

~ Mulligan II: In the Rough ~

by KG MacGregor

Disclaimers: Hmmm...original characters who might just make you think of someone else.

Marty and Lou are back in this sequel to [Mulligan](#), which was written for the 2003 Academy's Valentine's Day Special. There's ROMANCE ahead, and best of all, it's between two women!

Many thanks to my beta reader Tami, who has no idea how to dress 60-year-olds; and to my Sweetcakes, who loves to find mistakes.

Mulligan II: In the Rough

By KG MacGregor

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"Hey, baby! What's for dinner?" Marty Beck pulled off her visor and hung it on the hook by the back door.

Angela didn't answer. She'd been pacing the house for the last hour, playing out this confrontation in her head.

"Where have you been, Marty?"

"What do you mean where have I been? I was at work."

"Jim said you weren't there; that you must have left." Jim Conrad was the full-time pro at Pine Island.

"Yeah, he should have looked out on the driving range. I was giving a lesson." Marty didn't understand why she was getting the third degree. It wasn't even dark yet, and Angela knew that the course was open until the last golfer played in.

"He did look on the driving range. You weren't there."

"I was there. You can't see all of the tees from the pro shop. If he'd put down the phone and walked out there, he'd have seen me."

"Marty, I never said I talked to him on the phone. I wanted to show you the part I got for the lawn mower and see if it was the right one, so I stopped by after work. Your car wasn't there. Jim and I both walked out to the tees and we didn't see you. That was two hours ago."

The golf pro felt her stomach drop. After six years with Angela, she'd finally given in to temptation when a woman at the driving range construed her friendly overtures as flirtatious. Figures she'd get caught the very first time she'd actually wandered. Marty Beck was unlucky that way.

"I can explain this, Angela."

"Don't bother, Marty. I'm not going to go through this. I'm sick of watching you go to work every day and feeling like you're just looking for your next score."

"It isn't like that, I swear." *It was just this one time!*

"Save it. I want all of your stuff out of here by Friday. And don't even think you're going to stay here tonight."

Marty's heart broke as she saw the tears in her partner's blue eyes. What had she done? "Angela!"

"Just go back and stay with her, Marty. It's over for us."

June 2002

"Petie, I think you and I are about the two luckiest creatures in the whole world!" Marty loosened her grip on the plastic handle, allowing the Boston terrier another six feet at the end of the leash.

The little dog was investigating the evidence that others had visited this pet area, and recently. Not that he minded; on the contrary, this was a very exciting place. And he liked the fact that this woman, the shorter one, always took him out in the morning, because that meant that his mistress would fuss over him when he returned.

Marty looked up and spotted the object of their affections on the back deck of their corner condo. Louise was setting the small table for breakfast and stopped to wave in their direction.

"Yessirree, we've got it made, Petie." There wasn't a day that went by that Marty Beck didn't marvel at her good fortune. It might have taken her 61 years, but by golly, she'd certainly found the woman of her dreams. Lou Stevens was everything she'd ever wanted: beautiful, sweet, fun, and...she didn't have all that many hang-ups about sex. Not that everyone doesn't have a few; but Lou was nothing like Angela, who seemed to think that sex was only for procreation purposes...not the best outlook if you happened to be a lesbian.

No, Lou had been a wonderful surprise that first night together. Two hours of necking on the couch like teenagers finally brought them both to a fever pitch and the blue-eyed woman had just taken her hand and led her to the bedroom. Marty, in fact, had been the more self-conscious, turning off the bedside lamp only to have Lou turn it back on.

"I sort of...you remember that day we went walking on the beach and we laughed at how white my feet were?" Wearing golf shoes every day did that.

"Uh-huh."

"Well, the rest of me sort of looks like that too." If truth be told, Marty had pretty much always thought that she looked ridiculous without her clothes, thanks to the tan lines above her knees, around her collar, and on her arms and shoulders. "And I'm...fat."

"Look at me," Louise asked gently, tipping the smaller woman's face toward hers. "I think you're beautiful, Marty Beck. And I want to know every inch of you. That's what this is all about."

And so the two had proceeded to do just that. It wasn't perfect, but it was about the sweetest night Marty had ever had. Louise put her mouth on her most private spot - the first time anyone had touched her like that in almost 15 years. She had struggled a bit with trying to satisfy Lou, but when the taller woman retrieved a tube of lubricant from the nightstand, things went more...smoothly.

They'd been lovers now for more than three months, and while there was still plenty of "newness" to explore, they were getting settled into a routine that seemed right for both of them, usually making love once or twice a week. It was of course, a big deal at first, but even after such a short time, both women had seemed to put it all in perspective. Their physical relationship was just a small part of what they had going here.

"Breakfast is ready," the woman called from the deck.

"That's our cue, Petie. Come on, and I'll slip you a little piece of bacon under the table."

