

# ~ Mulligan IV: The Cart Path Not Taken ~

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by KG MacGregor

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**Disclaimers:** It's Marty and Lou again, still in love, and on the road with their friends. Just in case you can't tell by the fact that this one is *IV*, there are [three other Mulligan stories](#) out there, all hosted at the site where you found this one.

Thanks as always to my beta reader Tami, whose first name I borrowed for one of my characters. Thanks also to my Sweetcakes.

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## July 1966

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," the announcer barked to the crowd, just as he had when he sent the preceding nine groups of three off the first tee at the Hazeltine National Golf Club in Minneapolis. "At the tee is...." He went on to introduce the first golfer in the group, highlighting the fact that she was last year's Open champion and the leading money-winner for 1965. Her tee shot sailed to the right over the hill out of sight, and the crowd applauded.

"At the tee is...." The second woman in the group was one of the hottest players on the tour this year, having won the two previous tournaments in Milwaukee and Iowa. Her shot also cleared the hill on the right, and the crowd cheered.

Finally, the third golfer approached the tee, her blonde ponytail draping over the back of her visor. Unlike the others in her group, who wore culottes and sleeveless blouses, this one was dressed in shorts and an open-collar golf shirt.

"At the tee is Martha Russell, from Holland, Michigan. Miss Russell has played on the LPGA tour for three years, finishing third at the Peach Blossom Open in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1965."

Marty cringed at the meager introduction. Here she was, playing the best golf of her life, teeing off on the last day of the U. S. Women's Open in the next to last group. After yesterday's blistering round of seven under, she was tied with these two women for fourth place with a legitimate shot of winning the championship. That round - a course record for tournament play - had won her the attention of both the sportswriters and the gallery, a first for the struggling pro.

"Remember, it falls left over that hill, so you want to stay high on the right," her caddy advised. Wallace Beck was a longtime friend and golf buddy from her hometown. Realizing his own limitations with the game, he had thrown in with Marty when she decided to try to make it on the ladies pro tour. For three years, they had traveled the country on a shoestring budget, finishing out of the money on roughly half her starts.

"You don't think I should try to carry the slope on the left like I did yesterday?" With nothing to lose, Marty had taken one chance after another in the third round, even finishing the day with an eagle on the par five 18th hole.

"There's a lot of money at stake here, Marty. If it were me, I'd play it safe all day."

The blonde woman considered his advice. If she played her usual conservative game, she stood to collect over a thousand dollars with a fourth or fifth place finish. But dropping as few as five strokes could mean falling out of the serious money. On the other hand, a repeat of yesterday's round might net her the \$4,000 winner's purse, and would likely land her a sponsor.

Marty nodded and addressed the ball.

*Smack!*

The gallery gasped and applauded excitedly as her hammered drive sailed cleanly over the slope on the left side. For the first time in her brief career, she watched as a good portion of the crowd climbed down from their bleacher seats to follow her group on the course.

Wallace shook his head as she handed him the club. Marty Russell was about the stubbornest woman he knew.

## **March 2003**

Marty Beck peered into the snack bag she had picked up from the bin on the jet bridge while they were boarding the connecting flight in Dallas. That was definitely a cookie in the bottom, whether chocolate chip or raisin she couldn't tell. But if she were nonchalant....

"Here, sweetie. Trade me." Louise Stevens held out a sealed bag of carrots and celery from her purse. "I'll take your cookie."

"You've got to be kidding, Lou!" Jamming her hand into the bag, she extracted the item in question and admired it. "Who in their right mind trades a chocolate chip cookie for carrots and celery?"

"We've been through this, Marty. You're the one who wanted to lose weight. You asked me to help, and that's what I'm doing," Louise answered calmly.

"But I haven't had a cookie in over a month!"

"And you've lost eight pounds." She didn't mind one bit that Marty had put on 20 pounds in their first year together, but it bothered the shorter woman a lot, so she'd agreed to help out. These days, Louise prepared only low-calorie meals, and she carried carrot and celery sticks almost everywhere they went.

Resignedly, Marty handed over the cookie and took the colorful plastic bag. She already felt better about her weight, and it was nice to be taking a vacation feeling like she was in control. Chuckling to herself, the blonde acknowledged that the woman to her right was really the one in control.

"I'm really excited about this trip, Lou. Did I tell you it's the best present anyone's ever given me?"

"Only about 10 times." Louise smiled and took her partner's hand. "We're going to have such a good time." This was their first real vacation together, a trip to Palm Springs for the Dinah Shore ladies golf tournament. In recent years, the tourney had dropped the reference to its iconic host in favor of a corporate name, the food conglomerate; but to old-timers like Marty Beck, it would always be The Dinah.

"How are you guys doing back there?" Marty turned in her seat to spy on Linda and Shirley, seated directly behind them in the coach cabin.

"We're okay. I'll be glad when we get there, though. It'll feel good to walk around a little," Shirley answered. The 68-year-old woman had had a hip replacement in January, and she and Linda had considered canceling the trip. But the recovery was going well, and once Marty had explained about the layout of the course and the bleachers, they decided to come along after all.

"I bet. I can't wait for you guys to meet Carol and Joyce." Marty's friends from North Carolina made the trek to Palm Springs every year, The Dinah having become something of an annual rite of spring. Marty had come to this tournament three times over the past 20 years, but this time was special. It was Louise's first LPGA tournament ever, and Marty was eager to see her partner caught up in the excitement of the event.

"They're really nice," Louise added.

"Of course, we told them the same about you, so you should probably take what we say with a grain of salt," Marty kidded.

"You need to feed her more, Lou. She has a mean streak when she's hungry."

