blew a chance at an eagle when Joel followed our lead; his five foot putt becoming the fourth victim of a nasty patch of winter kill.

Joel swore. "What this, Dai?" he demanded angrily, jamming the head of his putter into the dead spot. Another expletive. "The green's a joke! What d'ya water it with, gasoline?"

Thomas and I exchanged a quick glance. Dai pulled himself up to his full height, at least four inches shy of Joel's, and calmly regarded his antagonist. A small pulse beat in his left temple but his voice was soft and controlled. "You know as well as I do that the winter was bad. I've worked fourteen hours a day since I got here in April but there's only so much you can do."

I punched Joel in the shoulder and laughed. "Don't blame Dai or the bloody grass for that putt. The green's the same for everybody. Face it, you blew it just like the rest of us."

Joel jerked back as though struck; his aquamarine eyes blazing. Thomas and Dai moved beside me. We stood there, with the sun warming our backs, throwing fat shadows over the green. Joel squinted at us, perspiring heavily. Finally, Thomas broke free, grabbed his putter and tapped the ball in for a bird. With a nod toward the carts, he said, "Let's move!"

By the time Dai and I reached Number 13, Joel was smiling and laughing. Our luck changed and we had three birdies on a trot.

Seven under at 16.

By 10:40 A.M., it was getting warmer; Thomas and I pulled off our sweaters. Parred 16 and birdied 17. On 18, the last to attempt a 20 foot uphill putt, I kissed the cup's edge and blew a bird. My wrist was aching continuously now. Joel stroked the ball for par.

Eight under.

As Joel and I rolled past the club house heading for the first hole, we were stopped by the Balls Up foursome, led by Carlisle, a Nanaimo stockbroker. "Well, if it isn't the effin' Flyers," Carlisle said, his heavy jaw tightening.

Joel's body tensed. Carlisle's partner piped in hurriedly, "He's just joking, guys. How ya doin'?"

"Ten under!" Joel shouted, the "t" hissing loudly. I kicked his shin but he ignored me.

"No kiddin'!" the little guy squeaked. "We're only seven."

Carlisle was momentarily speechless. No small feat for the man they call The Mouth. His jaw worked for a few seconds then he spat, "Ten under. Bull!" The veins on Joel's forehead popped out. "This sonofabitch'll lie about anything. Eh, Joel?" Carlisle's watery eyes washed across my face. "G'ahead, Riley. Ask the bastard 'bout the soft costs."

Joel grunted and flew out of the cart. Startled, I lurched after him. In seconds, Joel's hands gripped the stockbroker's fleshy throat. Carlisle's partner frantically pushed Joel back while Carlisle clawed for freedom. Thomas was beside me as I yanked on one of Joel's shoulders. Together, we wrenched the two men apart. Thomas ducked and using his shoulder, butted Joel back toward our golf cart. Dai

dashed in to help. With a howl, Carlisle clambered out of his cart. The little guy dove after him and hung onto to his back. "Sonofabitch!" Carlisle roared, twisting his passenger loose as though he were a scarf. Dai turned and blocked his path.

Slammed against the golf cart, Joel shook Thomas free and grinned back at Carlisle. "Don't blame me, sucker. A fool's born every minute."

Carlisle howled. Thomas shoved Joel into the seat, jumped alongside and punched the gas. I leapt in the other, Dai dove in and we shot forward. A couple of hundred yards later, we jerked to a halt.

"What was that all about?!" Dai and I yelled in unison.

"Forget it," Thomas said, anxiously looking behind. Joel grinned but his veins still pulsed blue.

"Are you kidding?" I said. "The idiot attacked one of my mem-"

"Drop it!" Joel snapped.

I stared at him. "Out of the blue, you jump a guy-"

"It's none of your business," he said, gaining some control. Turning to Thomas, Joel ordered, "Let's go!" Their cart leapt forward. Dai rolled his eyes and I hit the gas.