Summers in the North Carolina mountains were the best thing about being a golf pro, Marty thought. Mornings were cool, and even when the days warmed up in the afternoon, they rarely got miserable. Weekend golfers didn't care so much about the temperature - they were just glad to be out on the course. But for anyone who spent six days a week on the links, the heat and sun could really take a toll.

This year was the best Marty could remember, but that didn't have anything to do with the weather, she knew. She'd been thrilled - and more than a little surprised - when Lou had accepted her invitation to spend the summer and fall at the Elk Ridge condo. The hillside unit overlooked the 17th fairway, the prettiest hole on the course, as far as Marty was concerned.

"Hiya, Marty."

"Hi, Joe." Joe Baxter was the year-round pro at the club. He and Marty had been friends for over 30 years, having met for the first time at a club in Michigan while she was still married to his buddy, Wallace Beck. The divorce hadn't really surprised him much; but he was perplexed that she'd never remarried. Marty was such an outgoing person. Of course, it all made sense this year, when she showed up with the retired schoolteacher.

"You gonna try to squeeze in a round this afternoon?"

"Yeah, we're going to tee off at 1:15. It looks pretty slow then, so I should be back here in plenty of time for the five o'clock lesson." She'd been building a nice clientele for the lucrative summer lessons. That was her gift, and why she knew she'd always have a job at Elk Ridge.

"How is Louise liking it here?"

"Are you kidding? She loves it!" Already, her lover had begun to explore the High Country, poring over the antiques and mountain crafts, coaxing Marty into picnics along the Blue Ridge Parkway on her day off.

"Good. It looks like it's going to be a really nice summer."

"Sure does." He could say that again.

The golf pro guided the cart to the right of the 16th green. It was a glorious day, temperatures around 76 degrees with a soft southerly breeze. As far as Marty was concerned, all Mondays were glorious now that she had a standing date for a round of golf with this beautiful lady in the cart beside her. Louise did a lot for the scenery.

"Let me out here, sweetie. Looks like I'm going to the beach," Louise lamented, spotting her ball in the sand trap.

Marty smiled stupidly at the endearment as she pulled to a stop, waiting while her companion extracted a sand wedge and putter from the bag. Her own ball sat on the green, about eight feet from the cup.

After ratcheting the parking brake, Marty grabbed her putter and strode to the edge of the green where she could watch the tall woman grapple with her predicament. The picture of total concentration, Louise finally stroked, lofting the ball barely high enough to catch the fringe...but not enough to keep it from rolling back into the trap, where it came to rest only a foot from where she started.

"Darn!"

Marty couldn't help but chuckle. "Lou, I think I know what your problem is. It's your vocabulary."

"My vocabulary?"

"Right. Now, you see, that was not a 'darn.' That was at least a 'shit' if not an all-out 'fuck'."

"Martha Beck! You know that I do not use words like that!"

"And you're still in the sand trap, right?"

Louise sighed and shook her head. Marty had a point.

On her next shot, the tall woman managed to roll the ball across the green, and thanks to a neat nine-foot putt, salvaged a bogey on the par-4 hole.

The golf pro walked the green back and forth studying the break. The greens were fast today, but she hated to leave it short. This putt was for birdie...birdie...birdie.... "Screw!"

"Perhaps there's a different vocabulary for putting," Louise said smugly.

Marty putted in and followed her partner to the cart. Sliding into the driver's seat, she released the brake and they lurched forward. *"Perhaps there's a different vocabulary for putting,"* she mocked in a snippy voice, causing both women to burst out laughing.

"This is my favorite hole," Louise proclaimed as they approached the tee for Number 17.

"Why is that?" The par-5 was Marty's favorite hole too.

"Because it's a tough hole, and it's pretty, especially up there at the dog leg where the condo is." Number 17 angled to the right amidst a broad stand of pine trees about 150 yards off the ladies tee. Another hundred yards past the turn was a lake that spanned the width of the fairway; a prudent golfer laid up for the third shot.

Louise's drive didn't quite reach the turn; she'd have a tricky second shot. Marty, on the other hand, played the ball to fade, exploding off the tee with a powerful drive that disappeared past the turn. If she had a decent lie, her 3-wood might carry the water on the second stroke.

"That was beautiful!" Louise exclaimed.

"Thanks." The golf pro enjoyed showing off for her girlfriend, even after all this time.

The tall woman angled her second shot just past the corner of the dog leg, getting all the distance

she needed from her 5-iron. Now they'd drive to Marty's lie, up ahead about 30 yards. She was surprised, though, when her companion bolted off the cart path across the fairway to the rough on the far side.

"Where are you going?"

"I want to show you the view from here." The petite woman hopped out of the cart and stood at the corner of the dog leg. From there, one could see the lake and the green straight ahead, and the tee off to the right. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Yeah, this is what I like about where your condo is," Louise answered, gesturing over her shoulder, "especially with all the pine trees lining the fairways."

