

Chapter 5

Redcliff

I check my watch—it's 3:45 pm on Saturday. I sense a unique excitement about spending more time with Tom and don't want to be late. He's always complimentary about punctuality. I don't want to let him down.

I played this morning for the first time this year. Our spring has been cool thus far. Today is the first day of play on the regular *permanent* greens. The greens get covered for protection each winter. Temporary *winter* greens are created in their place in the fairway.

The permanent greens usually open April 1st, a week or two after the final snow thaw. Unfortunately, the course is in extremely poor shape this year, a result of untimely spring weather. An early thaw followed by a late freeze has caused rampant *winterkill* of the grass roots in low-lying areas. Our grounds superintendent, Andy Cameron, will whip them into shape in no time, I'm sure. He'll soon have some warmer weather to work with. The Hat is considered to be *the desert of Alberta* and is usually the first city to get onto permanent greens.

Today I was also able to sneak in forty minutes of putting drills after my round. Short game is the strong suit in my game. I feel like I have as much touch around the greens as anyone, a factor that has helped lower my scores more than anything else.

I wonder if Tom, or eventually maybe Ben, will try to change my approach to my short game. It will be an interesting summer, indeed. I'm glad Dad talked me into spending time with Tom.

I hustle back to the club storage to pack my putter and practice balls into my golf bag. Then I saunter over to the parking lot. Tom is already waiting, seated peacefully in his truck, a dark blue Ford Ranger. His left arm rests chicken-winged on the base of the open driver's side window.

Tom looks up at me and then peeks at his watch. "Hop in. I must run and get some groceries. My wife, Thelma, is making a Greek salad. We can talk as we go."

I crawl in on the passenger side and pull the door shut. Groceries? Oh well, maybe some driving time with Tom will be good anyway. Maybe I can ask some of the endless questions I have. How does he know so much about golf? What type of player was he? What level did he play up to? Why doesn't he have a teaching business? Did he teach the same stuff to Ben? When is he going to look at my swing? Why does he pick range balls?

Tom pulls out of the parking lot and heads up the drive. "In the next few weeks we are going to break the golf swing down into four fundamental cornerstones," he says. "Grip was the first. We have three left to study. Master them all and your game will be strong for life."

That sounds good to me.

"Now what of health, Billy? As promised, it is our parallel subject." Tom is silent as he negotiates the course's winding exit road. He reaches the main street and speaks enthusiastically. "Is health any different to learn than golf? Is any subject any different to learn? Accrue knowledge of fundamentals, apply your knowledge and review regularly. Move on only when fundamentals are mastered. Can health, like golf, truly be broken down into simple cornerstone principles? Or is health too complex? Can each person take control of his or her own health by mastering cornerstones?" Tom peeks at me

whimsically and smiles. “You will find true health to be very simple.”

I can see I am really going to pay for having that candy bar and soda during our meeting on Wednesday. What a waste of an evening. I’m here to learn about golf, not health.

“Your body requires four necessities to survive, Billy,” Tom says. “These are the health cornerstones. Four only—just as in golf. The health of your body mirrors the degree to which each is supplied daily. Go ahead. Try to name something your body must have in order to survive.”

I gaze into space.

Tom smiles and hints further. “Something that, if it were unavailable to you, would cause your body to die.”

It’s fresh on my mind and provides an opportunity for confession. “Well, before our first lesson, I felt like I was going to starve to death, so I bought a candy bar and a soda. My body needs food to survive. Food must be one.”

“Bingo, Billy! You have figured out the first cornerstone of health—*food*. A most important subject at this time of your life.”

“You know, Tom, I really don’t eat that many candy bars—”

“Food is as central to your health as your grip is to your golf swing,” Tom says, without acknowledging my sniveling. “‘Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food.’ Hippocrates wrote that in the fifth century before the birth of Christ. It is a very famous saying. Please write it down.”

I pull my pen and pad from my knapsack and begin writing. “Got it,” I say.

“Let thy grip be thy connection and thy connection be thy grip,” Tom continues. “I said that just now. It is not a famous saying at all. Write it down anyway, for comparison.”

I chuckle to myself nasally. Tom's sense of humor is healthy, but subtle.

"They are direct parallels," Tom continues. "Neither is less important to its topic than the other. Both are rock solid cornerstones. You can have a poor grip and still play golf. You can have a poor diet and still live. Yet, you cannot play *well*, nor live *well*. You most certainly cannot play to your maximum potential, nor live to your maximum potential. Most will never experience maximum potential of either in their lives. That is fine, if by free choice—free choice to be mediocre."

"Free choice—to be mediocre?" I question.

"Golfers may be unaware of the import role that their grip plays in the success of their golf game. Similarly, people may be unaware of the import role food plays in their health. This changes once one is made aware of the value of the cornerstone by proper counsel. Ignorance is no longer an excuse for poor choice. Instead, one is now able to choose freely their future. People may choose to excel, to be mediocre or to be lacking. Results are never haphazard."

I notice that we have driven past many grocery stores and are now nearing the edge of town. "Where do you grocery shop, Tom—Calgary?" I ask. More comedic prowess.

"We are on our way to visit my good friend, Jerry Colter. He owns the best greenhouse in Redcliff."

Redcliff is the small sister city to the west of The Hat.

"Did you know that Redcliff boasts to be the 'Greenhouse Capital of Western Canada'?"

I didn't.

"When one receives proper counsel in the cornerstones of their pursuit, they are immediately empowered to choose their future." Tom turns toward me in challenge. "You have been made aware of the importance of grip. What you do with this knowledge is your choice."

"I choose to excel," I say, confident in my ability to do so.