Studiously quiet, we birdied the first, a long dogleg left par five to drop to nine under.

Numbers 2 and 3 are both par fours's, generously lined with bunkers and water. At 2, Thomas's drive went for a swim. Joel bailed out and underclubbed to lay up in front of the water at 205 yards. As usual, Dai's drive found the right rough. My wrist had eased a little and, though the water was on the left, I pounded The Witch. The ball soared past the pond, smacking down in the middle of the fairway. A good shot but I paid for it: the wrist pulsed dully.

Dai took a deep breath and neatly chipped with a nine iron. The ball landed dead centre, six feet uphill from the flagstick. Joel fiddled, knelt and cleaned leaves and imaginary dirt from the lie then drained the downhill putt. Another bird, 10 under!

We waited on the third as the Swinging Singles putted out ahead of us. I wondered what the fisticuffs were all about. Knowing what slimebuckets Carlisle and Joel were, it had to be juicy. The Swinging Singles pro shouted that the top score was 10 under. We were tied!

The sloping green on Number 3 tricked us for another par. The fourth hole is a long, straight par three. Thomas, after his usual half-second study of the hole, blasted a five iron shot. It struck the pin! Joel let out a whoop. Dai danced a jig and grabbed me for a quick spin. Birdie. 11 under.

Number 5, our last, is a medium length par five but dotted with bunkers left and right. The tee area, smothered by thick Douglas firs, gives me claustrophobia. Pin's just visible, despite the snake's back fairway. The rookie's drive was weak but the rest of us avoided the rough. All three balls landed at about 240 yards.

We followed with fairway woods: Dai fell 100 yards short; Joel shanked to the left and Thomas and I found the green. My shot had too little spin and quickly died. Thomas's ball caught the speed of the green and rolled uphill, past the hole. That left two 40 foot putts, one uphill, the other down. With the slick green and steep front slope, we nabbed my spot. A missed hit ball from above would dance off the bottom apron.

Dai tried first. For a beginner, his putting stroke is strong: soft, firm hands and nice free shoulder swing. Must be his teacher! But he has no sense of touch yet; the ball braked halfway to the hole.

Joel up next. He plumbed the line with his putter, walked up and beyond the hole, returned, took three practice strokes and laced into his Wilson. His go-for-the-gusto style reminds me of Caroline

Keggi, a Tour friend. An aggressive putter, she rarely falls short. Too bad Joel doesn't have the Kegster's feel. The Wilson screamed wide and chugged uphill.

Thomas chuckled, wiped the head of his putter, quickly took his stance and stroked. Good hands but a shade too soft for the lie. The ball broke slowly to the right, stopping inches from the target.

I grinned at them. "Now, gentlemen, stand back and weep." This's the stuff I love and mourn: being in contention; under the gun; making putts worth \$30,000. I'd already checked the line so I stood over the ball and brought myself to focus on its very white dimples. This's what separates golf from other sports: the ball is stationary, taunting, waiting; the player completely proactive, never reactive.

I glanced at the hole, pulled back to the ball, saw only the ball - huge now and glowing - and stroked. The Titleist flew up the hill, hit the back of the four and one-quarter inch cup and dropped in. Eagle! 13 under!

"All right!" Thomas yelled. "A slam dunk!" Much hugging and slapping of backs followed.

I didn't want to leave. For a delicious instant, I'd found my playing zone again: that quiet, intimate space where nothing intrudes...where the ball, the swing and time are one. It's like you're watching, you're not stressing, you're just doing it, no big deal. Tears stung my eyes. Since the accident which forced me to abandon the Tour a couple of seasons ago, I thought I'd never find that zone again. Dai mistook my reaction and gently asked me about my wrist.

His voice shattered the moment. I laughed a little too harshly and wiped my eyes. "Nothing a little ice won't cure."

