

CHAPTER ONE

Ashland

I'm using everyone's real name. They can all sue me. I hope they do. I could use the excitement. It gets kind of boring living up here with my eighty-year-old mother in Ashland, Oregon. She likes having me around, though. She was sick of being by herself. My dad died...wow, a while ago...going on something like nine years now. Sometimes it feels like yesterday; other times it feels like he's still alive. We keep finding scribbled notes in his ninth-grade handwriting here and there—like when I change a fuse in the fuse box or my mother digs through the glove compartment looking for a map. Plenty of other people seem to think he's still alive too. They keep sending him mail—brochures from hearing aid companies and long letters on good bond paper explaining to him how he might want to consolidate his debt. Hey, his debt's as consolidated as it gets. It's paid, paid in full—going on nine years now.

I do the things my father used to do: mow the lawn, get the car fixed, put in new light bulbs, change the furnace filters, take the lids off jars that are on too tight for my mother's arthritis. Other than that, I pretty much just play golf. I play

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golf every day, rain or shine. The rainier, the better—wind, sleet, hail, snow, I don't care. Sometimes I get to feeling a little like King Lear out there, talking to thunder, flipping off gusts of wind. Ha! The other day I held my putter up like a lightening rod, daring the elements to do their worst, but usually I just play golf.

I play golf with anyone who shows up. Ford. Wallace. Bergeron. Johnny Pelosi. Felix. Knapp. Tyrone. Tyrone's a black guy from the Shakespeare Festival. He was the King of France last year. We all play golf at a cheap, hilly little municipal golf course called Oak Knoll. It's out of town a ways, south on Highway 66, toward Emigrant Lake. Standing on the ninth tee, you can see everything for miles around. Pilot Rock's directly in front of you, off in the distance toward California. Mt. Ashland's a little to the right; Grizzly Peak and Pompadour Bluff are to the left.

The golf course is home to five families of Canadian Geese. Nobody fucks with them. They poo on the greens with impunity. Even the feisty mallards and wood ducks and the seagulls that fly over from Klamath Lake stay out of their way. The five families of Canadian Geese correspond roughly with the five families of the New York Mafia. Well, according to Johnny Pelosi, anyway. He knows all about that sort of thing. Johnny Pelosi isn't his real name. I don't know for a fact that he got it as part of a witness protection program; all I know is you don't want to beat him out of more than a couple of bucks a round unless you want to wake up with your parakeet's head in your bed.

It's an eclectic group. Wallace drives a Winnebago. He's also a direct descendent of William Wallace, that *Braveheart* guy, so you want to watch how much money you beat *him* out

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of too. Ford has trouble keeping his trousers on. Bergeron has a twinkle in his eye. Knapp carries beer in a blue cooler in the summer and drinks whisky in the winter. Felix hangs dry-wall and thinks he's Lee Trevino. We all make up Mexican sounding things to say to him. Felix was one of my dad's buddies at the Elks. My dad used to make up Mexican sounding things to say to him, too.

Besides the five families of Canadian Geese and a few pesticide-resistant burrowing animals, there are flowering bushes and white birches and yellow birches and oak trees with mistletoe in their branches and willow trees. The groundskeepers prune them down to bare nubs in the fall but they always grow back into huge weeping willows by the time summer rolls around again. Then, on top of all that, there's the sky—all different kinds of sky, changing from one minute to the next; dark clouds, white clouds, mist, rainbows, double rainbows, you name it—anything you'd ever want to see in the way of weather.

If none of the guys I usually play golf with shows up, I play golf all by myself. Nor do I play golf well. I play golf badly. I've been playing golf badly every day for the last two and a half years. I shot a 76 once, but that was a gigantic fluke. The wind kept changing direction. It was with me on every hole. Calm zephyrs gently guided my 90 compression Titleist straight toward the pin every time I hit the thing. If I'd been any good it would have been a 66. But I'm not any good. That's part of the reason I quit playing golf and decided to write this book, instead—well, that and just to get it the hell over and done with once and for all.

