

# Beyond the Breaking Point

A Novel by Werner H. Manke

## Chapter One: The Interview

The grandfather clock in the living room struck eight times. "Monty, you'll have to hurry or you'll be late," Betty Moserly called upstairs. "As it is, you'll have to eat on the run, and you sure won't be able to stop to take pictures along the way this morning." She continued to hum a tune and reached for two slices of whole wheat bread from the breadbox. "I'll make him a sandwich to take along, or he'll go to the interview on an empty stomach," she whispered. "I just wish he'd eat better. I shouldn't make him his favorite snack, but it'll please him. Imagine, cheese whiz and jam. He'd have it on white bread too, if he had his way. But then it hasn't stopped him from getting top marks at the university. I guess it won't hurt him at the interview. And that second offer he received yesterday for his computer program from the people at Pulmer is just out of this world."

Montgomery Moserly stood in front of the bathroom mirror. Blue eyes in a strong, pleasant face framed by red hair covering the top part of his ears and a straight nose looked back at him. He touched many hearts when he smiled. At those times a dimple formed in his right cheek. He had finished shaving, but he had nicked his chin doing so. He hummed a tune. For more than a minute he had tried to stop the bleeding by pressing a piece of bathroom tissue, now soaking red, against the cut. A sigh of frustration escaped him. "It's not a good Monday morning sign," he mumbled, pressed a new piece of tissue against the cut and hurried from the room.

Monty had returned home the previous early fall, after he had completed the course work on his Master's program in the summer semester and travelled for a few weeks in Europe. Since then he had finished his thesis, had written a computer program for businesses dealing in electronics, and had put time and energy into two of his great loves, playing hockey and giving golf instructions. While he had intended to look for an apartment soon after he had returned from his travels, his mother's pleading and cooking had caused him to hold off looking energetically for his own place. At the time he had told his mother that he would stay for a few months, but not more than a year.

A week after returning home he had landed a position with the Mountain View Golf Club as junior golf pro. He loved his work. Not only did it give him flexible hours of work, the winter off to play hockey, and a pay that covered all his needs through the fall and into the early winter. The owner of the club, Earl Westinger, thought highly of him and had Monty plan several golf lesson sets and workshops for young people and children. One of the lesson sets he designed to be carried out indoors in a building Earl had constructed for putting, chipping and driving practice for those golfers who wanted to improve their game during the winter months. The indoor facility had proved to be more popular than even Earl had predicted. On Earl's request Monty had also designed an instructional CD, which Earl had insisted to purchase from Monty for ten

thousand dollars and a cut of the sales. To Monty's surprise and delight the sales had been brisk from the beginning. The success had also made Earl happy, and he commissioned Monty to write a second program which Monty planned to do in the coming fall months, once his hours at the golf course dropped off sharply due to the weather.

On the advice of Gerald Trimming, Panwest's Senior Vice-president, who had purchased one of the instructional golf CDs and thought it brilliant, Monty had also applied to the Panwest Corporation for a job. Gerald had told him of the company's ad on the company's web site for an engineer with a background and training in electro-technological design.

Forty minutes after Montgomery had driven away from his parent's house he pulled into the guest parking area of the underground parking level in the Panwest Technology office tower. He glanced into the rearview mirror once he had turned the motor of his 1996 Mustang off and smiled seeing the small piece of tissue still clinging to his chin. "That would have made a really good impression," he laughed, "a piece of toilet paper covered in dried blood on my chin and a streak of cheese whiz on my lower lip." He peeled the tissue off careful trying not to start the bleeding again and removed the evidence of his breakfast. Then he looked at his watch which showed him that it was nine minutes before the interview. *Good, I've got six or seven minutes*, he thought, *I shouldn't need more than two or three to get upstairs to the Boardroom*. He walked quickly toward the elevator. As he walked, he created an athletic impression. At six foot three and a build that told of an ambitious exercise program Monty in full stride often turned ladies' heads. Once in the elevator he pushed the twelfth floor button thinking, *here goes. I guess I'm as ready as I can be*.

The interview was long and taxing. Darren van Holmen, the chief executive officer of Panwest Technologies, smiled at Monty saying, "We're almost finished, Mr. Moserly. "We were impressed by your portfolio, and I liked what I heard in the last ninety minutes." He turned to the other two individuals beside him asking, "Any other question either of you gentlemen want to ask, before we let Mr. Moserly have his freedom?"