Two

1:40 P.M., Sunday, July 19

By twenty to two, I had showered, changed, iced the wrist for twenty minutes and was watching Vivian Graves hold court in the Club's cavernous lounge. The rustic, honey-coloured log walls are dotted with paintings - oils and waters - by British Columbian artists. Vivian, the Tournament Director for the Classic, was admiring Pitts' most recent purchase, a huge watercolour by a little known local Salish Indian.

The highly stylized rocky shoreline was unusually dark and moody for a watercolour. I said so. Vivian flicked me a sharp frown. It was gone in a blink and her perfect, doll-like features relaxed. She laughed loudly, flashing cherry lips and quickly regained the room's attention.

The lounge was filled, mostly with middle-aged men who were patrons of the arts, so long as the arts were female. These businessmen either openly gazed at Vivian or covertly cocked their heads for a quick glimpse. It all depended on whether their spouse had arrived. Vivian, looking thin in a sleek emerald green dress, absorbed the attention with a model's assured grace and confidence.

Gazing down at my wide-spread, silk trousered legs, I self-consciously crossed them. Perfect teeth, complexion and petite figure were bad enough but Ms. Vivian Graves was a strawberry blonde to boot. I felt, as always in her presence, like a gangly filly.

"You okay?" Dai asked, sitting down beside me.

I choked off the tail end of a whinny and nodded.

"Lemme get you another drink. Diet Coke?"

"Ah, yes. The nectar of champions," Vivian said, turning golden eyes in my direction. In the dappled light, her eyes and hair were the same colour. "Tell me 'bout the round. Understand you're to be congratulated."

"She played brilliantly," Dai said. "Didn't she, Thomas?"

Thomas Kent had just entered the room and was quietly eyeing Vivian.

"He said you were wonderful," a woman's voice called from behind him.

Thomas turned and quickly held out his arm to his plump, dark-haired wife. Juet slid past the outstretched arm and walked over to the painting. Thomas' face coloured then he forced a smile. "Yep," he said dully. "We were the greatest out there."

I sidled over to Juet. "Hey," I asked Pitts' daughter, "everything okay?" She tried to nod but her eyes were too bright. "Wanna talk?"

Juet bit her lower lip. "No," she whispered.

Thomas stepped beside his wife and handed her a glass of water. She took it but stiffened when her hand touched his. I flicked a glance across their faces. Both were tense, eyes filled with unspoken words. I backed off.

"So," Dai asked Thomas, "what was the fight all about?"

"Fight?" Both Vivian and Juet responded.

Thomas flushed. "It's nothing, really."

"What d'you mean, nothing?" I asked. "Joel almost took Carlisle's head off!"

"Joel!" Vivian said, voice filled with concern. "Joel was in a fight? Is he hurt?"

"No," I replied. "But he outta be. Man, he was crazy! Carlisle alm-"

"Carlisle's an ass!" Vivian snapped.

I raised my eyebrows at Dai. "Uh-huh," I agreed. "But--"

"Enough already!" Thomas said, throwing me a dark look. "It was nothing. Just bad blood, that's all. Let's just drop it, okay?"

He meant it. Silence followed. Since we weren't getting anywhere, I broke away. As the Head Pro, I'm always on duty so I wandered about socializing, wishing I'd had more sleep. Last night's emergency call came just after midnight and the sheets and I didn't meet again 'til quarter to four. Fortunately, it took little cerebral effort to mix with this crowd - most of whom I knew by name or, at the very least, by golf swing.

This is choice time for a teaching professional to do a little schmoozing. Mostly, you're dealing with men. So, you've got to sidle in, joke with a guy, flatter him silly, ask about the kids and exit quickly, hinting at lessons. Although successful, I find this one of the toughest parts of the new job. As a touring pro, especially a winner, you're the magnet. Everyone runs to you. It's hard to drop that coy wait-and-see posture and replace it with a cheery, non-sexual you-need-lessons-so-come-see-me-in-my-Hut smile.

After discussing the merits of perimeter club head weighting with several equipmentophiles, I spotted Dai chatting with one of the Eagle Beagles. Betcha he's talking turf stuff.