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"...but I'm getting around much better now." Shirley was filling Carol and Joyce in on her surgery.

"It sounds like it was the right thing to do. I put off the knee replacement as long as I could," Joyce answered. "Now I wish I'd done it sooner."

"Boy, do we sound like a bunch of old women or what!" Linda remarked as she helped Louise load the dishwasher.

"We are a bunch of old women," Marty retorted. "I can say that, because I'm the youngest one here, and I'm old." Marty would turn 63 in April.

"You are not old!" Carol had known Marty for ages. "The only time you've ever acted old was 30 years ago when you were looking to hustle somebody on the course. You should have seen her. She'd listen to these guys talking about playing for ten dollars a hole and she'd start holding her back or massaging her poor "arthritis" hands. Next thing you know, she's smiling and counting their money."

"Marty Beck! You never told me you were a hustler!" Louise was astonished to learn of her lover's shady side.

"It was a long time ago, Lou. Joe Baxter finally hired me on at Elk Ridge because his members started asking for me. I tell you, it wasn't easy back then for a woman to earn a living at this game."

"How long were you on the tour, Marty?" Shirley asked.

"About three years."

"Did you ever play in The Dinah?"

"Oh, no. The Dinah didn't start until 1972. I left the tour in '66."

"What was it like, Marty?" Linda asked. "The tour, I mean."

Louise settled back on the sofa of their three-bedroom condo, looking forward to hearing her partner talk about such an exciting time in her life. Marty sat on the floor in front and leaned back against her knees.

"Sometimes it was all I wanted to do. Other times, it was...well, it was pretty miserable." She felt Louise's comforting hand on her shoulder as her voice dipped in melancholy. "I'll probably never forget the way I felt the last day I played. When I teed off that morning, I was on top of the world. It was the U. S. Open at Hazeltine National in Minneapolis. I was one of only a handful of qualifiers in a field of about a hundred. Everyone else was exempt."

"What does that mean?" Joyce asked. All of the women had gathered in the living room to hear the tale.

"It means that most of the golfers playing in the Open didn't have to qualify because they had won tournaments already or they were among the top money winners. I was neither. I squeaked in after finishing fourth at a qualifying tournament the week before. My best outing on the tour was third place at a tournament in South Carolina that most of the really good players skipped so they could have a break. The smaller tournaments were my best bet for getting a paycheck because it was easier to make the cut. But the purses were pretty small. Sometimes, the winner walked off with only four hundred dollars."

"That's amazing. I bet the men were making thousands."

"Yeah, but the LPGA tour didn't have that many big sponsors. That's one of the things that changed when The Dinah came along. All of a sudden, the LPGA had a major sponsor in Colgate and a public face that people liked. The media picked up on it and it finally took off."

"So what happened at the Open? Go on with your story," Shirley coaxed.

"Like I said, on Sunday morning I felt great. I'd had the best round of my whole career the day before and was tied for fourth place, but just two strokes back from the leader. I birdied the first hole and scooted up into second...and then the wheels came off." Marty sighed at the memory. "I hit it out of bounds on two and dropped a stroke. On six and 13, I hit it in the water. I swear, I missed a half dozen putts by an inch. But I didn't back down. Oh, no, not Marty Russell. I kept taking chances, and I even finished the day with a birdie on 18, but all told, I'd dropped back to 15th place. I took home about three hundred dollars, and I mean I took it home. Wallace was my caddy back then, and he and I just threw the clubs in the station wagon and headed back to Holland. I bet we didn't say five words to each other all the way back."

"That was it?"

"That was my last professional tournament. Wallace and I hired on at the club where we played growing up. They made him the full-time pro and I gave lessons part-time and worked the rest of the time in the clubhouse."

"Wait a minute! They made your caddy the full-time pro?" Joyce was outraged.

"Yep! And everybody there knew I could beat him from the blue tees, even Wallace, but that's the way it was back then. 'Course, it didn't matter much in the long run, because we got married pretty soon after that and the next year I got pregnant with Katie."

The six women sat quietly, no one quite sure what to say in the wake of a story like that. The clock on the mantle chimed the hour of nine.

"I don't know about you guys, but I'm beat. It's really been a long day," Shirley said. "And this

old body of mine thinks it's midnight."

"That's because it is midnight back in Florida where we got up this morning," Linda answered, tugging her partner to her feet. The women had agreed to let Shirley and Linda have the bedroom downstairs; there were two more master suites upstairs.

"I bet we're all awake at four o'clock," Marty lamented.

"You up at four? That'll be the day!" Louise took her lover's hand and pulled her toward the stairs. "We'll see you ladies in the morning."

Marty drifted deeper into her funk as she closed the door to their bedroom. "I guess I really threw a wet blanket on the party with that miserable tale, didn't I?"

"You didn't throw a wet blanket on things, honey. Everybody's just tired tonight."

The golf pro shrugged. She had fought those demons so many times, always thinking she'd survived it in the end; but it was hard not to dream about how far she might have gone had she played better that day. Louise interrupted her reflections with a soft kiss to the back of her ear as they settled into bed.

"I love you, Marty."

"I love you too."

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Over the next two days, Marty and Louise played two rounds of golf, one with Carol and Joyce and another on their own. They explored the downtown with Shirley and Linda, and all six women relaxed at the condo from the late afternoon until bedtime. So far, it was a perfect vacation; all of them were completely enamored with the beautiful desert resort.

On Thursday, the three couples piled into the rented van to go to Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage, the home of The Dinah. The four-day tournament got underway at eight o'clock.

"Wow! Look at all the people!" Louise was amazed at the crowd, already numbering in the hundreds at 7:30 in the morning. Most were women, and many seemed to be couples like themselves.