Gerald Trimming, the company's senior vice-president of marketing, spoke up first. "We examined in great depth the computer programs you wrote, and we see tremendous potential for sales. Do you have a marketing plan for your latest program?"

"A friend has designed a plan for me. So far I have two offers from major corporations, and I've another request to make a presentation later next week." Montgomery replied. He noticed the marketing executive nodding, but Monty's attention was drawn to the third man of the interview team, the vice-president of electronic development and operations, Jackson Stadler. To Monty he seemed to be a nervous man. He had asked him few questions, but had regarded him coldly for most of the ninety minutes of the interview.

"What's your asking price for your program?" this man now questioned Monty staring at him.

"One of the offers I've received is for two hundred forty thousand with a small percentage of all sales," Montgomery answered after a short pause wondering for a moment how specific he should be with his answer.

The chief executive officer, van Holmen, quickly took charge again. He smiled at Monty and said, "It looks like we're done, Mr. Moserly. On your way out please stop at the front desk on the ground level, and leave us a number where we can reach you, if you should be away from home this afternoon. I'd like to call you after lunch today, Mr. Moserly, and I want to be sure I'll be able to reach you today?"

"I'm giving golf lessons starting at noon at the Mountain View golf course, and I'm meeting three friends there at five to play the front nine." Rising and gathering his items Monty continued, "Thank you for granting me this interview. I'll look forward to your call, Mr. van Holmen." He nodded to each man seated opposite him then walked confidently to the door.

Downstairs at the front desk the young receptionist smiled seeing Monty approach. "*Wow!*" she thought. "Can I help you," she asked as soon as he stepped to the counter.

Monty's face lit up with an innocent smile. "Yes, thank you," he said. "I'm Montgomery Moserly. Mr. van Holmen asked me to leave a telephone number where I can be reached this afternoon." He handed the receptionist a business card. My cell phone number is on the card, and I've written the golf course number at the bottom. Will that do?"

She nodded. "I'll make sure Mr. van Holmen gets both numbers, Mr. Moserly. May I ask you about the golf course? A friend and I want to learn how to play a little better. We're pretty green, and we thought it might be a good idea to take a few lessons. Right now we only go out when it's not too cold, but when it gets warmer we plan to golf one evening a week."

"You'll find a range of lesson packages at Mountain View. They're reasonably priced. I give individual and sets of group lessons to those who have never taken lessons. I'd be glad to work with you and your friend. If you're so inclined, just call the number on the card and say that you wish to schedule lessons with Monty."

His smile sold the young lady on the idea quickly. "I'll talk to my friend and we'll call. My name is Lisa, Lisa Mc Cleary."

"I'll look forward to seeing you at Mountain View Lisa Mc Cleary," he smiled. Monty chatted with her for a minute longer before making his way to his car. He decided to take the stairway rather than the elevator to the lower level. Taking two steps at a time he reached to door to the parking area and pushed it open. Running to his car he was eager to get to the golf course where he hoped he could drive a few balls before the first lesson he was to give was scheduled.

He lowered the car's window and was about to start the engine when he noticed one of the three men who had interviewed him, Jackson Stadler, the vice-president of electronic development and operations, exiting from the elevator. At the same time he heard car tires squeal, and out of the corner of his eyes he saw a black Cadillac bursting from around the parking level's corner toward the elevator. Before he fully closed the car's door and could start the engine four popping sounds rang out. *Sounds like shots fired through a silencer*, Monty thought.

He froze. He pulled the car's door, that he had left slightly open, slowly and careful closed not to make a sound and slid lower into his seat, but not so far that he could not see what took place in front of him. Instinctively, he reached for his camera lying on the floor on the passenger side. Monty saw the vice-president clutching at his chest briefly before dropping to the ground. Two men left the car. One was a heavy set man with short cut graying hair and looking like a wrestler. He walked with a slight limp. The other one was tall and skinny of about fifty-five and wore a touch of a beard. They had stepped quickly from the vehicle. Both were dressed in dark overcoats. They walked unhurriedly to the fallen man. Both held handguns with silencers in their hand.

Monty heard the taller man say, "Looks like he's not going to make any more trouble for Carlos or anybody else for that matter, Daryl."

