

**CHAPTER 1 PREVIEW**

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**THE  
LAST  
RESORT**  
A JEN LU MYSTERY

Michael Kaufman



NEW YORK

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# 1

*Friday, March 3, 2034—15:28:01*

“I never killed anyone before.”

Yeah, that’s what they all say when they’re staring at prison through their big brown eyes. But I admit, the hedge fund CEO had us both convinced, Jen and me. A freak death by an errant ball at a snooty golf course.

Despite being a Timeless, the man looked unwell. His skin was now the color of liverwurst that had been left out too long in the sun. He charged from the posh meeting room toward the restroom. Second time since we had brought him up to the clubhouse.

My boss: Jen B. Lu. Age thirty-eight. Washington, DC, police detective.

Me: Two years and nine months. Biocomputer implanted into her neocortex.

“What do you think, boss?”

Jen said, “I think he should take golf lessons before he kills anyone else.”

“She’s not dead yet.”

“No,” Jen agreed. “Not yet.”

When the hedge fund president finally staggered back, dabbing the corners of his narrow mouth with a blindingly white handkerchief, we ran through it all again. That’s your most basic police questioning technique: get them to repeat their story 150 times and try to spot discrepancies. It’s one of the many areas where I run circles around humans. Of course, it also lets the bad guys lock in their stories, but no mind.

Trebook said, “As I told you twice—”

“Sorry, Mr. Trebook, I need to make sure we capture every detail while things are fresh in your mind.”

“—when you’re on the tee box—”

“On the fifth hole.”

“Of course on the fifth damn hole.” He glared briefly, his normal rich-guy moxie starting to bubble up. “From up there, you can’t see the place we found her.”

“You knew she was playing in front of you.”

“Yes. As I have also already stated several times.” He shot Jen a look that couldn’t have withered a daisy, let alone my boss. “We saw her in the starter’s cabin. And it’s her regular time. Everyone knows.”

“Did you speak to her?”

He looked uncomfortable. “No.”

“She was by herself?”

“Right. No service unit. But the fifth hole descends steeply at about a hundred and fifty yards. She was down there, out of sight.”

“Isn’t that risky? Hitting your ball when someone could be there?”

“Our tee times are fifteen minutes apart,” he said with a voice so smug it made me itch.

“Is that good?”

The high roller rolled his eyes, apparently recovering from his abject whining and now reclaiming his natural superiority. He fussed a hand back and forth over his close-cropped hair like a little boy might do after his first trip to a barbershop. Seventy-six years old, but looked about twenty-four. Not a good-looking twenty-four—his lips were far too skinny, his mouth far too small, and his ears looked like someone had slapped iceberg lettuce leaves onto the sides of his head—but not everyone can be as handsome as me.

“Most good private courses,” Trebook said, “send out groups at eight- to ten-minute intervals. At a course where you might play”—here he sized Jen up and down as if calculating her net worth—“you’d be packed in every six minutes. Here we believe members absolutely must have the course to themselves. Fifteen minutes ensures this. And the fact that she was playing alone meant she should have been well ahead of the two of us by then.” She. Patty Garcia.

Texan. Fifty-two. Lawyer. Celebrity. Media darling. Daughter of farmworkers with a rags-to-riches story. Star athlete back in college. Rumored presidential candidate. *Time* magazine Person of the Year for leading the landmark civil suit against the oil, gas, and coal giants. *That* Patty Garcia.

When the call had come in, we happened to be a block away, so we were first on the scene. The polished gates of the golf club had breezed open to our police scooter. We charged up a drive that wound through thick woods where springtime leaves were popping out in front of our eyes. As we reached the steps to the clubhouse, a young woman dashed out and greeted us like a society dinner party hostess who was trying to control her panic that the beef Wellington would get soggy if we didn’t hurry. She whisked us into a Tesla golf cart with heated seats, and as she sped away, she launched into her commentary. “A member named Mr. Trebook phoned me from the fifth hole. He thinks another member was hit by his golf ball. He thinks she’s dead.” She floored that puppy,

and we charged straight across two holes, bombed through a patch of woods, blazed past a green, and arrived on the fifth hole. Good times.

Patty Garcia was lying there on the fairway, not moving, but then again, it kind of freaks me out when corpses start moving on you. Jen doesn't like it when I talk that way, but I'm not a kid anymore, and she can't tell me what to do.

We climbed out of the golf cart. The grass was as soft as a well-padded carpet.

Although our panicking hostess had said Garcia was dead, another woman—she was, we soon found out, Trebook's playing partner, Dr. Jane Kershaw—saw us and said, "I've found a pulse. It's extremely weak."

Garcia had a bump on her temple the size of a quail egg ready to hatch twins.

I checked comms and reported.

Jen said, "We expect an ambulance in four minutes."

Here's the picture. We were in the northern half of Rock Creek Park, the section that hadn't been incinerated in the fire last year. In the old days before I was booted up, this course had been a run-down municipal track that could have doubled as a dirt-bike course. It was to golf what netless, bent rims mounted on warped plywood above an undulating slab of asphalt were to basketball: nice that a million people had access to it, but damn, couldn't we do a bit better for our citizens? But after Disney bought the National Park Service, it flipped the course to a small consortium of super-rich Timeless who decided they indeed had a social responsibility to do better. They landed a ninety-million federal Better Future for All grant and rebuilt it as an urban golf resort—golf course, pool, gym, spa, and private suites for the pleasure of 246 deserving members.