Marty waved a foursome through so they could spend just a little more time in that corner of the fairway. Louise followed her to stand in the shade beneath a stand of pines. Her companion tugged her into the woods under the auspices of showing her something else.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Right here," Marty answered as she ducked behind the low branches of a thick pine. Wrapping her arms around the tall woman's waist, she pulled her close, seeking out those red lips for a passionate kiss.

"Oh, my!" Louise sighed when they parted. "You're sneaky."

"You know, you're pretty hard to resist, Miss Stevens. I've been wanting to do that ever since you walked into the clubhouse."

"Hmmm," the older woman studied her companion's face.

"What?"

Louise pulled a tissue from her pocket. "Not your shade," she remarked, dabbing bright red lipstick from Marty's lips and chin.

"Then we're going to have to find one we agree on, because I'm not going to have you giving me kisses then wiping them off."

"Oh, that's smooth, Marty."

"Got a million of 'em."

"I bet you do."

"Eww! What happened to you?" Louise exclaimed as she took in the sight of her mud-covered lover.

"My three-iron behaved very badly on seven and I had to hit out of the water."

"No one hits out of the water, Marty. It's a drop."

"But it wasn't all the way submerged, though. It was just sitting there right on the edge."

"Well from the looks of things, you took a heck of a divot!"

"I needed to get it all," she explained seriously.

Louise finally laughed. Marty was like a schoolboy sometimes, she thought. "Who were you playing with that you had to impress so much?"

"No one special," she answered nonchalantly, "just one of the new members up from Winston-Salem." Most of the members at Elk Ridge were flatlanders, traveling up on the weekends and summers to their second home in the mountains.

"Well I hope whoever it was doesn't think everyone up here is as crazy as you are," she chided.

"I'm only crazy about you," the golf pro answered sweetly. "Let me grab a shower. What time are we supposed to be there tonight?"

"About seven-thirty. You better hurry." They had been invited to dinner at the home of Carol and Joyce, two of Marty's longtime friends here in North Carolina. They were year-round residents of the High Country, Carol now retired from the local gas company and Joyce working at the Linville post office. Both were members at Elk Ridge, but Joyce's job made it hard for them to play during the week. Carol and Louise had played a few times together, usually paired up with another twosome when things got busy at the course.

Twenty minutes later, Marty emerged from her shower, fresh and clean, wearing her best khaki shorts and the aloha shirt Katie had given her for Mother's Day.

"Don't you look cute!"

"I have to look cute when I go out with you. I don't want people to think you have bad taste."

"Silly." Louise filled her dog's water bowl and bade him goodnight as Marty turned out the lights and waited at the front door. In no time, they were pulling into the drive at their friends' home, looking forward to a relaxing night of socializing.

Carol and Joyce lived in a beautiful mountain home they had built themselves off Highway 105. The wrap-around deck offered a spectacular view of Grandfather Mountain, and it was here that they dined this evening.

"So have any of you had a chance to meet Charlene Rogers yet?" Joyce asked the group.

"Who's that?" Carol asked.

"She's from Winston-Salem. She came by the post office yesterday to sign up for a box. She said she was moving up here to play golf all summer and I asked her where. She told me she'd just joined at Elk Ridge."

"I met her today. In fact, we play a round this afternoon," Marty answered innocently.

"You better tighten her leash, Louise. Charlene Rogers is a looker, and I'd bet money she's on the prowl," Joyce warned.

"I didn't get that from her at all," the golf pro defended. "She just seemed really nice."

"I don't think I have to worry about Marty," Louise kidded. "She doesn't like sleeping on the couch."

"You're so whipped, Marty," Carol teased.

"There could be worse things in this world, Carol."

Later that night as the women got ready for bed, Louise brought up the subject of the newcomer from Winston-Salem. "So this Charlene Rogers, is she as pretty as Joyce says?"

Marty shrugged, tossing her shirt on the bedside chair. "Yeah, she's attractive, I guess."

Neither woman really noticed when Louise automatically retrieved the shirt and hung it back in the closet. Slipping up behind the cute little blonde, she wrapped her arms around Marty's waist just as she raised the nightshirt above her head. "So is Joyce right? Should I tighten your leash?" she growled playfully.

"You know better than that, Lou," she said defensively. As far as Marty was concerned, there would never be another temptation as long as she had Lou Stevens to come home to.

"Yes, I do. I just know what a big flirt you are," she teased, biting into Marty's neck from behind.

"I'd say you're the one who's being the flirt right now, Miss Stevens. You got something in mind?"

"Why don't you lose that nightshirt and we'll see!"

Louise really did like it here in North Carolina. She and Rhonda had visited several years ago in the summertime when Linda and Shirley had gotten that timeshare. How things had changed in her life since then!