"Let's make sure of it, Harry," the shorter man said with a snarl on his face.

Another shot rang out from the gun with the silencer held in the left hand of the heavy set man. Monty's camera clicked away. He saw the tall fellow push one shiny black shoe under Jackson Stadler's shoulder raising it a few inches off the ground. Then he heard him speak to the other fellow before the two turned quickly making their way to the idling car blocking the approach to the rest of the parking areas for incoming vehicles. They climbed into the car's backseat unhurriedly. A moment later the car passed Monty's vehicle on its way toward the exit as if nothing had happened. Through the open front side window of the Cadillac Monty had seen a younger man with shoulder length blond hair, a long scar on his cheek and wearing an earring with a black pendant of a hawk in his ear driving the Cadillac.

"Man, oh man," Monty whispered trying to keep his senses in control. He focused the camera on the leaving vehicle's license plate and zoomed in on it. Without hurrying the driver of the black Cadillac passed out of view around a corner on the way out of the underground parking lot. Monty waited for several more seconds. "I hope they didn't see me," he murmured. "I don't think they'll be back unless one of them did. But what do I do now?"

Dazed by what he had witnessed in the previous minutes he slowly left his Mustang and walked to the executive lying unmoving on the ground in front of the elevator. A pool of blood had formed around the upper part of the man's body and a trickle of blood still ran from the back of his head. A hole in the middle of Stadler's forehead stared at Monty. He noticed an empty shell near where he stood. "This looks really bad," Monty mumbled and thought he had heard his words echo back to him. He

stooped to take the man's pulse, but found none. Mechanically he dialed 911. "A man's just been shot," he answered the questioning voice and supplied the address where he was and all other details the female on the other end wanted to know.

Seated in his car again he waited for the police to arrive. He rested his head on the steering wheel trying to make sense of what had occurred in front of him. Soon he heard sirens rushing closer. Suddenly he remembered that he had to be at the golf course at noon. Looking at the car's clock he mumbled, "I've got less than an hour and a half."

Two police cars arrived almost at the same time and a third one screeched to a halt before Monty reached the policemen who had started to walk toward the dead man. "I'm the one who called 911," he said to the first officer he approached.

"Please wait by your car," the uniformed man replied, "we'll be right with you."

Monty watched the officers examine the victim briefly. An ambulance pulled in behind the police cars at that moment. As if in a nightmare, Monty watched two officers cordon off the area and the first aid attendants begin their grim task. He felt cold and closed his eyes for a moment wishing it all to go away like a bad dream. "This can't be real," he murmured. Finally two officers approached him and roused him back to reality.

"You called in the shooting?" the male officer asked. "I'm officer Tunni and this is my partner Alison Weltner. Let's start with your name." He pulled out a small notebook and pen asking, "All right, what can you tell us?"

To Monty the questions kept coming, and he answered them mechanically. His eyes kept returning to Jackson Stadler's lifeless body. He saw the ambulance crew cover him and place him on a stretcher. Twice the officer questioning him had to repeat questions. Monty lost track of time until he heard the policeman say, "This is all for now, Mr. Moserly." He looked at Monty and then asked, "Do you feel all right? I can ask the first aid people to have a look at you."

"I'll be all right," Monty replied. The officer noticed his hands shaking.

"Are you able to drive?" the officer continued. Monty only nodded. "Someone from the station will contact you later today or tomorrow," the policeman explained. "When we do, you'll have to come down to the station for a more detailed description of all that transpired here. You're free to go now, Mr. Moserly. I'll guide you past the restricted area." He made a note of Monty's license plate and wrote a brief description of the Mustang before he waved to Monty to follow him around the restricted area.

Monty's hands shook driving from the parking area, but once out on the street seeing cars and people all around him his head began to clear. He noticed the clock on the dashboard read twenty-five minutes to twelve. "I think I can make it to the golf course," he said. "There's no need to call to say I'll be late." Thinking of the cell phone brought the camera lying on the passenger seat to his mind. "I didn't tell him I took

pictures of much of it," he called out. "Now what do I do? I better call the police station when I have a minute at the golf course."

It was difficult for Monty to concentrate on the golf lessons he taught this afternoon. He could not bring himself to tell any of the jokes with which he usually livened up the time of the lessons. He was glad that all of the lessons this afternoon were with junior high school students. Their energy and banter didn't need any livening up. They also asked a multitude of questions which kept Monty's mind from dwelling on the shooting for long periods of time.