"The greens're fast," Dai replied, nodding vigorously. "The L.P.G.A. has strict requirements for their speed. We're double-cutting today, taking off more grass to get to tournament level."

"How d'you measure speed?" the Beagle asked, keenly interested.

"Well, we've been bringing the height down all spring. It's kinda trial and error for us but I'll have a better idea next week when the Tour's advance official arrives."

I suppressed a yawn and looked around. From across the room, Carlisle and I suddenly locked eyes but he quickly jerked his bushy eyebrows free. No matter, I thought. There'll be other opportunities.

To the Beagle's displeasure, Dai stopped his dissertation on turf grass to question me.

"Just heard you were called out last night."

"Yeah, Dr. O'Brien was on another case." I told him briefly about the motor vehicle accident.

"Ugh, woken up in the middle of the night to see a dead body." He shivered. "Don't know how you do it."

I didn't say anything. A lot of people didn't understand my part-time job. Didn't matter, I thought being a coroner was the bee's knees. You see, in lotus land even a golfer can be a coroner. No medical experience required; instead, take one keener, spice'er up with a heavy dose of instruction, add qualified help to taste and voila: an investigator of unusual deaths extraordinaire!

"Anyway, why didn't you tell us? Four o'clock in the morning: you must be beat!"

I stifled another yawn. "No reason. Nothin' you could've done."

During lunch, the comparisons finally came. As I knew they would. It was almost a relief.

"She just won last week, didn't she." Good ol' Viv, so quick with the obvious.

I nodded, chewed my carrots and waited.

"She's some golfer, Ril," Thomas added. He glanced anxiously at his wife. "Isn't she, Juet?" Juet nodded slightly. Eyes hardening, Thomas continued. "Pitts damn near blew my ear off watching. That last putt: what a beauty!" He stabbed the air with a fork. "I thought Bradley had'er. That it'd be sudden death but man, that Hal, she's got iron in her veins."

I studied my mushy peas and slowly shuffled them onto my fork. After all, I'd won a few tournaments, too.

Thomas swallowed and then asked the killer question. "How many more for the Hall of Fame? Two?"

"One," Vivian answered loudly, again espousing the obvious. I threw her a withering look.

Thomas dropped his knife and fork, shoved back his chair and looked me squarely in the eyes. "Imagine! Your sister's one measly win away from the Hall of Fame!"

The rest of the group nodded and murmured appropriately.

A tap on the shoulder saved me from shouting, *Enough about my bloody, wonderful sister!* The freckled young waiter whispered that I had a phone call.

"Who is it?" I asked, tossing my napkin beside my plate.

"Halliday Quinn."

"Well, I'll be damned," Thomas said.

Damned. Yep, that's the word all right.

Three

2:45 P.M., Sunday, July 19.

"Riley? It's Hal." My sister's voice was hesitant. Made me feel guilty. THAT made me feel angry. So I waited an extra heartbeat.

"I know. I'm in a bit of a hurry, in the middle of lunch." I was sitting at Pitts' huge mahogany desk in his office one flight up from the dining hall.

"Hey! I understand congratulations are in order! Hear you - what'd Thomas call your foursome? The Frequent Flyers? - just won." She was, as always since the accident, trying too hard.

I studied the gold framed picture near the phone. It was of the three of us, Pitts, Hal and myself - all smiling. When was that? "Yep. Mucho big time."

There was a small gold trophy sitting by Pitts' blotter. The tiny plaque read, *Winner, First Annual Sea Blush Charity Pro-Am*. Our prize. Whoop dee doo.

"You're playing again. That's what matters."

"Yeah. First the Sea Blush Classic, next the Phar-Mor."

There was several seconds of silence then Halliday exhaled heavily. "You heard. I wasn't sure you still paid any attention."