She still missed Rhonda from time to time, but Marty had taken care of that ache that was her constant companion after her lover had died. Her days with the impish golf pro were filled with laughter, good times, and a genuine love that warmed her soul.

Louise wondered what Rhonda would think of Marty Beck. That was easy. Rhonda liked everybody, and she would have loved Marty's sense of humor. Funny, that was something the two had in common, though Louise sensed early on that Marty's had a more "adult" flavor, probably because she'd been around golfers all her life. Her language was certainly more colorful.

She hadn't had any trouble finding things to do in this new place, but Louise had to admit that the days were sometimes pretty long when Marty was out on the course. That's why she looked forward to Mondays, when they played a round in the afternoon; to Wednesdays, when she played with Carol and had a chance to pop in at the clubhouse; and most of all to Fridays, when Marty had the day off.

But today was Sunday, and the urge to see her sweetheart was almost more than she could stand. All she wanted was a quick hello and one of those patented Marty Beck grins.

"I think I'll go hit a bucket of balls, Petie. Will you hold down the fort?"

The terrier's ears went up, as they did each time he heard his name. But his mistress wasn't paying him any mind. No, she was wrestling with that clanging bag of sticks again. This was good, though. She always came home happy.

The course was predictably crowded for the weekend, and that meant that Marty was probably working the counter or giving a lesson. Louise scanned the clubhouse for her lover before heading out to the range tees. Off to the left, the familiar blonde hair caught her eye. A man and a woman were working in tandem on their chip shots as the golf pro gave assistance. The tall woman smiled to herself, happy at once to see Marty doing what she loved.

Louise emptied some of the range balls into the trough, selecting a nine-iron to start.

Smack!

That felt pretty good.

Smack!

The ball dropped softly only a few feet from the 75-yard marker.

Deciding not to press her luck, she tucked her iron away and extracted a fairway wood. These shots had been giving her a little trouble lately, and it would be good to work out the kinks in how she was following through.

Smack!

Topped it.

Smack!

That one didn't go straight at all.

"You know, there's a 50-cent surcharge for every ball that leaves the driving range."

Louise smiled at the familiar line, turning at once to see...to see Marty approach a woman she'd noticed earlier having a good deal of trouble making solid contact with the ball. The woman was quite attractive, but appeared to have had only minimal instruction in the game of golf.

"Oh my! I'm so embarrassed. I can't seem to get in any sort of rhythm. I'm just terrible at this," the woman gushed with obvious discomfiture.

"No, you're not terrible at all. You just need a few pointers and some time to practice," the golf pro encouraged. "Here, let me show you a couple of things, Charlene."

That must be Charlene Rogers, Louise thought.

"I don't think anyone can help this lousy swing, Martha."

"I told you. My friends call me Marty," the golf pro said, smiling as moved toward the golfer.

At the other end of the mats, the tall woman grew steamed at the exchange. *"My friends call me Marty. Won't you be my friend?"* she muttered angrily.

The golf pro stepped behind Charlene to help her find the right position for addressing the ball. An abrupt movement a few mats away caused her to look up, where she met glaring blue eyes that radiated both anger and hurt. "Hi, Lou!" Marty smiled tentatively, surprised at seeing her sweetheart here at the range.

Louise shoved her club back into the bag forcefully and heaved it onto her shoulder. With dozens of balls scattered at her feet, the long-legged golfer stomped off in a huff.

Oh shit! "Excuse me," Marty said to a baffled Charlene. "Lou, wait up!"

"Mary Louise Stevens, you are such a fool," she chastised herself.

"Lou," Marty panted breathlessly, finally catching her lover at the trunk of her car. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong, Martha Beck. What's wrong is that I fell for that silly little '50-cent surcharge' line just like apparently everybody else. I didn't know you had flirting down to such a routine."

"Flirting? Lou, I wasn't flirting with that woman!"

"Fine! You can call it something else if you want to, but I call 'em as I see 'em." Louise slammed her trunk emphatically, causing Marty to jump back.

"Lou, come on! I give golf lessons for a living. It's important for me to be friendly, especially when I see people who could really use the help. I wasn't flirting." Marty vividly recalled pleading the same case again and again before Angela, almost word for word.

Louise wanted to believe she was overreacting; wanted to think she'd just imagined something that wasn't there. But Marty had a history of fooling around; she'd said so herself. And Louise wasn't going to just ignore this when there was a chance she'd get her heart broken.

"Marty, I think we'd better step back and see what's going on here. I don't want to find myself wearing Angela's shoes."

The blonde woman's jaw dropped at the last remark. Angrily, she reached for the car door as Louise moved to pull it shut. "Now you wait a minute. How the hell did this get to be about that?"

The tall woman jutted her chin out defiantly. She could be hurtful too.