"Wait till Saturday and Sunday. There'll be ten times this many here then," Marty explained. "I'll get us a program. Why don't you go on up and sit with Shirley and Linda? You want me to bring you anything?"

"No, I'm fine." Louise began the climb up the bleachers to where their friends were already sitting. She and Marty had walked first to the 18th hole to view the bronze statue of Dinah Shore and to see the Wall of Champions that recorded the previous tournament winners. Despite the early hour, the air was humming with excitement.

Marty shouldered through the crowd to the kiosk where the programs were sold. Hopefully, Louise had brought their reading glasses or they....

"Marty?"

The blonde golf pro whirled at the sound of her name, at once spotting her old friend Pat Shapiro, now a pro at a private Tampa club. "Pat!"

The two friends hugged warmly.

"I didn't know you were coming this year."

"It was a Christmas present from my new lady. She's sitting up in the bleachers. I'd love for you to meet her."

Marty and Pat had played on the tour together, the latter woman hanging on four years after Marty had hung it up. Pat had been good enough to land a sponsor, Marty thought, but a Jewish surname had been the real handicap in those days. Over the years, they'd run into one another at some of the LPGA sanctioned teaching and club pro events in Florida, and enjoyed now both a friendship and a mutual professional regard. And Pat was "in the family," so to speak; though if she'd ever had a partner, Marty didn't know about it.

"I'd like to, but I've only got a minute. I'm sure I'll run into you both over the next few days. Did you know Tami was playing?"

"You're kidding! How'd she get in?" Tami Sparks was a recent University of Florida grad whom Marty had "discovered" as a young teenager. After working with her for three years, she'd seen the potential and had referred her to Pat, who was an outstanding teacher and better connected to the ladies' pro tour.

"She won that qualifying tournament in Atlantic City last month. She's got her handicap down to two. I think she's decided to get serious about this."

"God, I hope so. It would be such a shame to see all that potential go to waste." Tami had given up so much of her youth to an adult game that she'd almost burned out for good. On Pat's advice - and against her parents' wishes - she'd taken almost a year off before turning back to the game she loved.

"Well, she still has to make the cut, but she's playing pretty good golf right now."

"That's great. I'll be sure to find her and say hello."

"She tees off at 8:40 on Number 10 if you're interested. Or you can come over to the driving range in about 15 minutes to watch her warm up."

"I'll do that. It'll be great to see her again," the blonde agreed.

"Listen, a bunch of us from the tour are meeting for drinks at the clubhouse Saturday at two o'clock. You ought to stop by."

"Who all's going to be here?" Marty hadn't kept up with most of the women she'd played against week in and week out for those three years long ago.

"Fran, Becky...Mary Jean...and a couple of others I can't think of. You should stop in."

"Okay, I'll try. But I'm here with five other people and one car, so I can't promise."

The friends said goodbye and Marty picked up a program and worked her way back to the bleachers. "I just ran into a friend of mine from Tampa," she said cheerfully. She went on to explain about Pat Shapiro and Tami Sparks.

"Hey, she's that kid you were working with when we first started coming down to Florida!" Linda remembered the teenager that followed Marty all around the club.

"That's her. And she's playing in this tournament."

"You mean to tell me that someone you gave lessons to is now a pro?" Louise was immeasurably impressed.

"Yes, ma'am! Listen, I'm going over to the driving range to say hello to her. You guys want to come meet her?"

"I'm not giving up this seat," Shirley pronounced. Their seats were in the only patch of shade.

"Lou?"

Louise really enjoyed seeing her partner so excited, but she couldn't help but feel like she might be in the way. She didn't know any of these women Marty was off to see, and Marty might cut her visit short because she wouldn't want her to feel left out. "Why don't you go on by yourself? She's a friend of yours and you should talk to her without having me hanging around. I'll say hello to her some other time."

The blonde woman started to leave again when Carol and Joyce climbed to their row and sat to await the first group of golfers teeing off. "You'd never believe what we just saw," Joyce said, still shaking her head in amazement.



"What?" the group asked in unison.

"There's a woman over there that looks exactly like Marty did when I first met her. She's wearing a sponsor's tag."

The women craned their necks to see if they could catch a glimpse.

"She looked like me?"

"A lot. At least the way you looked back then."

"You mean before I got so old and fat." Marty had no problem with calling it as she saw it.

"Marty Beck, you are not old and fat! You're...just right," Louise argued.

"Nice try, sweetie," she grinned. "I know you love me, but I'm still old and fat."

Watching her lover walk away, Louise asked the others, "Why do you think she goes on so much about being fat? I think she's as cute as she can be."

"I guess people just have their own ideas about how they want to look," Carol offered. "We've probably all added a few pounds over the years, but that doesn't make it easy to accept the changes."

Louise sighed and shook her head. She weighed the same today as she had most of her life, but she had to admit that things were...apportioned a little differently. Still, she'd just never been the sort to put so much emphasis on what was on the outside, and she wished Marty wouldn't either.

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As promised, Marty found her young protégé warming up at the driving range. From about 20 yards back, she watched as Pat quietly instructed the woman at the tee. It was hard not to envy both of them; Tami for her youthful potential, and Pat for her mentoring role and ringside seat. If the young woman continued to play well, they could both ride the wave for several years, right at the center of all the action on the women's tour.

The decision six years ago to hook Tami Sparks up with Pat Shapiro had been gut-wrenching for Marty. She would have loved the chance to get back onto the tour, and there was no one in her life then who would have tied her to home. But the kid deserved a real shot, and Pat knew the ins and outs of the LPGA better than anyone she knew. It would have been selfish on her part to try to do it on her own just to have the chance to get back on the inside again. But seeing them here together was tough.