He was almost finished with his third set of hour-long lesson. The four boys he instructed were eager to strike out on their own. "All right you guys let's wrap it up," Monty said. "All four of you've really done well in this lesson. You'll have one more lesson with me next week. For now I want you to remember the pointers I gave each of you and practice them as you go and have fun. I only need a couple more minutes of your careful attention before I turn you loose. In parting, let me remind you of what is expected of you in the way of courtesy on the golf course. It's important to keep this in mind, if all golfers will have the opportunity to enjoy the game."

Monty had given each group of students their fourth set of lessons. They had come to the golf course for two weeks now, and he was pleased with their progress. As in the previous lessons, he had worked with them over the first three holes of the course nearest to the clubhouse. Once the students finished the hour long session with him they were to complete the rest of the nine holes on their own concentrating on the things he had taught them.

Monty said goodbye to the four boys and started to walk back to the clubhouse. He was nearly there when his cell phone began to play its tune indicating that he had an incoming call. His immediate thought was that Mr. van Holmen was calling. "Hello, this is Montgomery Moserly," Monty said.

"This is Assistant Captain Varsinsky, head of the homicide investigation unit down at the police station, Mr. Moserly. We'd like you to come to the station as soon as possible. Do you have time this afternoon or evening?"

"I have another set of lessons to teach right now to a group of ladies who are tourists and can't rebook," he replied. He also did not want to face more questions about the shooting at the moment and added, "I'm also to be with another group at five-thirty." He did not volunteer that that group would be his friends with whom he had planned to play nine holes before their planned dinner together at the clubhouse.

"All right, it looks like this afternoon is out. How does tomorrow morning look for you?"

"Yes, I can come in early in the morning. Anytime before nine is good for me. I run for an hour in the morning between five and six and I'm free until nine. I'm also done here tomorrow at four in the afternoon. I don't mind coming in then either"

"Well, let's do this in the morning. Can I expect you at seven-thirty?"

"Certainly, seven-thirty is great for me." Monty was about to end the call when he remembered the pictures he had taken. "Captain Varsinsky, I forgot to tell the officers last night that I took picture of the fellows who did the shooting, and I should have a good shot of the license plate of their Cadillac too, although I haven't looked at the pictures yet."

There was a long silence on the other end. For a moment Monty wondered if the officer had hung up before he had heard Monty's last statement, but saw that the line was still active. "Hello, Captain Varsinsky, can you hear me?" Monty questioned.

"Yes, I'm still on the line." While he was alone in his office, he told Monty that he had been interrupted for a moment by his secretary. "Did you say you have pictures?"

"Yes, I have pictures of the two men who were there. I've several of the shorter man firing the last shot while standing over Mr. Stadler who was lying on the ground from being hit by the earlier shots. I also zoomed in on the license plate as the car left. I didn't have time to get a picture of the driver, but I did get a good look at him. The light in the parking area was not too bad. I didn't want to use a flash, but I'm sure the pictures will be fairly clear."

Again there was a lengthy silence on the other end. When the captain spoke again he asked, "You're at the Mountain View Golf Course right now?"

"Yes, I should be here until about nine this evening."

"And you go for a run at five in the morning?"

"Yes, I will tomorrow. I run five miles five times each week unless there's a blizzard."

"Can I ask where you do your running?"

"I don't always run the same route, although I often run in Cedar Heights Park. Tomorrow I think I'll go and run along Twoshoe Parkway."

"Yes, that's a nice area. It's quiet there in the morning and those trees along the sides of the trails and in the median of the roadways are really pretty this time of the year."

"That's why I decided to run there for a few days, before going back to the park. Do you like running or jogging, Captain?"

"I do, Mr. Moserly, but I live a ways out of town and do my running in the country," the man chuckled thinking the young man was not bashful. He thought, *I bet he's got a barrel full of friends.* "Anyway, you'll remember to come in tomorrow morning at seven," he continued, "and please bring the camera with you. Do not take the film out of the camera. Bring it all along." He stopped speaking for a moment, and Monty had the feeling that the man had something else he wanted to say, before he hung up. He finally asked, "Or is the camera digital?"