"Let me tell you something," Marty started, her face growing redder by the second. "In the first place, that was eight years ago. In the second place, I did that to Angela - not to you - so I don't have to answer to you for it. And in the third place," her green eyes were like lasers pinning Louise to her seat, "I didn't tell you about it so you could throw it in my face." With that last retort, Marty spun in the dirt and stormed off toward the pool of carts. She didn't dare go near another human being for fear of tearing off someone's head. Within moments, she commandeered a cart and wheeled out recklessly toward the first tee.

Louise sat frozen in her car, stupefied at what had transpired. Okay, so what exactly had transpired? All she knew was that she'd been feeling on top of the world only 15 minutes ago, and now she felt like throwing up.

Petie scampered out of the way of the flying newspaper. He couldn't remember ever seeing his mistress this angry, even when he used to...you know. "I'm sorry, baby. Come here." Louise bent down to pet the cowering dog. "You're my best friend, you know that?"

Yeah, he knew. She was his too.

"What am I going to do, Petie? I screwed up. She admitted to making a mistake, and told me how bad it made her feel. And I threw that right in her face, just like she said." Louise had berated herself for a whole day, not eating much and not sleeping well at all. Marty had come home at her usual time, but had gone straight into the guest room and locked the door without speaking. This morning, she was gone when Lou got up.

Louise had played the whole thing over again and again in her head, and knew without a doubt that she was wrong, wrong, wrong.

The Boston terrier looked at her sheepishly.

"That's right. I need to apologize." Marty liked giving flowers, but she didn't seem like the type that would enjoy getting them. No, and besides, flowers wouldn't be near enough. When Rhonda got really mad, it always took jewelry.

Jewelry! Hurriedly, Louise went into the master bedroom and opened the bottom drawer in the bureau Marty had emptied for her things. Sifting through the golf shirts, she extracted the mahogany box that she had been afraid to leave behind in Florida. It held the collection of gold, silver, and jewels that Rhonda had worn through the years. Most of these items were chosen by Louise, given as gifts at Christmas, birthdays, and Valentine's Day.

There! Louise studied the small gold lapel pin, only an inch and a half long, a lady golfer in the midst of her backswing. A tiny diamond chip represented the ball on the tee. She'd given the pin in Rhonda's Christmas stocking the year they'd both taken up golf. Her lover had worn it often, and it was one of Louise's favorites.

No reason for this to sit in the dark box, she reasoned. If it weren't enough for a peace offering, she could always come back and get the small emerald earrings. Now wouldn't Marty look nice in those!

The tall woman checked the clock: 12:45. Technically, she and the cute little golf pro still had a tee time in 30 minutes. Louise wondered if she'd show.

"Why don't you go beat the shit out of a bucket of balls, Marty?" Joe Baxter had had enough of his partner's surly disposition, now going on two days. Yesterday afternoon, she'd rearranged every single rack in the pro shop, so that he couldn't find a thing. This morning, she'd gone out on foot with a squirt bottle and a rag to clean the tee markers - all 108 of them! Next, she'd probably want to pull out all the cups and wash them, or trim the greens with a razor.

"I don't know, Joe. The way I'm feeling right now, that might not be such a good idea."

"Maybe you ought to just take the day off. I can manage," he offered. They'd had a rush this morning around eight, but weren't expecting another crowd. Mondays were kind of slow.

"Thanks, but I think I'd go nuts at home. But I'll try not to drive you crazy here, okay?"

Marty was frustrated. She felt awful about the scene with Lou yesterday, and especially about going into the guest room and locking the door. No matter how bad things were, they needed to be able to talk, and she'd behaved pretty childish. Still, she couldn't understand why Lou had gotten so upset. She needed to be outgoing and friendly in her job; and besides, she enjoyed it. And she was shocked when Lou had mentioned Angela; she hadn't expected something so below the belt.

A lone figure entered the pro shop, hesitating for a moment at the door, then wending through the racks to the end of the counter where the blonde pored over her order list.

"Hi, Marty."

Marty's heart raced at the sound of the familiar deep voice. Looking up, she met the tired blue eyes in a quiet gaze. From the look of things, Marty wasn't the only one who'd missed some sleep.

"Hey, Lou."

"Could we...go somewhere and talk...in private?" the tall woman asked nervously.

The golf pro gestured toward the fitting room. "That closet is about the only place."

Quietly, the two women walked into the small room and closed the door. Marty turned to face her lover. "Okay?"

Louise nodded solemnly. "Marty, I'm sorry. It was wrong, what I said. Especially that part about Angela. I'm so ashamed of myself."

The petite woman's insides were jumping up and down with excitement, but her face remained stoic.

Louise continued. "Really, it was...uncalled for. I don't handle being jealous very well."

"You had no reason to be jealous, Lou."

"I...I know. It was childish of me. It's just that I thought your '50-cent surcharge' line was kind of cute, and I wanted it to be just for me," she admitted, the corners of her mouth turning up in a bashful smile.