"Well, look who's finally learned to keep her head down!"

"Marty!" Tami dropped her club and ran to embrace her former coach. "What are you doing here?"

"I heard that some hotshot kid was making her move, and I thought I'd better check it out."

"I can't believe you're here! Wait till Mom and Dad find out." Mike and Cathy Sparks would always be grateful for Marty's guidance of their daughter's career.

"It'll be good to see them again. Listen, is it okay if I join your gallery on the course? You can say no if you'd rather I didn't." Sometimes, golfers got distracted when followed by people they knew. "I won't say a word, I promise."

"Are you kidding? I'd love to have you there. You can walk with Mom and Dad."

Marty nodded, and looked to Pat for approval. The coach would have the final word.

"It's okay by me," Pat agreed.

"Great! Let me go tell my friends where I'm going to be. Break a leg, kiddo!" Marty chuckled the young woman in the arm and turned back toward the bleachers.

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"I missed you again today," Louise said as they returned to their room on Friday afternoon to shower and rest a bit before dinner. For two days, they'd seen each other only in passing as Marty had followed Tami Sparks along the course. Louise tried to follow as well, but eventually returned by herself to the bleachers on the 18th hole, not wanting to interrupt her partner's concentration as she talked softly with the girl's parents and watched the young golfer grapple with her shots.

"I missed you too. Tami's playing great! She's definitely going to make the cut."

"Yeah, she's only one over, and that's just six back from the leader. She's ahead of a lot of big name players."

"Yeah, but most of those big name players have a lot of tournament experience, and they can turn it up a notch when they have to. She'll need to do that too."

"Wonder who she'll be paired with tomorrow."

"I gave Pat the number here, and she promised to call tonight when they announced the tee-times for tomorrow." Marty pulled off her shirt and tossed it onto the bed, adding her shorts and underwear to the pile. Naked, she opened the drawer in search of the oversized t-shirt and shorts she usually wore to relax.

"You looking for these?" Louise held up the faded black shirt and the baggy gray shorts. She was enjoying the view of Marty in the buff. She didn't get this view very often, even less since the shorter woman had put on weight.

"How'd they get over there?"

"I guess I forgot to pick them up and fold them and put them away last night when you threw them in the floor," the taller woman answered with just the barest hint of sarcasm.

"Louise Stevens! What ever will I do with you?" Marty teased, catching the tossed items.

"Well, I have an idea or two, but it doesn't involve those clothes." Her eyebrow shot up suggestively.

Marty smiled softly and shook her head. "How can you look at me like that when I look so awful?"

Louise's face fell at once. "Marty, don't you know that you break my heart when you say things like that?"

"I...don't...mean to do that, Lou. It's just that I...." She held the shirt to her chest, suddenly modest.

"Listen to me." She crossed the room and put both of her hands on Marty's bare shoulders. "The body that I want to touch, the body that excites me and turns my knees to jelly," she placed one palm directly over the blonde woman's chest, "is the one that surrounds this heart. Isn't that the way you feel too?"

"Of course it is. But you're not carrying a spare tire like I am," Marty reasoned.

"Maybe not, but should I start to feel self-conscious about my flat chest? Or my gray hair? Or the veins on my legs? Or the...?"

"No, Lou! I think you're beautiful."

"And I think you're beautiful too. Really, I do." Louise dropped her hands to caress her lover's backside.

Marty tucked her head beneath the taller woman's chin and sighed. Sometimes, she was almost overwhelmed by her realization of how lucky she was to have Louise Stevens' love. "I really turn

your knees to jelly?"

"Uh-huh."

The lovers held one another for a long time, finally sidling into the bathroom to discuss the merits of water conservation.

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"Wow, look at this sports car!" Marty exclaimed. One of the major sponsors of The Dinah was an auto manufacturer, and the local dealer had arranged to have several models on display, rotating their positions on the course each day.

"You'd look good in that, Marty," Shirley observed.

"Nah, not enough room for golf clubs. I liked the SUV they had here yesterday."

"Yeah, that one's out by the entrance this morning. Oh, that reminds me! I almost forgot," Shirley gushed with excitement. "Linda and I were looking at the ones out front yesterday and there was this woman talking on her cell phone with somebody about where to put the cars today. She had on a sponsor tag, and I swear to God, Lou, she looked just like you did the first time we met you and Rhonda at that dance."

"You're kidding!" Carol said. "That's so weird! I mean, especially after seeing that woman the other day that looked so much like Marty."

"I think you guys are pulling our leg," Louise said skeptically. "We certainly haven't seen anyone like that."

"If I see her today, I'll point her out," Shirley offered.

"And we'll keep our eyes open for that other one," Joyce added.

"I think we better hurry over to the first tee and claim that shady spot," Marty suggested. "You gonna walk with me today, Lou?"

"If you want me to."

"Of course I want you to." She liked having Louise close by.

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Tami Sparks had a scorching third round, coming into the clubhouse at four under, now only three back of the leader, who was still on the course. Marty and Louise joined their friends at the bleachers on the 18th hole to watch the remaining golfers finish the day.

"You know, I don't want to jinx Tami or anything, but this is kind of like that story you were telling the other night," Linda said.

"Yeah, it is, isn't it?" Marty didn't need to be reminded. She'd been thinking about it all day, seeing herself in the young golfer's shoes as she took chances on the course. From time to time, Tami would talk quietly with Pat as they walked to the next tee. Whatever the old pro was saying, it was the right advice, Marty thought.