"Even in the wilds of lotus land, we heard about the Great Halliday Quinn's victory at Youngstown. Three round total of 207: six birdies, one eagle, winner of seventy-five thousand American bucks." I dropped the trophy on its head. "That must put you at the top of the money list with Mochrie."

Hal cleared her throat. The connection faded then her voice burst in. "-I know it's been a while." I waited.

"Riley, you there?"

"I'm here. Just a little busy."

"Oh," she said, an edge entering her voice, "no time for your own sister. Still mad aren't ya? How many times can I say I'm sorry? That I wished it could've been me who got hurt."

There was nothing I could say.

"Look," she sighed, "I'm not calling about me. It's about Pitts."

"What about him?"

"Well, we spoke and..."

"And what?"

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "He's upset."

Carrie, Pitts' young secretary walked into the room. I looked up. She shrugged an apology and handed me a note. She'd written in large, childish writing that the lab called. I took the note, nodded and she left.

"What? Sorry, got interrupted."

"Dammit - he's upset!"

"Your husband? Well, let's be real, Hal. You've hurt him. Badly."

"All right, all right. I'm to blame." She sighed again. "Just tell me, will you pick him up?"

"What, now you care?"

"Dammit, Riley! Is this never gonna end? It's been two years."

Don't I know it, sister. Two years since the accident - years not of living dangerously but of living angrily.

Halliday was talking. "Just do me a favour. No. Forget that. Do him a favour. Get'im at the ferry, okay?"

"Don't worry 'bout it. Picking Pitts up's no favour." I looked at my watch. The Rolex said 2:55 P.M.. I was late. "I've gotta go."

"But..."

"See you Sunday."

I stared at the phone. Damn. I grabbed the trophy and tried to rip the tiny gold golfer off his base. My palm split along a rough edge running up the back. I watched the sliver of blood.

Shiiit! Seventy-five thousand dollars!

* * * *

Ten minutes later, I was booting it south along the Island Highway to Nanaimo. Though late for my three o'clock with Dr. O'Brien, I thought I might catch him. I had to go to town anyway to meet Pitts' ferry at Departure Bay.

The Highway reminds me of the line "...ribbon of darkness over me" in the Gordon Lightfoot song. I've always liked its haunting image. Our dark ribbon winds its way mostly along the eastern edge of Vancouver Island, ending eventually in Victoria, Canada's best bloomin' city and the capital of British Columbia. What is it about Canadians always living near the edge? Ninety percent of our population straddles the southern border of the country and most Vancouver Islanders live within sight of the choppy, blue Strait of Georgia which separates us from the mainland. Geography and proximity to the commercial gods of the U.S.. Yes, I guess we do live near the edge.

With the top down on Emily - my tiny, yellow convertible - my lungs, hair and eyes were quickly awash with salt-water wind. My anger at Halliday tugged free: words and phrases best forgotten ripped into harmless letters and fluttered along the tree-lined coast. Didn't even flinch while edging through the latest construction zone. I grinned and waved at a bald eagle, wheeling slowly above a rocky ridge ahead. Damn, I played well! My left wrist, now deliciously sore, gripped harder at the wheel. The Tour was coming and with it old friends. I made a mental note to thank Pitts for bringing professional women's golf to the Island, although his caddying idea twitched at me like a tired eye muscle.

As the rooftops of the small tourist and residential retreat of Lantzville flashed by on my left, my thoughts slid back to tournament disasters. Like the Hawaiian washout in '88. It rained ten to twelve inches in two days and the course disappeared under water! We lost the Pro-Am, didn't even tee off the ball. Then, the next year, we had the stalker incident. The tournament was delayed while police searched the grounds for a nutcase with a hit list. Huddled in the locker room, nervously anticipating gun shots, we made bets as to who headed his list. Fortunately, the cops quickly caught the loonie. They wouldn't show us the list so nobody won the bet. I don't know who was on it but I had a couple of nominees.