I'm not worried about getting it published. What publisher wants to get sued? No publisher, that's what publisher.

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I suppose I could get my sister to stick it on the Internet for me. She has a web-design company. One of her clients is the World Elephant Polo Association, which, according to *People Magazine*, was one of the hot sites of the week awhile back, so you never know. Someone I knew thirty years ago might just be idly browsing the web, stumble across his or her name, and decide to sue me for something. Hey, it could happen—Sandy Good, Donna McKechnie, Gordon Lish—any one of them might just up and sue my ass. I hope one of them does. I hope they all do.

“Hey,” I’ll say, “get in line.”

I might even throw in some people I *didn't* know, just to increase my chances of getting sued—Mia Farrow, maybe, Jill Clayburg, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, Courtney Love. I sort of *did* know Courtney Love, actually. She would only have been around two years old at the time, but I’ll put her in anyway. Her father brought her over to where Ginny and I were living on Shrader Street in something like 1966. He needed a babysitter. We were on acid. Her angelic little towhead two-year-old glow lit up the whole room. So, yo, Courtney, sue me, man. Bring it on.

The prospect of some hard working process server showing up at my mother’s front door with a summons on behalf of some long forgotten friend or acquaintance just somehow warms the cockles of my heart. Duchess, my mother’s little black ragamuffin dog, will bark her fool head off when the process server knocks on the door, but I’ll be so glad I’ll practically kiss the guy. The summons will tell me that I should get a lawyer, but I won’t. Ha! I don’t need no stinking lawyer. I’ll be my own lawyer. That will be the exciting part.

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The last job I had was as a paralegal. I got fired, but I was a paralegal all the same. I'll totally know how to defend myself if it ever comes to that. I've got plenty of pleading paper and exquisite answers to all the complaints anyone might want to make. That's how I got the money to play golf every day for the last two and a half years, as a matter of fact—by suing the law firm that fired my ass. Shafer, Kirloff, Isaacson & Barish. Those twerps. They were what you might call a mid-sized San Francisco labor and employment law firm. It all started out innocently enough. I had run out of money. My whole life I've been running out of money. I knew one of the associates. She recommended me. The partners took her word for it that I wasn't some kind of whacko—and I wasn't. Well, not right away.

When I first started working there, I wasn't sure what a paralegal was supposed to *do*, exactly, but my predecessor left a pile of stuff on his desk, which gave me clues. Call people on the phone. Make lists. Look up things on *Westlaw*. Write memos. Come up with chronologies.

I worked there around a year and a half. I *liked* working there. I got good at it. Everyone loved me; well, *almost* everyone. By my standards, I made plenty of money. I rode through Chinatown on the crowded California Street bus, jaywalked across Montgomery Street, went into the lofty marble lobby through a chrome-plated revolving door and got free coffee in the company coffee room. I liked getting free coffee. Another thing I've always been is cheap. How do you think I've managed to play golf every day for the last two and a half years on the paltry settlement money I finally managed to squeeze out of those Bozos? By being cheap, that's how.

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The partners billed me out at eighty-five bucks an hour. I had my own office. We took up the whole 22nd floor. My window looked out across the red roofs of Chinatown. I ate lunch in the park next to the Transamerica Pyramid—usually with one or another of the secretaries. They were all pretty cute, too. Terri. Stephanie. Tess. Barbara! I flirted with them. They flirted back. I was happy.

In my spare time I wrote thinly disguised fictional stories about the place. That's another thing I've always done—my whole life I've been writing thinly disguised fictional stories about stuff. In the stories I called the place "Sadler, Cristlieb, Altschule & Beckwith" or "SCAB." That's one of the slick things about fiction; you can thinly disguise stuff to suit your own clever, ironic purposes.

The reason Shafer, Kirloff, Isaacson & Barish fired my ass was that I tried to organize a union among the support staff. Organizing a union totally pissed them off. The partners prided themselves on being big time union busters. That was their job. That was what they were paid to do. It would have been hard to charge the kind of money they charged to keep unions out of other businesses if they couldn't keep a union out of their own damn business—hey, don't think I hadn't thought of that.

