

Plunk. The unique sound of Reid Clark's golf ball hitting the bottom of the cup was, without question, the most satisfying sound he could hear. But in this case, he had to settle for the roar of the massive crowd as he sunk his 12-foot putt, winning his sixth PGA tournament this season. The intense pleasure, undeniably the best high a professional golfer can experience, was surging through Reid.

Another win in his pocket, another cool million in his bank account. No longer was money the goal. Now it was the win, only the win. The adrenaline rush was all consuming.

After the trophy presentation, Reid wanted to get back to the hotel. He quickly changed in the locker room, doing his best to avoid the press and the crowds. Nothing irritated him more than cameras flashing in his face.

He made it all the way to the parking lot before a paparazzo jumped out from between the cars, almost hitting Reid with his lens before snapping his picture. Enraged, Reid reached out, snatched the camera and launched it over his shoulder. The photographer watched in horror as his camera smashed onto the pavement.

Consumed with fury, Reid pushed the paparazzo. "Maybe next time you'll stay a little further away."

"Who the hell do you think you are?" yelled the photographer as he returned Reid's shove.

As Reid wound up to hit the guy, his arm was grabbed at the top of his backswing.

Holding Reid's arm in his vice-like grip, Buck Green, Reid's agent, muttered, "Down, boy! Walk away now!"

It took a moment, but Reid drew a lung-filling breath and slowly let it escape through his nose. All the while, his eyes were fixated on the paparazzo in an evil stare. He turned abruptly and walked away with Buck to their car.

"Man, you certainly know how to ruin a good day, don't you?" Buck seethed.

"Fuck you. You know, sometimes you're just like my mother, you don't know when to stop."

"You bastard! I just saved your ass from another probable law suit, and this is the thanks I get?"

"Why can't the paparazzi just stay out of my way?"

"Because it's their job, and you need to smarten up and get used to it already." Buck turned to look around. "I only hope no one saw it this time. Let's get out of here."

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Several hours later, the bright flash of the camera in Reid's face was more than he could tolerate. He reached out, grabbed the paparazzo's camera and tossed it over his shoulder. Seeing the photographer's eyes quickly grow wide, he turned in time to see the camera smash through the windshield of a passing Rolls Royce.

Reid woke with a start. *Damn!* he thought. *Déjà vu in a dream, how strange.* The dreams had been haunting Reid for a couple of months. Lately, after waking abruptly from a bad dream, he would lie in bed analyzing it, trying to figure

out what was bothering him. He had a constant nagging feeling that something terrible was going to happen. He searched his memory for past events that could be haunting his subconscious. It had to be that anonymous e-mail sent to the Inner City Sports Foundation (ICSF), a charitable foundation Reid and Buck had started. It read "ICSF has a new meaning - I can see a fatality." The e-mail had been declared a hoax by The Internet Fraud Complaint Center. Everyone but Reid had been able to forget about it; he felt personally threatened, and the feeling wouldn't go away. It wasn't just the nightmares; his typically high stress level was becoming unbearable at times. His tolerance of even small irritations, which was normally minimal, had practically dissolved.

He looked at the clock: 4 a.m. His sleep had been restless; he was overflowing with anxiety. It was a travel day. He had to be at the airport by 5:30, which meant leaving the hotel by 5. *What a life*, he thought. *Why is everyone so envious of the golfer's life? It's not fun!* In fact, he contemplated quitting every day. (The word that people used was retiring, but he knew better). The next thing he knew, his phone was ringing and someone was banging on his door.

Damn, he thought. "Okay, okay, I'm up," he yelled. Buck just kept knocking until Reid opened the door.

"Good morning, bright eyes," Buck grumbled with an irritated look. "Read it and weep," he said, forcing a bundled newspaper into Reid's chest as he pushed by him into

the suite and sat on a bar stool. "Sit down and listen to this call."

Buck's dominant air annoyed Reid. He thought, *How early did he wake up? We were both out partying until 1 a.m., and here he is showered, shaved and immaculately dressed in pressed slacks and a blazer.* Even the shine from Buck's bald head, diamond stud earring and bright white teeth were too much for Reid to handle in his barely awakened state. At least the cigar in Buck's hand was unlit.

With a deep breath Reid held back his anger, watching curiously as Buck pushed the buttons on his cell phone, then held it to his ear. Reid could hear the ring of the phone from where he sat on the couch.

"Hi Jay, it's Buck, sorry to wake you so early. Listen, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't have time for chit-chat. We got another e-mail threat last night and I'd like you to check it out. This one gets a little personal. Now they're threatening me and Reid. Hold on and I'll read it to you." Buck lifted a piece of hotel note paper and read:

"Remember my last e-mail, you know, the one that said ICSF means I can see a fatality? Well, let's add two more new meanings; REID now means - Reid's life will soon End In Death, and the new meaning for BUCK is - Buck Ultimately Can be Killed. Are you guys sweating yet? Am I ruining your day, gentlemen? Ahh, revenge is soo sweet. Good luck in Augusta boys."

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Buck listened, then spoke again. "Yeah, I'm with Reid now. We're heading down to Augusta in a little while. We have an endorsement meeting, then of course the Masters... Great, thanks Jay. I'll be waiting for your call.... Alright, you too. I'll have Cathy Biggers forward you the e-mail. She's our e-mail administrator. Evaluating every message we receive has become a full time job for her and an assistant...I know, but we have no choice. I'll talk to you soon. 'Bye."