Ten minutes from Nanaimo, the highway ducks inland a few kilometres, providing peek-a-boo ocean views. At least that's the cutsie term the local real estate hacks employ to sell properties where water views might be possible if MacMillan Bloedel clear cut straight to the ocean. Sometimes, I

wouldn't put it past the logging giant. I slapped my right wrist - Dad would never allow MacBlo bashing. After all, they're the largest custodian of Island forests.

Yeah, right.

As always, the parking lot at the Woodgrove Centre sparkled with chrome. The Island's largest shopping mall is retail heaven for the 75,000 plus inhabitants of Nanaimo and surrounding communities. When pressed, I might admit to a visit or two.

I leaned over and blew a loud raspberry as I whizzed by one of our arch rivals, the Nanaimo Golf and Country Club. Then the highway cut into suburbia, meandering through the chunks of houses that wrap the city.

Nanaimo is an Indian word for The Great And Mighty People. A bit grandiose for a waterfront community built on the dirt, sweat and danger of coal mining. Nowadays, the hard hats are worn by 12,000 blue collar lumberjacks-and-jills working for MacBlo. Though situated out of sight, the company's flagship Harmac Pulp Mill is never out of scent.

I turned left onto Comox road, then a quick right onto Front Street with its view of the harbour. Banners for the Annual Nanaimo to Vancouver International Bathtub Race still fluttered from the lightposts. I parked on Church and entered number 16. I've always thought Church is an appropriate name for the Coroner's office. Both the Church and the Coroner's office have a long history: both are tranquil: both deal with death. Though the former is largely spiritual and the latter completely physical.

"You're late."

"I know, I know, Wheez. Couldn't be avoided. O'Brien in?"

"You missed'im," Louise said with a tight smile. She tugged at her impossible-to-be-true black hair then checked her long purple nails. "E wasn't appy."

I sighed and sat on the edge of her immaculate desk. We don't have much in common. Louise Ménard was a woman in battle. My guess, she was on the dark side of 45 but fighting back with every weapon known to Avon. At 33, my battle was just starting. Having never had the bone structure nor the interest to launch a defense, I'm certain it'll be a massacre.

I'd known O'Brien's moody secretary as long as I'd known O'Brien, a little over 10 months. Still not comfortable with either. She's a transplanted Parisian; he a wayward Englishman. Add me, the token Canadian and you don't get the U.N..

One thing I had learned with Louise. A little French goes a long way. As does a nickname. So, I started over. In my high school dialect, I asked Wheez how she was. There must be something about my accent 'cause she grinned, as she always does, then replied with one of my favourites: pas pierre. I like the sound of that, whole lot more punch than saying not bad. It's an expression I use a lot at the Hut, often with hysterical results. I have, I've been told, my mother's raw voice - Dad used to call it "smokin' spoken" - and foreign jargon sharpens its edge.

"Why so all dressed?" she said.

I looked at her to see if she was teasing. When it comes to discussions on looks or clothes or women's things, I never know how to react to Louise. I usually stumble along with humour. "You make me sound like a hamburger. It's 'dressed up.' I just came from the Pro-Am luncheon." Speaking quickly to avoid any further discussion on my obvious lack of style, I asked, "When'll O'Brien be back?"

She frowned. The tiny lines around her eyes and forehead cracked and deepened. Not a pretty sight. "Don't know. E's assisting at a P.M. this afternoon."

I enjoy the way the French use the verb "assisting" in place of "attending." So much more action-oriented. The truth be known, O'Brien wouldn't be much help at the post mortem. Instead, he'd be watching. Light brown eyes soaking it all in.

"Well, I'll just use the phone, okay?"

She shrugged her slight shoulders and turned back to a violet coloured computer screen.

O'Brien's telephone has the numbers for the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital's laboratory and the local detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police stored in memory. I punched the button marked LAB and was soon speaking to the soft-spoken technician, Barb Jenkins.

"Just got back the blood alcohol test, Riley. The Fowler boy was legally impaired, about 160."