And that's smack-dab where we'd found Patty Garcia. The fifth hole of Viridian Green Golf Resort.

Other than the not-quite-yet-dead person lying in front of us, it was a pretty decent day. We were having a fantastic early spring—what Jen, when she's out of Zach's earshot, calls the good side of climate change. Zach is (your choice) her boyfriend, partner, common-law spouse, significant other. The trees around us were filling in with the tenderest of green leaves, each looking like a delicacy you'd want to pluck off and eat. It was an overcast day, but throughout the woods, like dabs of paint by Monet, redbud and dogwood bloomed, and patches of wild flowers carpeted the ground. Jen told me to enjoy it while I could. Our "seasons" now seem to last a week or two, then we have a wild swing with temperatures climbing or crashing by twenty degrees.

Here was the cast of characters: Ms. Garcia on the ground looking dead. Mr. Trebook looking gray. Dr. Kershaw, kneeling at the lawyer's side, looking concerned. Two service units, each with a hand resting on top of a golf bag, standing off to the side. Four golf course employees shuffling from foot to foot—one whispering into his phone, the others with hands folded in front of themselves as if dress rehearsing for the funeral.

Just as I detected four sirens—an ambulance, a police motorcycle, and two cruisers—I also caught the first whumping of the air ambulance. Bad news about big people travels fast.

Garcia was wearing soda-pop-orange shorts—tightly cut and fashionably short—with a persimmon-orange shirt and a wide purple belt. Lying at her side was a neon-green golf bag. If I had my own set of eyes, they'd be pumping tears like a busted spigot trying to cope with this clash of colors. But somehow it worked on her. This was one very cool woman.

A gleaming white golf ball lay on the tightly mowed grass like a pearl in a display case on green velvet. We squatted down, looked, but did not touch.

"It's mine," the man said. His skin now seemed to be experimenting with interesting shades of green, which at least added a splash of color alongside his beige golf attire.

"Who are you?" Jen asked.

"Peter Trebook. Jane—Dr. Kershaw—and I were the group playing after Ms. Garcia." He pointed to the service units. "Those two are ours."

"This is your ball?"

"I didn't mean to hit her. Of all people."

"I'm sure you didn't. You're certain this is your ball?" He nodded.

"Did you see it hit her?"

He turned back and glanced up the sloped fairway, beyond the top of the hill. "You can't see down here from the tee."

"Did you touch it? The ball?"

He blushed strawberry. I was already figuring out this guy was a veritable rack of paint chips.

"I wiped off some mud with my towel to make sure it was mine."

"Did you put it back right where you found it?"

"Of course I did."

Jen turned to Dr. Kershaw. "Where's your golf ball?"

Dr. Kershaw stood up and pointed down the fairway to a ball close to the green. "That's mine."

"You're sure?"

"From where I was hitting my second shot, I could see the green and where it landed. So yes. Definitely."

"But you couldn't see Ms. Garcia here."

"No."

"And where is her ball?"

"I have no idea," she said. Trebook shook his head, enthusiastically confirming he didn't know either.

Jen took out her phone and popped off a series of photographs: the famous lawyer, a close-up of the wound, the ball, the golf bag she'd been carrying, the people, the surroundings. She scooped the ball into an evidence bag.

The sirens and helicopter were getting loud.

Jen raised her voice. "How long since she was hit?"

Trebook and Kershaw started muttering back and forth to calculate the time.

He: "I teed first."

She: "I flubbed my tee shot. Went a hundred and twenty yards, still on the upper level. We walked to my ball, and I hit my second shot."

"We reached the top of the hill and saw her."

"Ran down."

"Got to her, say, eight minutes from my tee shot."

"Maybe a bit more."

"Phoned 911 right away."

I double-checked to confirm the time of the 911 call.

They were still talking.

"While you were calling them, I phoned up to the clubhouse," Kershaw said, checking her watch.

"Fourteen, fifteen minutes ago," Trebook said. "So nineteen or twenty minutes from when we teed off."

*Which means, I said to Jen, the ball hit Garcia between fourteen thirty-two and fourteen thirty-four.*

Any more talk was drowned out by the belly-deep thumping of the helicopter.

That's when we'd invited Mr. Trebook up to the clubhouse for a chat. Jen figured that sounded friendlier than admitting we were going to grill the guy until he cracked. He was now on his own—Dr. Kershaw had insisted on accompanying Garcia in the chopper.

The clubhouse was in a quiet uproar: everyone whispering, sitting in stunned silence, or sharing the excitement over their phones, but with their well-tended hands covering their well-fed mouths so others wouldn't hear.

The woman staff member who had driven us back up to the clubhouse escorted us to an elegant meeting room. Jen asked Trebook to have a seat, then stared at the woman until she got the message and closed the door behind her.

Jen began with an open-ended gambit: "That must have been quite a shock."

That's when Trebook said, "I never killed anyone before," and rushed out to toss what was left of his lunch.

When he returned, his face was gray-green white. We reassured him that Patty Garcia was still alive. He nodded, but it was obvious from the panic etching his face that he figured that might not be true for long.

Trebook closed his eyes and breathed like a yoga master. By the time he opened them, his tanned color was returning. It seemed to finally occur to him that

his odds of getting dragged into a lawsuit were solid enough to turn an actuary into a gambling man. He abruptly announced that if we had any further questions, he wanted his lawyer at his side.

And so we said adios to the Timeless man who thought he had it all and headed down the long drive and out the polished gates of Viridian Green Golf Resort.