Reid slowly shook his head and said, "Great, just what I need, more stress. As if finalizing the endorsement deal and the Masters weren't enough? Now another threat!"

"Put it out of your mind for now," Buck said as he stood up. "It's nothing."

"If it's nothing, why did you call Jay Scott?"

"Because I run everything by him. He's a good friend and the best private investigator in the country. He'll clear this up quickly. We'll be fine. Let it go."

Reid crossed his arms and let out a sigh.

"Go get ready and meet me out front at the limo in an hour." Buck spun on his heels and walked out.

The phone was ringing again. Reid knew Buddy, his caddie, would continue to call until he answered it. On edge, he lifted the receiver and barked, "I'm up, I'm up. I'll see you in Augusta."

He slammed down the phone and threw the newspaper on the coffee table. The nagging ache that had been in the back

of his mind was now consuming him. Buck was totally irritating, but he also was right; Reid had to put the e-mail out of his mind. *This stuff happens to top athletes and celebrities all the time, right?* Still, as a very successful PGA golfer, having been on the tour for six years now, he was at the top of his game with earnings more than \$30 million and endorsement contracts topping \$40 million. He had already won six tournaments this season and was favored by many to win the Masters. Why, then, was he so worried? If Buck could dismiss the e-mails so easily, why couldn't he?

After showering and dressing, he grabbed a comb and ran it through his wavy dirty-blond hair. No matter how often he combed his hair, it always had that windblown look. As he looked in the mirror, his crystal-blue eyes gazed back. He laughed at what he saw. Sun bronzed skin, strong chiseled cheekbones, tall lean 210-pound body with a tight washboard gut. He had the body of someone who worked out every day, when, in reality, all he did were a few occasional sit-ups.

Women were attracted to his rugged good looks. His fame and fortune probably helped, but he knew he could make women melt with his grin alone. Magazines had listed him as one of the sexiest men in the world. While he enjoyed the company of beautiful women, he felt they were a distraction to his career. He had time in his life for only one obsession.

Without complete devotion and concentration, his game could fall apart. Until recently, he had never stayed loyal to any woman. He had broken many hearts and left a trail of angry, scorned ex-lovers in his path. In fact, the jury was

still out on his current girlfriend, Jennifer. Everyone else seemed convinced she was a golddigger. Only after the press ran a few stories about her extreme shopping sprees did he begin to agree. He wanted to believe she actually liked *him* more than his money, but it was getting more difficult every day.

He glanced at the clock; he still had 20 minutes. He picked up the newspaper with a little apprehension, wondering what Buck meant when he said, "Read it and weep." He leafed through the paper until he arrived at the sports section. His entire body tensed as he saw a quarter page picture of yesterday's scuffle with the photographer. "Shit," he seethed through gritted teeth. He walked to the recliner, fell back and read:

Will he never learn? PGA tour leader, Reid Clark, once again, proves his nickname, The Bad Boy of Golf, is right on the money. His unprovoked assault of Post photographer, Will Mendelson, was the last straw.

Reid chuckled. "Unprovoked, who are they kidding?" He continued reading:

It is almost laughable that instead of a single lawsuit against Mr. Clark, we could probably start a class action suit. Mr. Clark seems to think it's funny when he attacks unsuspecting reporters and cameramen, often destroying their expensive equipment. His abuse is often directed at other players on the tour, caddies, fans, girlfriends and the list goes on and on. Mr. Clark's sexy looks and great athletic ability may earn

him titles and money, but they do not earn him the right to abuse others. Mr. Clark's one downfall, his uncontrollable temper, might eventually rip apart the empire he and his agent, Buck Green, have built. Good luck, Buck!

Reid sighed as he finished. *Great*, he thought. *E-mail threats, bad press, what's next? This should make my day with Buck lots of fun.* As much as he wanted to deny it, he knew the story was correct. His temper had been a problem ever since the death of his father when Reid was a kid. The media took advantage of his outbursts, never hesitating to play them up in the news.

Everyone who cared about Reid, especially Buck, pleaded with him to exercise more self-control. The PGA had already warned him that another incident might jeopardize his eligibility.

Usually, Buck could spin even bad publicity into profits, but not this time. This article could destroy their endorsement negotiations with Eagle later today.

He checked his watch. *Time to go*, he thought. *Better not keep Buck waiting. I don't want to add fuel to the firestorm I'm already going to get from him.*

On his way out of the room, he thought about his relationship with Buck. As far as agents were concerned, Buck was the best of the best. Their friendship had grown over the years, as did their bank accounts. They had a mutual admiration for each other's strengths. But, although they usually enjoyed the time they spent together, their

relationship frequently was strained because they antagonized one another. Buck was sick and tired of Reid's childish behavior. He was worried that Reid would bring on a damaging lawsuit, or worse yet, get kicked off the tour. Reid was fed up with Buck's constant hen-pecking. He'd had enough of that from his mother while growing up. Sometimes he actually wondered whether or not Buck really cared about him at all or was only concerned with the money. Aside from their agent-client relationship, they were also partners in various business ventures.

They had become a unique winning team over the past four years.