"Yes, it's a digital camera."

"And you said you had not looked at the pictures."

"I haven't had a chance to do that, and I really hate the thought of seeing that shooting again. I'm trying to forget about it."

"Yes, I can believe it wasn't pretty. Have you got the camera with you at the golf course?"

"I've not been able to go home yet, sir. So it's still with me. Actually, I usually always carry a camera in my car. You never know when you come across a unique sight and wish you could capture it. So I try to take one along with me at all times."

"That's a good idea, Mr. Moserly. You will remember to bring the camera with you, right?" He stopped briefly and Monty could hear him breathe before he continued. "And, Mr. Moserly, I suggest you don't view the photos you took. The shooting will only haunt you still more. It's also not a good idea, since we want to hear what you saw directly, not what you think the photos showed you."

The call occupied Monty all the way back to the clubhouse. Even though the police officer had been courteous throughout he couldn't shake a strange feeling. "I'm reacting this way, because of the shooting," he murmured under his breath. "That was horrible and must be affecting me in ways I don't even understand." It was several minutes later when he was called to the telephone by the manager.

"Monty, this is Darren van Holmen. I promised to call. We had a tragic event here after you left us, or I would have called earlier. I need to tell you that I've put everything here at the company on hold for the moment to allow us to deal with the shooting of Mr. Stadler. You'll hear about it on the news tonight, but I wanted to let you know I haven't forgotten you, or have you think that we're not interested in having you aboard. Matter of fact we very much want you with us. We have ambitious expansion plans and you can play a major part for us in research and in our technology department. Right now, however, isn't the time I can deal with it. I hope you can understand the company's position. I'll be in touch in a couple weeks or so."

"I understand sir. I witnessed what happened and reported the shooting. It was horrible indeed. It's not something I'll easily forget," Monty replied.

The silence on the other end of the line became oppressive to Monty. He wasn't sure what was appropriate to say next. "Please allow me to offer my condolences to you, Mr. Stadler's family and the company, sir." Still not hearing the man speak Monty asked, "Mr. van Holmen, are you there?" He felt foolish asking, because he could hear the man breathing.

"I'm sorry Montgomery. I didn't know. That had to be horrible for you. I'm glad you didn't come to any harm. From what little I know it sounds like it was a targeted hit. Listen, I will be in touch with you when the time is right. Goodbye for now and please be careful." Monty heard what sounded to him like a deep sigh on the other end and then the caller was gone.

The call weighed heavily on Monty's mind. "For some reason Mr. van Holmen had not been told that I had reported the shooting," he mumbled. "I told the officer that I had just come from the Panwest boardroom where Mr. Stadler had been present. And what did he mean by saying I should be careful? Those shooters didn't see me or they would have come back to silence me." He shook his head thinking, *it may be just as*

*well that I don't start at Panwest right now, if I did get the job. I'm not sure I could go to that building without reliving it all again.*

The afternoon dragged on for Monty. While he enjoyed instructing the last group, a pretty foursome of retired ladies who had decided to take up the sport lately, he was glad when he was finished giving the lessons. The ladies had been there for the fun of it, but he had found it hard to join in their light banter. As he approached the clubhouse on his way back from the third hole, Robert greeted him. Since the ladies to whom he had given the last set of lessons had preferred to go around the course by golf cart instead of walking, he had taken one also. Returning it to its place and plugging it into an electrical outlet to charge its battery Robert followed him and asked grinning, "Hey Monty, how's it going?" He didn't wait for an answer but continued, "That young woman behind the clubhouse main desk is gorgeous. Talking to her I just about forgot that you'd be off the course soon. It's a good thing she got busy. She's something else."

"You better not let Chance hear you say that. You'd be in her doghouse for good," Monty replied laughing. "That good looking woman is Olivia. She just broke up with her boyfriend, because he demanded more from her than she was willing to give him, but he's been making things difficult for her almost daily. She moved back here to her hometown to get away from him. The fellow had been stalking her after the breakup."

"Well, you're really up on her history aren't you? And I'd say you're awfully lucky she decided to stop here. I'm sure she could have got a job many other places too."

"Her dad owns the golf course, Robert. That's why she stopped here. She's a really outgoing person, but I'm sure she's not terribly interested in any guy right now. I'm glad you didn't make a pass at her, Robert."