Organizing a union was *intended* to piss them off. They had pissed us off. Mainly by making us work longer hours without increasing our pay. Personally, I was happy to be getting the money I was getting, but the secretaries were all up in arms. *They* were the ones who wanted the stupid union in there. I couldn't have cared less. But I'd written some seminar material about how to *avoid* union organizing and therefore knew a little something about the mechanics.

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The first thing you have to do when you're organizing a union is shut up about it. We had surreptitious planning sessions after work. Stephanie and Terri and I all took pictures of each other sitting in Kirloff's office with our feet on his desk, leaning back in his chair, and wearing a baseball hat that said, "Union, Yes!"

I called the local Teamsters Organizing Committee. They said they'd back us up—and the next day, on behalf of all the cute secretaries, I wrote a memo to the partners informing them that it was our intention to form a duly recognized labor union affiliated with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

That got their attention. The partners had a healthy respect for the Teamsters. Gary Barish used to work over there. He'd recently been made managing partner, although it was Rick Shafer who started the company and still really ran the place. Shafer looked like Lenin—Vladimir Ilyich, without the goatee. Barish looked like the guy from the Men's Warehouse. He turned the task of dealing with me and our union organizing efforts over to Walter Reynolds. Wally, he was called. Wally looked like the gray-haired guy on *The Nightly Business Report*.

With their fear of the Teamsters backing me up, I told the partners all they had to do was increase our pay to compensate for the increased hours. It seemed simple enough to me, not to mention fair and just and reasonable. Barish and Reynolds objected to the "tone" of my memo. That was it. We didn't get our raise.

It took them another couple months, but the partners finally got the secretaries to give up on the idea of joining a union. Then they sent me a "warning" memo which included

a bunch of cockamamie reasons they were going to use to fire me for so-called “good cause”. One of the things the memo mentioned was that I had said, “Gary Barish eats shit,” to someone in the elevator. I drafted an answer which pointed out that it wasn’t in the elevator, it was in the coffee room, and that, furthermore, it was a fact, Gary Barish *did* eat shit—not only due to the USDA finding that there’s a certain amount of fecal matter in most commercially prepared foods, but in the more traditional meaning of the phrase, as well. My letter started out: “If you’re reading this, I’ve been fired.”

I carried it around with me wherever I went so I could whip it out on them when they finally got around to actually giving me the ax. In the meantime, just for practice, I whipped it out on Barbara Kalinowski. She was Wally Reynolds’s secretary. Her cubicle was just outside his office. She had overheard some of our more heated conversations and liked the way I stood my ground.

I liked the way Barbara Kalinowski looked, period: green eyes, red hair, big juicy mouth all lipsticked up. She wasn’t quite twenty-five but had been on her own since she was fifteen. Her husband produced pornographic movies. She was allowed to have sex with women, but not other men. Her husband was allowed to have sex with other women and didn’t want to have sex with men. It didn’t seem fair.

We went out for drinks after work one night. She had four or five gin and tonics. I sipped a Glenfiddich on the rocks. She read my memo out loud to me and kept getting all breathless with laughter and cracking up in the middles of sentences.

After we’d taken a cab to my apartment, I went across the street to get her a six-pack of Michelob. When I got back, she

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was on my bed with no clothes on. She had a single body piercing—a small, tasteful, 24 carat gold clit ring. She had multiple orgasms. I forget how many. Sixteen? Seventeen? Some astronomical number. She must have had some sort of gynecological condition. It wasn't anything I was *doing*, exactly, she just kept having orgasms, one after another—you barely had to breathe in her direction and, whoops, there she was, having another orgasm. She said it wasn't quite a record, but record or no record, it was all the orgasms I ever wanted any chick I ever had anything to do with to have.