Relief coursed through Marty's veins as she took in the obviously contrite Louise Stevens, who was saying everything she needed to hear. Taking the long hand in her own, she rubbed her thumb along the back of the palm.

"I hate to disappoint you, Lou, but I bet I've used that line 500 times. And I bet I've complimented a thousand women, maybe two. But in the past eight years...", she stepped closer, "I've only kissed one."

Comforted by Marty's admission, Louise brought her mouth lower to meet the approaching lips. As soon as they touched, she reached forward and drew the stocky woman tight to her chest. The kiss that followed was hard, conveying feelings more like desperation than passion. "Will you forgive me?"

"Absolutely." The petite blonde rested her forehead underneath Louise's chin.

"Marty, I have something for you, if you'll take it, that is." Louise fished into her pocket and brought out the pin. "It's a pin for your lapel, or your collar, or just on your vest."

Marty drew back to get a look at what Lou was holding. She'd left her glasses on the counter in the other room and was having trouble making out what the pin looked like. "Is that a diamond?"

"Yeah, but just a little one. This was Rhonda's. I gave it to her for Christmas one year. I liked it, and she used to wear it a lot. I'd like for you to have it, Marty."

The golf pro was deeply touched by the gesture, but there was no way she could take something so precious. "Lou, I don't think I should."

"Please take it." Not taking no for an answer, Louise snaked her long fingers underneath the golfer's vest and pinned it into place on the left shoulder. "It'll be nice to be able to look at it again."

Marty touched it and tested to make sure it was secure. She was overwhelmed that Lou was giving her something so important. "Thank you," she whispered.

Louise pulled her into a second kiss, this one tender, almost chaste. "Thank you for wearing it,"

she said as the kiss ended. "Now, are we still on for a round of golf?"

"You bet," Marty grinned.

Marty stepped out onto the deck carrying two glasses of red wine. "You coming, Petie?"

The dog scampered out in reply. Marty had tacked chicken wire around the edges of the deck to keep the pooch from slipping off between the railings. This way, he could sit outside whenever they did.

Louise sat sideways on the padded swing, an obvious invitation for her lover to join her. "Can I talk to you about something, sweetie?"

"Sure." It had been a couple of days since their fight, and while they appeared to have survived it, Louise had seemed a little melancholy.

"It's about...how I got so jealous the other day."

"It's okay, honey. I told you, you can trust me." Marty leaned back into her lover's arms as they rocked gently.

"I know...I think I was...reacting to something else, not to you." The older woman's voice was subdued. "I hadn't really thought about it in a long time, but in the last couple of days, it seems like I've been thinking about it all the time."

"What is it, Lou?"

Louise sighed deeply. She'd never told this story to another soul. "Rhonda cheated on me once. It nearly killed me, Marty."

The blonde woman tried to sit up but Lou squeezed her tighter around the waist. She relaxed again and started to softly stroke the long forearms. "If you want to talk about it, I'll listen."

"It was a long time ago, March of 1980. I remember the date because it's when my father died. He was really sick and my brothers and I worked out a schedule for sitting with him. I was supposed to go down to Wheeling on Friday and stay the night, and Hiram was going to go on Saturday. Just before I left, he called and asked me if I could switch days with him. I had already taken the day off from school, so I hung around the house and fixed a nice romantic dinner for Rhonda and me for when she got home. Except that she didn't come home.

"So I cleaned everything up and the next morning, I went on down to the nursing home. I called Rhonda that night to tell her that I'd be home on Sunday and she something like 'good, because I sure was lonely in that big old bed last night.' I asked her what she did and she said she'd come home and watched TV.

"I couldn't understand her lying to me, but I figured after 13 years together, there was only one thing she'd lie about. That night, my father died and after we got through that, I just didn't want to deal with it.

"We were at Hiram's house that summer and he said something about how he wished he hadn't asked me to switch nights so he could have been with Daddy when he died. Rhonda figured it all out, then she finally asked me why I'd never said anything. I told her that I just didn't want to know anything about it, so I'd appreciate it if she didn't say anymore."

"And you never got the story?"

"I already had the story. The details weren't important."

"And she never apologized?"

"Well, I got flowers the next day. I knew that Rhonda really loved me, and it took a little while, but I forgave her. I never had to question again whether or not she strayed."

"You won't ever have to worry about that with me, Lou. I felt bad about what I did to Angela back then, but I felt a lot worse about what I'd done to myself. It took a long time to get over it. I don't ever want to feel like that again."

"You're sweet, Marty. And you're so good for me."

Hearing these kinds of things from this woman she loved so much made Marty's heart want to jump out of her chest. "I love you, Lou."

"I love you, too."

The summer flew by in a blur, with Marty working six days a week and Louise taking a side trip back to Pennsylvania to visit her brothers. In early October, the women were already starting to pack for the return to Florida.