"How do you know that I didn't?"

"You'd still be licking your wounds my friend, and I'd see the evidence of it. She's quite a nice lady, but right now I don't think she'd put up with any of your crass come-ons. So just forget about making a pass at her."

"Is that so? She seemed friendly enough and didn't mind me joking around a bit. She even told me she thinks you're great, after I told her you were my friend even though you're kind of a nerd. I told her I had come to golf with you. By the way, the girls should be here in about twenty minutes. Cindy's dad's driving them here. That gives us just enough time to go to the driving range to drive a few balls. Five bucks says I'll out hit you today."

Chance and Cindy arrived chatting in animated fashion. Cindy rushed to Monty. He and Robert had just returned from the driving range. "Have you heard what's happened down at the Panwest Tower this morning?" She surveyed him with her brown eyes shining. "It must have been awful. The report said that there was at least one witness. It must have happened soon after your interview, Monty. You haven't heard about it yet, have you?"

"I have, Cindy. Matter of fact I was there. I'm the one who called 911," Monty whispered. "It was ugly and scary, and I hope I don't ever see anything like that again. Right now I'm trying to forget it all, but it's not easy."

Cindy's mouth dropped open. She remained silent and frozen to where she stood in front of Monty with her eyes fixed on him. Robert was the first to speak, "Wow! That had to be scary. Why didn't you tell me when I got here? Hopefully, those guys who did the shooting didn't see you, or find out you saw them. They might after you in that case."

Chance, wrapping an arm around Robert asked, "Are you all right, Monty? That must have been horrible for you. Maybe you should ask the police to put you in, what you call it."

"Yea, protection program," Robert piped in.

"I'll survive," Monty replied. "I just want to forget about it all."

"Man, the cops will want to talk to you," Robert spoke up again.

"I've already talked to the police. I waited for them to arrive at the scene. The 911 operator told me to stay there, but to be sure to stay in hiding until the squad cars arrived. Believe me I didn't need to be told to stay in hiding. Those two shooters didn't hesitate for a moment before they shot Mr. Stadler. Matter of fact, after they had shot him from out of their car, and he was down and probably dead already, they walked over to him, and one of the guys shot him again right in the head like it was nothing. I was scared as all get out, but I knew the right thing for me to do was to go and check on Mr. Stadler before hiding in my car."

"Wow!" Robert exclaimed again. "Imagine if you could have captured it all with your camera and put it out there on the Internet."

"I did take digital pictures of quite a bit of it, but there's no way I'd ever share it. I have to go to the police station tomorrow morning and take the camera in with me."

"You should save those pictures first and maybe even make copies, Monty. The cops will take the pictures and then erase them from your camera. You'll never see them again."

"Why would I want to keep them and want to see them again, Robert? I'm trying to forget the whole mess. I don't want to be reminded of it, and I sure don't want to look at those pictures."

"I'd keep copies. You never know when they might come in handy. Maybe down the road when these guys find out that you saw them, you could make a deal with them to spare your life, if you turned the pictures over to them."

"You've watched too many detective movies, Robert. I don't think things work like that," Monty said, but Robert's ideas for some reason kept nagging at him for some time.

Cindy had recovered herself. She had listened to all Robert had said. Finally, she placed an arm around Monty. "I think I'd have fainted if I'd been there," she said looking up into Monty's eyes. "You were really brave to check on the man, to report

this to the police and to take those pictures. I hope none of those killers ever finds out you saw them and took pictures of them."

"I know. I've been thinking the same thing, but after I turn the pictures in to the police, they'll want to publicize them to help identify the killers. But let's forget about that shooting. I'm trying to wipe it out of my memory. Let's get started with our game. Our tee off time is in a couple minutes." He tried to put on a cheerful face and added, "I'm going to show Robert what a good golf swing is today."

Three hours later, the four friends had finished playing nine holes and had eaten a light meal in the clubhouse. For much of that time Cindy had not managed to forget about the fourth year exam she was scheduled to take in one of her university classes, or the shooting that Monty had witnessed. Eventually, it had upset him. He was glad, therefore, that the club manager asked him to see him for a few minutes before he left for the day about a tournament he was planning.