"160!" Twice the legal limit. The kid must have been flying. "That's about six drinks, isn't it?"

"About. This guy's small, could've been less. Doesn't really matter, anyway, case closed."

"For you, maybe," I sighed.

"What d'you mean?"

"When the officer told the parents, the father was adamant. He wants to know if the kid was drinking."

"Oh," Barb said in a small voice. "Doesn't seem much point, does there?"

"Nope." I took a deep breath. "I hate telling parents their child was driving under the influence. It's bad enough the kid's dead."

"Sure glad you're the coroner'n not me."

While listening to the phone ring at the R.C.M.P. detachment, I mentally rehearsed the familiar scenario of talking to bereaved parents. It starts and ends the same: me apologizing; them crying. Worst part of the job. I could just imagine the conversation with the Fowlers, *I'm terribly sorry for your loss, Mr. and Mrs. Fowler.*

Thank you. A hesitation, then it comes. There, there's something I... An exchange of glances. ...we need to know. We just can't believe that Roddy... the road was...

I know, sir. You've suffered a great shock. I don't want to make it worse...

We want to know.

Yes. Roddy was legally impaired.

Silence. Heavy - into the pit of despair - silence. The mother's red, puffy eyes flood with more tears. The father's glazed look of shock sharpens. His voice, very small. *Thank you.*

Both bodies will seem to shrink and age visibly. It's a good sign when couples hold each other closely. When I see them start apart and stay apart, I know they're in for a long term struggle....

I detest these so called visits. After one of'em, I've got to exercise. To breathe. To sweat. To touch life. So I rollerblade around Nanoose Bay, through West Bay Estates to Schooner Cove and back down to the highway. I skate until my lungs thicken, my thighs shriek and I can no longer control the fat, blue wheels. Still the parents' glassy eyes, the kid's lifeless stare haunts me. I skate on, muscles screaming, mind whirling. Gratefully alive.

"Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Parksville Detachment. May I help you?" The disembodied voice shocked me back to reality. I blinked a couple of times and found my tongue.

"Yes, Constable Dickson, please. It's Riley Quinn."

The phone crackled, seemed to go dead and then Dickson's disc-jockey voice filled my head.

"Riley? Hey, pard, congrats on the Pro-Am!"

Small town, big news. I'd known Walter Dickson since elementary school. He wanted to be a cop, me a pro golfer. We both got our wish but he's still living his. "Thanks Walt. How're you doing?"

"Same old stuff, chasin' nosepickers - uh," he stopped. Walt knows that I hate that generic term for lawbreakers but it's common lingo on the Force. "Sorry, I mean 'perps.' Hey," he hastily changed the subject, "Mom says she saw you last week."

"Yes, the old gal looks great."

"Yeah, she's adjusting to the Home not bad. It's awfully good of you to still visit."

"What d'you mean? I'd go nuts without my monthly fix of cribbage."

"Means a lot to her. And me. She's not the only one who's glad you're permanently back in town." The boom dropped slightly from his voice. "You calling in an official capacity?"

"Yes. Sorry, no golf tonight. Pitts's coming in. Remember?"

I could just see his linebacker figure slump down in the too small regulation chair.

Walt exhaled. "I forgot. So what can I do you for?"

"It's about Pitts. He's been receiving threats."

"Threats? Wyndamere? How? What'd they say?"

"I'll fax you one inna minute. Have you ever heard of a group called BioAction?"

He paused for a moment. "Nope."

"Okay. Well, whoever they are, they've threatened him three times."

"Three? Why the hell didn't he tell you earlier?"

"Question of the hour. Don't worry, I'll ask him. You know Pitts. Guess he didn't take it seriously."

"Send it through, Ril. I'll get back to you when I get something."

"Okay. Thanks."

"See you at hockey?"

"Not this week."

I grabbed a photocopy of the BioAction letter and gave it to Louise to fax. I could hear the high pitched dialling tones of the machine as I ran out. The ferry would be docking.

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