"You want to leave some stuff here, Lou? You know, in case we can get away for a week during the winter."

"What happens here in the wintertime?"

"It snows."

"And just why would anyone want to come back to that?"

"Good point. But you can leave whatever you don't think you'll need in Florida and it will be here when we get back next May."

Louise smiled at Marty's easy assumption that they'd be doing this again a year from now. They hadn't actually talked about "forever" kind of stuff, but they were sure going through the motions.

Katie and her husband Brian were trying to work on their marriage and he was now down in Cape Coral working construction. They were all living in Marty's two-bedroom duplex, so it just made sense that Marty could move her things over to Louise's house.

But that invitation didn't go over as well as the retired schoolteacher had hoped.

"I don't know, Lou. I mean, sure, I'll probably end up staying there most nights, but I think I ought to keep getting my mail and stuff at my place." She could see right away a look of hurt on her beautiful lover's face.

"If that's what you want, Marty, but I don't understand why you want to go through all that bother of going back and forth like that." Apparently, the separation was important, and Louise couldn't help but be hurt by that. She'd abandoned her home for six months to come here with Marty.

The golf pro knew how foolish it sounded to keep her things in one place and sleep in another, but giving up her home would put her in a pretty vulnerable spot. "Look, I know it sounds pretty stupid, but the last time I moved into somebody else's house, she threw me out. Now I'm not saying that I plan on getting thrown out again or anything, but I'd like to think that I can't just be tossed on the street again. You know what I'm saying?"

"You're worried if you move in that I might ask you to leave?"

Marty nodded. "I mean, if we had a fight or something...."

"Sweetheart, we're going to argue about things from time to time, but I'm not going to just ask you to leave on a whim."

Logically, Marty understood that. But her fears wouldn't let her give up that little piece of control she had, even to Louise. Hell, they had almost split up back in June over Charlene Rogers!

In the end, they agreed to the status quo, with Marty knowing she was welcome to stay each and every night, and that she could bring whatever she wanted to Louise's house.

Louise stretched out to silence the obnoxious alarm. From the bed, she could see the leaves swirling in the wind on the back deck. Marty hated windy days on the golf course.

"Sweetheart, it's time to get up."

"Mmmmmm," she groaned, "don't feel like it."

"You want to sleep a little longer? I'll take Petie out and we'll just have some oatmeal for breakfast."

"No, I'll do it. Morning's are my job."

"Silly thing. I've only got two jobs: Petie and you. Go back to sleep. I'll wake you when breakfast is almost ready."

Louise slipped out of bed and into the kitchen, setting up the drip coffeemaker. Going back for her heavy robe and slippers, she saw that Marty was again fast asleep. The blonde woman hadn't felt very good when they'd gone to bed last night. Louise hoped she wasn't getting sick.

Petie waited patiently for his leash, but almost balked at going out into the crisp October air. When he was little and they lived in that cold place, he used to wear sweaters outside on chilly days. He remembered well the first time his mistress had knitted one herself. It was kind of long, he recalled, and practically covered his...you know. The first time he wore it proved pretty humiliating for both of them, and they hadn't spoken of it again.

Anyway, here they were, walking across the frosty grass to the place where he always started his day. It wasn't worth hanging around for all those smells in this nippy air, so he quickly took care of business, scuffing his feet backwards to cover his tracks.

Boy, it felt good to be back inside. Soon he'd have breakfast and there was a spot over by the sliding glass door that got good sun in the morning.

Louise poured two cups of coffee and returned to the bedroom.

"Marty? Here you go, baby. It's time to get up."

The petite blonde stretched and finally pulled herself to a sitting position. "Thanks," she said

groggily as she reached for the steaming cup. "I'll get dressed and be right out." The nature of her work meant that Marty always bathed in the evening, while Louise was more of a morning person.

In a few minutes, the golf pro stumbled into the family room where the dining table was already set.

"Honey, you don't look so good. Are you sure you should be going to work today?"

"I'll be fine. I'm just tired. A nice hot breakfast should do the trick."

Louise obliged with a piping hot bowl of oatmeal with blueberries and cream. "You're going to need a heavier jacket, sweetheart. It's cool and windy out there."

"That's okay. I'll be working in the pro shop most of the day." Marty stood up and leaned over for a kiss.

"Will you call me later to let me know how you're doing?"

"Okay. Have a good day, Lou." Marty disappeared out the front door. She had four more days at the club in North Carolina before the end of the season. Then they'd take a two-week vacation before she started back at Pine Island.

Marty walked through the racks, straightening the pants and jackets and buttoning all the shirts. Virtually everything was on sale here at the end of the season, and she eyed two outfits in a size 12 that would look good on Lou. If they were still here at the end of the week, she'd pick them up for Christmas presents.

Only a few dozen golfers were on the course today; no surprise, given the windy conditions. It was one thing to play in the heat, but few golfers wanted to give up a stroke on every hole to the wind.