"Are you going to see your friends today, sweetie?" Louise turned away from the others as she asked the question, sensing that Marty had developed reservations about meeting her former colleagues.

"I don't know, Lou. I haven't really kept in touch with any of them besides Pat."

"That's all the more reason you should go, isn't it?"

"I guess." In truth, Marty had started to wonder what good would come of seeing the old gang again; or rather, what good would come of them seeing her. Here she was, an overweight seasonal golf pro, second banana at two relatively ordinary clubs. Her best chance to get back to the big time was in the clubhouse, playing not for her, but for Pat Shapiro. "Maybe I'll just stop in and say hello. I hate to keep all of you waiting."

"We don't mind. Carol and Joyce said something about a bargain table in the pro shop. That should keep us busy for an hour or so."

"Still, I don't think...."

"Stay as long as you want, sweetheart. Or for as short as you want. Whatever's right for you is okay."

Marty looked at her sheepishly. Somehow, Louise understood.

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Were it not for Pat Shapiro's familiar face, Marty would never have found her group. None of the women in the tight circle of armchairs was immediately recognizable as someone she had played with almost forty years ago.

"Well, if it isn't Marty Russell!" The first woman to speak was smartly dressed in a creamy silk wind suit like so many of the golfers their age wore. Her abundance of makeup reminded Marty of Pauline Rourke, their friend back in Cape Coral. This was...Fran Edgars!

"Fran?"

The woman nodded excitedly. "Marty, you look great! It's so good to see you again."

The blonde golf pro turned to look at all of the other smiling faces. Their names were coming back...Becky Halstead...Mary Jean Hunter...Candy Romarco. "Wow! It's great to see all of you again!"

In no time, the excited group of women caught up on the ages since they'd played on the tour. Fran left about the time Marty did, and married Dale Thomas, a pro on the men's tour. Dale worked now out of a country club in upstate New York. Fran had all but stopped playing the game.

Becky won three small tournaments in 1967, but shoulder surgery ended her golf career. She was a breast cancer survivor, twice divorced and she now sold real estate in Texas.

Mary Jean quit the tour after only two years and went back to college. She taught physical education at a community college in her hometown of Chillicothe, Ohio. She had a partner of 17 years named Lana.

Candy played eight years on the tour, finally winning a major in 1971. The next day, she announced her retirement from golf and married her childhood sweetheart in Huntsville, Alabama. She and her husband had nine children, and Candy weighed almost 200 pounds.

When Marty's turn came, she timidly told of her winters in Florida, her summers in the North Carolina mountains, and her life with the retired schoolteacher from Pennsylvania.

"Didn't you marry Wallace Beck?" Interesting that Becky would remember that, Marty thought. The woman had shared many whispered concerns with Marty back then about the number of lesbians on the tour. But even before she realized her own orientation, Marty had known the risks of alienating sponsors on the tour with a rumor here or there.

"Yeah," Marty sighed, "for five years."

"Boy, you should have gotten a prize for that," Candy said. Wallace had quite the reputation as a ladies' man.

"I did, actually," the blonde woman chuckled. "My daughter Katie's 35 years old now, and I have

a six-year old grandson."

"Aw, that's nice," Fran said sweetly.

Now it was Pat Shapiro's turn, and Marty listened in envy as the pro told of how nice it was to be back on the tour again, this time with a golfer who had a shot at making a real name for herself. "And I have Marty to thank for that, because she's the one who steered Tami Sparks my way."

Marty smiled meekly. "But she took off under you, Pat. You're the one that deserves the credit," she said nobly.

"Hey, remember that time...." With Mary Jean's story of Becky's stolen clubs, the reminiscing was officially underway. More than an hour passed as they recalled the special moments and laughed over shared experiences.

"Would you look at the time! I told Dale I'd only be a few minutes. He's going to be pacing all over the parking lot!" Fran stood and picked up her purse. "It was so good to see all of you again. We've got to keep in touch."

Everyone nodded their agreement. Pat was the one who had managed to pull them all together here, but it was clear that all but she and Marty had whittled the game to something much less important in their lives than it had been forty years ago. Still, the excitement of a major tournament had brought them all to Palm Springs, proof positive that their glory days were something they still held dear.

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The soft buzzer sounded at 6:30 a.m. on Sunday, the last day of The Dinah, and the last full day of their vacation. Marty tapped the snooze alarm and snuggled into Louise's long body. "You feeling any better this morning, Lou?"

Poor Louise had eaten something yesterday that "disagreed" with her, and had been up and down half the night. Around midnight, Marty had taken off in search of an all-night pharmacy, finally coming back with a bottle of pink stuff to settle her stomach.

"I think I'm going to live," she mumbled.

"I guess that means you're better then. Last night, you didn't want to live."

"What do you think it was?" Louise struggled to sit up, gently rubbing her stomach in small circles.

"I don't know. Maybe your piece of fish was bad." They had grilled Pacific salmon on the patio. "Or it could have been that sausage with peppers and onions you picked up for lunch. That stuff sits out a long time. It's a wonder more people...."

"That's enough, Marty." The gray-haired woman had a face to match. "Sorry I asked."

Marty chuckled and stroked her lover's back. "All things must pass, eh?"

Louise smacked her playfully, warning, "This will be you someday, and I'm going to show you the same sympathy."

"Sorry, babe. So do you feel like going today?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world." She managed to smile, and forced herself out of bed. They all needed to be out the door by seven to get the good seats at the first tee.

Marty fell back onto the bed to watch Louise get ready for the day. She'd laid out her clothes the night before and was dressed in no time. Next, she rummaged through Marty's drawers and pulled out one of her favorite outfits.

"Will you wear this today?"