The next day, I was summoned to Gary Barish's office and was told I was being "let go." Fired. Terminated. Given the old heave ho. Shafer was on vacation. Barish and Reynolds did the actual axing of my ass. I whipped out the letter I'd already whipped out on Barbara Kalinowski on them. It had a few gin and tonic stains on the first page. Barish and Reynolds weren't particularly impressed with my Pleistocene understanding of labor law. Oh, well. I signed up for unemployment and wrote a letter to Rick Shafer. He said I should get on with my life. Guys like Shafer always say that. What it means is that they would like you to go away and leave them alone so they can get on with their own damn lives.

A few months later, after I turned all our correspondence over to the National Labor Relations Board and filled out a formal complaint, Shafer and Kirloff met me at the Cadillac Bar and Grill and I agreed to take around ten thousand dollars in exchange for dropping the thing. It was kind of anti-climactic. I could have gotten a lot more, but I'd mainly just wanted to prove my point. Then I moved up to my mother's house in Ashland and played golf every day for the last two and a half years.

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Barbara Kalinowski came up for a visit last summer. She was in the middle of getting a divorce. We played golf. I introduced her to some of the guys I usually play golf with. She had on a yellow tank top. When we got to Felix, he said, “Ay, Chihuahua.” He didn’t mean to say it. He couldn’t help himself. She’s a pretty good golfer, too. I can’t think of anything Barbara Kalinowski’s not good at.

Later on she and I took a blanket and a flashlight and a bottle of Scotch up to the cemetery where my father’s buried. It’s called Scenic Hills. It was still around eighty-five, even at night. During the day it had been up to a hundred and six—not quite a record, but close. We passed the Scotch back and forth and shined the flashlight on my dad’s tombstone:

“Many Dreams Came True”

That’s what the tombstone says. My mother picked it out. It was the truest thing she found among the samples she’d been shown. Under the words, there’s a picture of a guy fly fishing beside a lake with snow-capped mountains in the background and fluffy clouds chiseled into the smooth gray granite.

Barbara Kalinowski turned off the flashlight and stretched out on the blanket. There was a sliver of moon and about a billion bright shining stars shimmering in the huge black cemetery sky. She watched the stars for a while. Then she rolled me over and I watched the stars for a while.. There were times when neither of us watched the stars. Then we watched the stars together for a while. It wasn’t all that comfortable, even with the blanket. Plus, I kept getting the eerie feeling that my father was going to rise up from the grave to find out

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what the hell was causing all the commotion. He never did like a lot of commotion. But he didn't rise up from the grave. Not ever.

Barbara Kalinowski has a new boyfriend now. The last I heard, they were getting married. As for me, my meager settlement money's just about gone. I probably ought to be thinking about getting another job, but I've decided to conserve what little money I have left and take a stab at writing this book I've been threatening to write for longer than I can remember. I'm not exactly starting from scratch. I've started what amounts to the same book on and off for the last thirty years or so and have, in the process, accumulated a little stack of stuff I thought might come in handy someday—the oldest surviving scrap goes back to the spring of 1960. I also have a bunch of old letters and things—part of a diary, a few pictures, a Valentine's card. But, basically, the book's about four people—Elliot Felton, Virginia Good, Melanie and me—and what we all tried to do with each other back in the summer of 1972.

I suppose I need to start with Ginny. She was the first hippie, in case anyone's ever wondered. That tidbit of information probably never made its way into any history books, but it's true. I have proof. Documentary evidence. She was also the older sister of Sandra Good, the same Sandra Good who used to be one of the chicks in the so-called Manson Family. Sandy's *still* one of the chicks in the so-called Manson Family. I saw her on TV a while ago, talking about how she and Squeaky had set up a website to show what a bum rap poor Charlie got. When I get my sister to stick this on the Internet for me, I'll have her link it to the Charlie Manson site.

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I'm pretty sure I still have a letter Ginny sent me about her sister and the so-called Manson Family back before anyone had ever heard of them. I've got all kinds of letters and things, stuff I haven't looked at in years. I think I'll go ahead and start with a biography of sorts—just write down whatever I vaguely recollect Ginny telling me about what happened to her before I met her. I always used to tell her I was going to write a book about her someday. That may have been why she even liked me in the first place. Oh, well. Better late than never.