"Hey, Marty! You 'bout ready to head back to Florida?" Jerry Bainbridge never missed a chance to play golf, no matter what the weather.

"Hi, Jerry. Yeah, I'm mostly packed." Marty grabbed the rack in hopes of fighting off a dizzy spell.

"When do you go?"

She could barely hear the man. "We're going to..." The room was starting to spin. Marty tried to focus on the rack of shirts as they got closer and closer to her face. Then the whole room went black.

Louise put the last of her shorts and tops in the suitcase and zipped it up. She certainly wouldn't need any of her summer clothes in the next few days.

Petie barked excitedly to announce the arrival of someone on the porch. Before the doorbell ever rang, Louise was on her way.

"Hi, Todd. Can I help you?" Todd was one of the teenagers who worked on the grounds crew. Marty had probably sent him to the house to fetch something she needed.

"Miss Stevens, Joe Baxter said I should come get you. Something's happened to Marty."

Oh, dear God! Not again! Louise grabbed her jacket from the hook by the door and followed him quickly to his truck. "What's wrong with her, Todd?" she asked frantically.

"I don't know, ma'am. But they called the paramedics. They should be there by the time we get back."

The ride was only three or four minutes to the pro shop, but it seemed like an eternity to Louise. Before the truck even came to a stop, she was out and running toward the door. Feelings of terror flooded her senses as she entered and saw the uniformed medics crouching around her beloved Marty.

I can't lose her!

"Marty!"

"Lou," the woman mumbled, a thermometer protruding from her mouth.

"Marty, sweetheart, I'm here." Scooting between the technicians, she took the clammy hand in hers. "I love you, Marty. Don't you leave me."

"She's going to be fine," the paramedic assured as he clipped the IV into place. "It's that nasty flu going around and she got dehydrated. We're fixing her up."

"She's okay?" Louise tearfully looked at her wide-eyed lover.

"103.5! No wonder you don't feel so good, Marty. I'm going to give you a little something to bring that down, but you need to get home and get to bed, okay?"

"You heard him, Lou. I'm okay," she said, squeezing the long fingers tight. "I just got dizzy all of a sudden and passed out. Lucky for me Jerry Bainbridge was standing right there."

Louise turned around and thanked the man profusely, then turned back to the paramedics. "Should I take her to the doctor?"

"No, she's okay, really. It's just the flu. This is the fifth case this week like this, and I bet it's not the last."

Marty rested peacefully in bed for the next three days. Louise had bad dreams.

"I should drive," Louise insisted.

"I'm fine! I haven't had a temperature in three days and I've eaten enough to choke a horse!"

Still, Louise was being overprotective. The scene at the pro shop had scared the living daylight out of her. "You can drive for a while, but we will take turns. And we will not drive all the way to Cape Coral in one day," she said sternly.

"Okay," Marty grinned. Secretly, she liked having Louise fuss over her like this, but she hated that the circumstances had brought back all those horrid memories of Rhonda's death. She slid into the driver's seat of the Mercury Sable and buckled her seatbelt. Louise got in with Petie on the other side.

"It's beautiful here," the tall woman sighed as they pulled out. "Thank you for bringing me, Marty."

"Thank you for coming. It really meant a lot to me that you were willing to pick up everything and move here for the summer just to be with me."

Louise reached across the console to lay her hand on the driver's knee. "I'd go anywhere to be with you, Marty. Don't you know that?"

"Really?"

"Really. And I wish you'd think again about moving all of your things into my place when we get back to Florida."

Marty turned over the proposition in her head. It was a big step, but no bigger than the one Lou had taken when came up here last May. "Lou, I just...I don't know. It makes me nervous to think about moving into someone else's house again."

"Marty Beck, in the first place, I am not just an ordinary 'someone else'. You may not have noticed, but I tend to keep my lovers for a really long time. That's why I was on my knees in front of everybody last week daring you to leave me."

Marty grinned at the memory. She'd enjoyed the public declaration of love from this woman, one who seldom gave herself away.

"In the second place, Marty, I don't give a damn about whose house we live in or where. It's my home that I want to share with you, just like you've shared yours with me. It's really very simple. Why can't you just do that?"

Marty was stunned into silence. Louise said 'damn'! She must be really serious here. "Okay."

"Okay? That's it? Okay?"

"Okay, I'll move my things into your house and it will be our home. Okay, I'll change my permanent address. Okay, I'll spend the next 30 years with you. Anything else?"

"No, that should cover it."

Marty flipped on her signal and pulled off onto a scenic overlook. Both women released their seatbelts and came together in a kiss to seal that promise. Thirty years might not be enough.

The End.

Thanks again for reading more from Marty and Lou. And thanks to the webmasters for hosting this and all that other great stuff out there.

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[Continued in Mulligan III](#)