Marty eyed the dark green shorts and green and white striped golf shirt. It was one of her favorites, too, but she suspected that Louise liked it because the neck scooped low. "You just want to look down my shirt."

*Busted.* "I just...happen to think you look very nice in these colors."

"Sure, Lou. Whatever you say."

Ten minutes later, they were toasting bagels and getting their bag ready for the day: camera, film, water, sunscreen, and cash.

"Are you guys going to follow Tami again today?" Linda was trying to plan the best approach for Shirley to watch the leaders as much as possible. The woman's new hip just wouldn't allow her to walk much.

"Lou?" Marty wanted to walk with her former protégé, but she also wanted Louise to know that she had some choice in the matter.

"Yeah, I want to see if she makes another move." In fact, after watching the young woman yesterday, Louise had found herself profoundly interested in Tami's game. Some of the nuances of her approach to the ball showed Marty's influence, even after all these years.

But the most intriguing aspect of following Tami Sparks was watching Marty watch Pat Shapiro. As they walked between holes, the elder pro gave sage advice and encouragement to the young



golfer; and it was as though Marty strained to hear what was being said. Louise couldn't make sense of her partner's fascination with the coach and found herself hanging back to take it all in.

"So what about you guys?"

"Well, we got those two folding stools and I think we're going to try to set up after they tee off in the shade around two, because we can see the second green, the third tee and the whole sixth fairway from there. Then after they wrap up the front nine, we'll probably head over to the green at 10 or 11. When the last group comes through, we'll go to the bleachers on 18."

"That sounds like a plan."

Carol and Joyce emerged from their room ready to go. "I can't believe our vacation is almost over," the latter said. "Two days from now, I'll be back at work."

"Just one more year, honey. Then we'll be sleeping in every day." With one more year at the gas company, Joyce would increase her pension by almost two hundred dollars a month. Carol was already retired from the post office.

"How much longer are you going to work, Marty?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I feel like what I do isn't really work at all. I mean, if I retired, I'd probably get up every day and go to the golf course."

Louise had been disappointed at first to learn that her partner had no definite timetable for retirement. But when they'd discussed things in detail, she learned that Marty was at least financially prepared, thanks to her IRAs and the regular contributions to the LPGA's pension fund by her bosses at Pine Island and Elk Ridge. If Marty worked two more years to 65, they'd have plenty of money to relax, travel, and play golf whenever they wanted. It would be a nice life, not far off what she'd planned with Rhonda. But Marty had also said she thought she'd like to keep her toe in the water, maybe just giving lessons part-time.

"I think I could handle a job where I had to go to the golf course every day," Carol said.

"Who couldn't?" Linda concurred.

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The six friends sat perfectly still in the stands as Tami Sparks lined up her tee shot on the first hole. Yesterday's leader, Shelley Coleman, had bogeyed the last two holes, dropping into a tie for first with Tia Johnston. Tami was four back, in a tie for second, but her hot round on Saturday had prompted the tourney officials to place her in the final group.

Marty understood the pressure that was on the young golfer, just as it had been on her at the Open in 1966. But Marty hadn't had a Pat Shapiro in her corner. Sure, she'd had Wallace, but as her caddy, he'd grown to be more concerned about how they lived day to day than what was best for her future in golf. Looking back, she could have used his encouragement that day rather than his reproach. She longed for the chance to give that same encouragement to Tami Sparks, and hoped that Pat Shapiro could do just that.

All three in the last group started off solid, each making par on the first five holes. The co-leaders seemed to be holding back on this final day, playing their most conservative game, each hoping the other would make a mistake. That was exactly the opportunity Tami Sparks needed, and Pat pushed her through it. Number Six was a long par five, the entrance to the green narrowed by sand traps at the front on both sides. A prudent golfer laid up for the best position from which to loft one onto the green. From there, a solid putt would net a birdie.

Tami crushed her drive, and boldly went for the green on her second shot. The crowd erupted in cheers as her ball inched off the fringe beyond the trap on the left side. If her putting game held, she would likely birdie the hole; putting pressure on her opponents to do the same.

As expected, both of the leaders laid up, finding the green on their third shot. Tami was away, and shocked the crowd by sinking a 15-foot putt for eagle. Just like that, she'd closed the gap to two.

But the leaders weren't conceding. Johnston parred, and Coleman birdied; Tami remained in third place, but had netted one stroke on the leader.

Two holes later, she picked up another stroke on a par three; and on the ninth hole, moved into second place as each of her playing partners dropped a stroke. Heading into the back nine, she was tied for second, one back from the leader.

The gallery had almost doubled since their start. When the electronic leader boards around the course showed the movement in the last group, fans abandoned their old favorites to see if history might be made today. No qualifier had ever won The Dinah.

"I can't believe how well Tami's playing, Marty. She's got a real chance to win it all." Louise was genuinely excited to see "their" player making her move.

"Yeah, it's great. But she's got to keep pushing herself," Marty agreed, hustling ahead to see if she could catch what Pat was saying. The coach needed to keep Tami focused. She had to seek the advantage and seize it, keeping pressure on the leader to force a mistake.

Louise drifted away from her partner, feeling almost like she was intruding by her presence alone. Marty was barely aware of the others around her, intent on staying close to Pat.

Suddenly, Louise understood. It wasn't about Tami at all, but about Pat Shapiro. Marty wasn't thinking about her collapse at the Open almost forty years ago; she was kicking herself for her

own lost opportunity to coach this rising star.

And the realization that Marty might rather be back on the tour made Louise very sad.