Taking Cindy's hand Monty said, "I'm not sure how long this will take, Cindy. Earl's ten minutes often turn out to be a half hour or more. It might be better for you to catch a ride back with Chance and Robert than waiting for me. You want time to study for your final exams. You might as well use the time to study that you'd be sitting here. I'll call you when I get home, and if you like to get together for a bit later, I can drive over to your place."

Cindy thought about Monty's suggestion briefly. "You're probably right," she replied. "In less than two weeks, when I've finished this semester we'll be able to spend more time together. Right now you might need some time to get that shooting out of your mind anyway." A few moments later Monty waved goodbye to his friends. He stood and watched the departing car leaving the golf course and for those few moments thought about his relationship with Cindy. *Since right after the Christmas season it seems something's been missing for us*, he thought. When his friend's car drove out of sight into the dusk of the evening he turned to go into the clubhouse.

Earl did need more than half an hour to outline initial plans he had drawn up for a ladies golf tournament. "You've given lessons to several groups of the ladies to whom I'm thinking to offer the chance to compete in a short tournament, Monty. I've watched some of these young professional career women and have seen how competitive they are. No other golf course has anything like this for this group of golfers. I think they'll love a tournament. The reason I wanted to talk to you about it is that I'd like you to help me plan it. We'll have the tournament in the early to middle part of June. At that time we shouldn't have to worry about getting snowed out anymore. It also gives us a month to get it all together. A bit more time would be great, but we've got that late June tournament for seniors scheduled, and I don't want to see these two closer together than they will be. Drawing up a schedule should be easy. I can do that once we know how many ladies will enter the tournament. To make it more tempting for them we want to offer more than just a few golf prizes. Advertising, cash and other prizes, food, entertainment, a fashion show are the kind of

things I'd appreciate your help with. Olivia is eager to help me too. What I'd like to suggest is for you and Olivia to plan the things I mentioned and other features the two of you might think of that would add to the tournament's attraction. I think we should advertise this fairly widely too."

Monty quickly consented to Earl's request. "I'll be happy to help, Earl. I think your idea is a great one and will give Mountain View a lot of free publicity too." he said. "Before I'll leave I'll see if Olivia has time tomorrow to get together for some preliminary planning."

"That's good, Monty. I appreciate it. Keep me posted on things. I'll work out a budget tonight for you two and leave that information with Olivia in the morning. Yea, I better do that tonight. I'm off to Toronto tomorrow. So I'll talk to you in a few days."

Monty stepping out of Earl's office began to think about what Earl had suggested, and while his mind was occupied with the tournament, he was able to push the shooting into the back recesses of his thinking. Turning into the lobby he noticed that Olivia had put on her coat and prepared to leave the clubhouse. When she looked up and saw him, she stopped and surveying him said with concern mirrored in her face, "Monty, I just heard on the nine o'clock news about the shooting downtown. The reporter gave your name as a witness and the one who likely called the police. This must have been horrible for you. How were you able to carry on with the lessons today? I wish you would've called in. I could have brought in Lance or Edward to teach your lessons." Seeing Monty's expression she walked quickly from behind the counter and placed an arm around his shoulder. "You must be a mental and emotional wreck right now."

"I'll be all right, Olivia. Thanks for caring. I see you're on your way home. Earl asked me to help with planning the tournament for the ladies, and I thought I'd stop to see if you have time for a bit of planning tomorrow."

"I'd like that. The sooner we can get that planning done the better. I don't think we have all that much time to get the word out. We have barely four weeks, and they'll slip by quickly. Advertising will be most pressing for us, and we should get it rolling right away." They quickly settled on the lunch hour the next day. "That way, if we need more time we can take an hour after four, as you suggested, Monty," Olivia said. They walked to the parking lot together where they exchanged a few more thoughts about the tournament and then said goodbye.

It was shortly after nine-thirty when Monty steered his Mustang out of the golf course's parking lot. There was little daylight left, and Monty turned on the car's headlights as soon as he left the parking area. The traffic was no longer heavy. He glanced out of the side window where his attention was drawn to a couple running for cover. Clouds had rolled in before dusk, and now a drizzle of rain hit the windshield of the car. He flipped on the switch for the wipers and turned on the radio trying to keep his mind from returning to the shooting, but the shooting was still the item being reported in the news reports on most of the city's radio stations. He let out a silent

scream and switched the stereo unit to play the CD he had left in the stereo. Monty groaned. The singer of the ballad moaned about a love she had lost to the gun of a jealous lover. "What about a happy song or something funny?" he murmured. "Right now I just can't stand love gone sour." He reached for a CD of instrumental music and turned up the volume.