On Number 12, Shelley Coleman reminded all those in attendance why she was out in front, and why she was the leading money-winner on the tour this year. From 80 yards out, she dropped a wedge shot within four inches of the hole. Her birdie, combined with Tami's par, stretched her lead to two strokes.

But the young golfer reached deeper into her resolve, returning the favor on 14. She tightened the screws even further when she chipped in from the sand trap on the 15th hole. With three holes remaining, the two were tied. By this time, Tia Johnston had fallen back three strokes behind Tami and was pretty much out of the race.

Marty was astounded at the way Pat had kept the golfer on an even keel throughout the day. At 23 years old, Tami was handling the pressure like an old pro. But the real test came on 16, when the young golfer's tee shot caught the treetops on the right, falling into the rough well behind her co-leader's lie in the center of the fairway.

Hanging back, Marty looked for signs that Pat would soothe the player's frazzled nerves. This was no time to come unglued. Looking ahead, she watched Tami circle her lie, studying the trees in her path and the angle of the incline. The young golfer had a narrow opening to push it into the fairway if she nailed it precisely between two stands of trees. But if she caught one of the trees, the ball might careen to an unplayable lie.

From the corner of her eye, Marty caught another image, that of Louise Stevens squatting low to study the golfer's approach. She smiled as she noticed the flat-brimmed hat with the black band. It was the same one the blue-eyed woman had worn when she'd returned to the driving range two days after their initial prickly meeting; the day Marty had felt something inside her click for the retired schoolteacher. Suddenly, this profound longing she felt from seeing Pat and Tami on center stage seemed trivial and misguided. She didn't want to be in Pat Shapiro's shoes. All she wanted in the world was what she had with Louise.

The crowd exploded in applause as Tami's second shot sailed from the trees into the fairway. But Marty had missed it; she'd been watching her partner. *Partner*... Out of the blue, her thoughts wandered back to the night before, when she'd unselfishly climbed out of bed to go in search of something that might help Louise feel better. No doubt about it, Louise Stevens brought out the best in her, and her best had nothing at all to do with playing golf. Her best was giving love, and receiving it openly in return.

As the gallery shifted forward, Marty pushed her way through the crowd to walk alongside the taller woman. Without a word, she suddenly caught Louise's left hand, wrapping their fingers together to feel the ring she had proudly given as her promise of their life together. Yes, indeed: Louise Stevens was the only thing she really needed to be happy, to be fulfilled.

"That was some recovery, wasn't it?" Louise asked.

"Oh, yeah," Marty agreed, though her thoughts hadn't made it back to the course yet. "I love you, Lou."

The gray-haired woman smiled, surprised at the sudden display of affection and declaration of love. But Louise wasn't the kind of person to look a gift horse in the mouth, and she knew Marty well enough by now to know that something had just happened to trigger the abrupt change in her behavior. Whatever it was, it was welcome. "I love you, too."

Tami salvaged a par on 16, but her opponent birdied and moved back into the lead. When they both nailed the par three 17th, the crowd held its collective breath for the exciting finish.

Marty and Lou moved ahead quickly to pull up even with the middle of the fairway on the last hole. From here, they could see both the tee and the pin. The 18th green was situated on a small island at the end of a long fairway. A grandstand lined the right side, and camera crews looked on from behind the green.

All three players had driven their tee shots down the center of the fairway, but Tami's had gotten a generous roll, stopping almost thirty yards beyond the others. As the others were away, they hit first, laying up in front of the lake.

Excitedly, Marty explained to Louise that the young golfer had a chance to go for broke. A perfect second shot could clear the water, almost guaranteeing a birdie. But the risk was enormous: Anything less than perfect most likely meant finding water and dropping two strokes.

Louise pulled out the small binoculars. "It looks like a four-wood."

"She's going for it."

Several long minutes later, Tami Sparks made the shot of her young career. The ball sailed cleanly over the lake, landing with a soft thump on the deeper right side of the green and rolling to the back edge. The pin was positioned on the left, but two good putts would net a par.

Tami relaxed with her caddy as the other two golfers hit their third shots. Once again, Coleman showed her skill with a nine-iron shot that landed 10 feet from the pin, but spun back to stop only three feet from the hole. If she sank the putt, she would almost assuredly win the championship.

Johnston cleared the lake, but her ball rolled off the back of the green into the high fringe, just a breath away from falling into the water on the opposite side. Though she was closer to the pin than Tami, she would take the next shot because she was not yet on the green.

Marty and Louise hurried ahead to find their friends in the grandstand. As the players walked in front of the stands to the footbridge for what would likely be their final hole of the tournament, the crowd stood in unison to cheer the wonderful play.

Johnston hit a fine chip shot that rolled within only two feet of the pin. To extract herself from

the drama of the thrilling finish, she putted in and waved to an appreciative crowd.

It was Tami's turn. The young woman and her caddy walked the area a dozen times, assessing the break and the speed of the green. Finally, she stilled with her putter in hand. The silent crowd waited to see if she could bring the ball within range to birdie the hole, perhaps forcing the leader into sudden death.

Thirty feet of void lay between the ball and the cup. At last, a swift, smooth stroke sent the ball rolling, eating up the green, breaking at the last moment as though it had eyes. The roar of the crowd started when the ball was 10 feet from the hole, the excitement building to near pandemonium when the tiny white object disappeared from sight. Eagle!

It was all Tami Sparks could do to keep from throwing her club into the air. She led by a stroke!

But the drama wasn't finished. Shelley Coleman diligently repeated the process, studying her shot with the realization of what was at stake. If she sank the putt, she had to face Tami Sparks in sudden death. If she missed, she finished in second place.

Three feet. Three feet. Three feet.... The ball stopped at three feet...one inch to the right of the hole.

Qualifier Tami Sparks had just won The Dinah.

In a long-standing tradition, the young woman flung herself into the lake, dragging her caddy and Pat Shapiro along behind. It was one of the greatest finishes in the history of women's golf, and Marty Beck could not have been prouder if she'd been in the water herself.

"Let's go congratulate them," she shouted above the roar of the crowd. They'd have only a small window to do so before the media mobbed the winner as she exited the course.

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"I still can't believe that finish. I've never seen anything like it," Linda gushed.

"I feel sorry for Shelley Coleman, but I swear, it was like Tami was fated to win," Carol said.

The six ladies sat on the bleachers at 18 waiting for the crowd to clear out. Traffic would be a mess, and besides, it was nice to have one last chance to absorb the enchantment of their wonderful week together.

"Are you guys about ready to go?" Joyce asked, fishing in her pocket for the keys to the van.

"If it's okay, I wouldn't mind stopping in the ladies room," Louise answered.

"Me too," Marty agreed.

"We'll meet you out front, then."

Marty and Louise headed up the back steps into the nearly deserted clubhouse. Entering the ladies room, Marty remarked, "Finally, no line."

But two of the three stalls were occupied, so Louise went first while Marty waited.

Suddenly, one of the stalls opened and Marty found herself face to face with one of the most beautiful women she'd ever seen - a tall...dark-haired...blue-eyed...younger version of Louise Stevens. Wide-eyed, they both stared at one another until the second stall opened. As if the shock of seeing her partner's clone was not enough, Marty found herself opposite her own carbon copy, a blonde, green-eyed woman who looked for all the world like she had thirty years ago.

"Lou, you need to get out here," was all she said as the three women continued to gape open-mouthed at one another. And when Louise finally appeared to complete the picture, the shock was almost too much.

"Oh, my," was all she could say.

Finally, the younger brunette spoke. "I'm Anna Kaklis, and this is my partner, Lily Stuart."

Marty nodded numbly, finally finding her tongue. "I'm Marty Beck, and this is my partner, Louise Stevens." Gesturing toward their badges, she continued, "You're sponsors."

"Yeah, those are my BMWs out there. I own the dealership here in Palm Springs."

"They're very nice."

"Thank you. Are you...from around here?" *Distant relatives?*

"I'm from Michigan. She's from West Virginia. But we live in Florida now."

"Oh. I just wondered because we kind of...." Anna's voice trailed off.

"Look alike," Louise finished.

"Yeah."

"Well, they say everyone has a twin," Marty concluded. But what would be the chances of her twin finding Louise's twin?

The women stood silently for a few moments longer, still amazed at the sight before them. But

what else was there to say? They were strangers, despite their appearance.

"Well, it was nice meeting you both," Lily finally offered.

"Same here," Marty replied, "and, uh...good luck to you." That brought broad smiles from the younger couple, who seemed to understand exactly what the older woman meant.

"And to you."

Marty and Louise watched as the pair washed up and left the ladies room.

"That's amazing, Lou. I mean, first we hear that there are women here who look like us. But who'd have guessed in a million years that they would be a couple?"

"It sort of makes you wonder, doesn't it?"

"Wonder what?"

"I don't know...if there's something natural about people like me being drawn to people like you," Louise explained, not really understanding herself what she was asking.

"Maybe we're the ideal. Carol and Joyce read a lot of lesbian fiction, and they say a lot of the couples are like us."

"Well, none of them are as cute as you, Marty Beck."

The golf pro almost blushed. "Nor as dazzling as you, Lou Stevens."

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"Are you ready to go back to work tomorrow?" Louise unpacked their suitcases, separating clean from dirty and putting everything back in its place. First thing tomorrow, she'd go pick up her sweet little Petie from the kennel.

Marty had tucked their clubs away, sorting her own bag to make sure she had everything she needed for work. "Yeah, but you know what? I think we should plan another vacation soon. Just you and me, and maybe to some place besides a golf course."

Since her revelation on the 16th hole yesterday afternoon, Marty had been thinking about how Louise had expanded her life beyond that of a golf pro. There were many things she wanted to experience with Louise, not the least of which was to get to know her better by visiting West Virginia and Pennsylvania to see her lover's old haunts.

Louise couldn't believe her ears. Marty never wanted to be far from a golf course. "What did you have in mind, sweetheart?"

"I don't know. Maybe we can drop our things off in North Carolina in May and drive on up to Pennsylvania. I'd like to meet your brothers if you're ready for that."

"Do you mean it?" Louise was suddenly excited. She'd been after her lover to make that trip with her, but had resigned herself to go alone.

"Yeah. And then we could head up to Michigan and maybe see my sister. I'll show you where I grew up and where I used to play golf. I'll even take you out to the lake and show you where I lost my virginity."

"Marty Beck! You never told me you lost your virginity!"

The blonde woman laughed, loving her partner's playful side. "Gosh, Lou. Does it bother you to find out that you weren't my first?"

Louise pulled her close, her smile fading to a serious look. "Being first is no big deal, Marty. I want to be your last."

"You will be, Lou. You're all I ever want." How could she ever have thought that she needed more than this? Louise Stevens loved her through and through, and returning that love was the best feeling in the world.

### **The End.**

Author's note: The characters of Anna Kaklis and Lily Stuart were used by me with my permission. If you're still thoroughly confused, they're the main characters in the [Shaken](#) series, and as she explained, Anna happens to own a couple of car dealerships in Palm Springs.

Thanks again for keeping up with Marty and Lou. Let me know what you thought of the story at [kgmacgregor@yahoo.com](mailto:kgmacgregor@yahoo.com).