Monty recognized the tune right away. He knew the lyrics by heart and tried to hum along. The words of the song made him think of Cindy. He wondered for a moment if she had met someone to whom she had become attracted. "Things don't seem the same anymore," he whispered. "Maybe we've changed too much during the time we've been apart." He thought about how long they had known each other and the time they had first began to date in their junior high school year. Cindy had told him on one of their first dates that she had carried a torch for him for a long time, and had loved it when he used to tease her by calling her princess whenever their paths crossed, even though she knew that he had liked another girl in their neighborhood at that time.

"Maybe I've changed more than I realize," he mumbled. "I've not called her princess for years. She hasn't complained, and I wonder if she's noticed." They had written and emailed often while he was away studying, and had dated frequently when he was home during some of the university breaks. "But for several months it hasn't been the same," he mumbled. "We've argued more and maybe Cindy is right when she told me that she's realized that we don't have all that much in common. Lately she's thought more about her studies than she used to and has cancelled at least three of four dates to study instead. That never used to happen. But then maybe it's a sign that she's grown more mature. I shouldn't complain. I took my studies serious too, and there were a few times when I hit the books instead of writing a letter to her.

Monty had noticed a car pull out of a back alley shortly leaving the golf course. Seeing it in the rearview mirror still behind him, he tried to get a better look at what kind of vehicle it was, but the distance was too great to see any details of the car.

## Chapter Two: The Face of Danger

Monty drove slowly along the street now nearly empty of traffic. He had tried to forget the events of the morning for most of the day without success. Leaving the golf course and trying to listen to the CD to help him forget he came to the conclusion that it might be best to face what had happened head on, and deal with it instead of trying to shut it out. "I was lucky to close the car's door without being detected by those two killers," he said to himself.

He had driven several kilometers since leaving the golf course. Shortly after turning out of its parking lot he had noticed a vehicle behind him, but not until this moment did he think anything of it. In spite of having turned off the road leading from the golf course onto another street the car had followed and was still behind him now that he had turned again. He wondered suddenly if it was more than coincidence. He tried to see if he could get a clear enough view of it to determine what make the vehicle was. In the light of the next oncoming car he thought he recognized the vehicle behind him to be black. "I think it's the black Cadillac," he mumbled, but the next moment he wondered if it wasn't just his all too vivid imagination playing tricks on him. "It can't be," he said out loud. "They didn't see me. How could they have found out? And if by chance they did, how would they know where to find me?"

"I'll see how far they're going to continue to be with me," he mumbled. He made a sudden right turn without signaling and glanced into the rearview mirror. The vehicle behind him turned also without having signaled previously. Wondering for a moment what else he could do he thought that the surest way to lose the car, if it wasn't following him, was to go in the opposite direction and to head back the way he had come, toward the golf course. He signaled a right turn and a block later another right before turning left to get on the street he had left earlier. Once there he headed toward the golf course once more. A few seconds later he checked his mirror again. He swallowed hard at what he saw. The car had followed him. *I can't doubt that this car is following me any longer*, he thought. *What I don't understand is how, whoever it is in that car, knew where to wait for me?* Monty was an optimist and still wondered if he was letting the events of the day spook him, but under the bright street light he saw clearly the car behind him was black and that it had the emblem at the front of it that he knew to be that of a Cadillac.

His heart now began to race. "I'm being followed and it could very well be the murders," he said silently, "I better stay on streets where there's at least a bit of traffic." He wondered if he should stop at a corner store with the pretense of making a

purchase, or if he should call the police to complain, but dismissed both thoughts, because he still did not want to believe someone would be out to hurt him. He also felt he would sound foolish complaining about a car that had travelled behind him for a considerable distance, but had not done anything against any law.

Monty tried to think of another way to lose the car behind him. *Maybe if I sped up a lot they'll not follow*, he thought. As soon as he had crossed the next intersection he stepped on the gas pedal, and when he reached the next traffic light, which to his relief had turned green before he approached it, his speedometer had reached ninety kilometers. The vehicle behind him also sped up and was now coming up closer to his Mustang. "They are after me," he murmured.