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# Murder

at St. Alfanus

Todd Vogts

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by  
Todd Vogts



Strategic Book Group

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# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to my mother, Karen, who instilled within me the love of reading. Also to my father, Steve, who showed me the joy of golf, and to my brother, Troy, who always made sure I never won a round against him.*

# Acknowledgments

I wouldn't have been able to complete this novel without the help of an amazing group of family and friends. When I first told them I had written the manuscript and had found a publisher, they were almost more excited than I was, if that's even possible. I am grateful for each and every one of them. I want to give special thanks to my friends Jerod Horchem and Travis Schafer. These two helped me proof the novel and get it ready enough to even attempt to send it to a publisher. They both told me when something sounded dumb or just didn't work. They also put up with me bouncing ideas off of them at all hours of the day.

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Yours,  
Todd Vogts

# PART ONE





# Chapter One

A warm breeze was blowing across the course, rustling the leaves of the trees lining either side of the fairway. It was No. 8, a par 5 and 476-yard hole, and it was the longest and straightest hole on the eighteen-hole course that made up the eastern edge of St. Alfanus College.

St. Alfanus was a private, Catholic college located about two miles south and west of Hooks, Texas, which is in Bowie County in the northeast corner of the state.

Tyler Fox surveyed the fairway and looked down at his ball sitting on his tee. It was June 2. The summer sun was beating down on the course, and Tyler's light T-shirt was damp with sweat. He was playing his second round of golf that day. He had finished his first just before lunch. He took a short break for a bite to eat and hit the course again. He had to keep practicing. He was playing golf on a scholarship for St. Alfanus, and the coaches had high expectations for him to win the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics national championship in the coming spring.

Tyler squared his body up to the ball, bringing the oversized head of his steel-shafted driver just behind the ball. He took a deep breath.

It was his swing that got him noticed and earned him the scholarship that covered the majority of the \$50,000 per year tuition.

His swing was relaxed yet powerful and since he was left handed, relatively rare in the eyes of the scouts. He easily pulled the club face backward away from the ball as he shifted his weight to his back leg. The club head arched over his head as his hips cocked, ready for the second half of



the swing. As the club reached the peak of its journey, Tyler straightened his right elbow and swung his hips forward. The club's shaft arched downward, and he shifted his weight to his front leg.

Upon impact with the ball, Tyler brought the club head through the area of impact and allowed the club to wrap around his front shoulder until the club came to rest across his back.

Tyler's eyes, squinting against the bright sun, followed the flight of the ball. It sailed effortlessly down the center of the fairway. When it hit the lush, green grass, it bounced three times before rolling. Tyler estimated he hit it nearly 280 yards.

He bent over and plucked the tee from the grass and placed it behind his ear. He walked over where his golf bag stood perched on its stand. Tyler shoved his driver in and removed his Kansas City Royals baseball cap. He wiped his brow on his forearm before pulling the hat back down over his buzz-cut brown hair. He picked the golf bag up and slung the straps over his shoulder.

Tyler began to walk off the tee box and down the fairway toward his ball when he noticed a glimmer of light out of the corner of his eye. He stopped and turned, facing the source of the light.

There stood a guy of medium height and a stocky build. He had shaggy, curly blond hair spilling out over the top of a red Nike visor. Clutched in one of his hands was a camera with a long lens. The guy was smiling as he waved and walked toward Tyler.

Much like Tyler, the guy had a deep tan, and his teeth were perfectly straight and brilliantly white. His smile was disarming, and his blue eyes made Tyler feel at ease. So Tyler lowered his golf bag from his shoulder and sat it on the ground at his feet.

"Tyler Fox. A five-foot-eight sophomore from Goessel, Kansas. You're here on a golf scholarship and are expected to bring a championship home to our beloved St. Albanus,"

the guy said with a drawl that could only mean he was a true Texan.

Tyler cocked an eyebrow and tilted his head back. “Who are you?”

The guy let go of the camera and let the device hang from the strap around his neck. He stepped closer to Tyler and extended a hand.

“My name is Charlie Harrison,” the guy said.

“Hello, Charlie,” Tyler said, shaking his hand. “So why do you know so much about me? And what’s with the camera?”

Charlie smiled. “I’m the editor-in-chief of the campus newspaper, the *Clarion*, and I’m working on a profile of our star golfer.”

Tyler nodded and looked around. “Where is he?”

“So you’re modest,” Charlie commented as he chuckled. “You are the star, and after your quiet yet successful season last year, I hear you are the top pick to win the national championship this year.”

“That’s what people say, but I try not to listen to all the hype. I don’t want to try and live up to the expectations of everyone. I just want to play golf and do well.”

Charlie flashed another grin as he pulled a narrow reporter’s notebook from his back pocket and fished a pencil from behind his ear and underneath his mop of hair. He began to scribble.

“What are you writing down?” Tyler asked.

Charlie looked up. “That quote. I liked it. I think I’ll use it in the story about you. It really shows how down to earth you are.”

Tyler shook his head. “Wait. This is an interview?”

“Sure,” Charlie said with a shrug. “I got pictures of you practicing, and now I have to talk to you. That’s how this whole journalism thing works, but you know that. You’ve taken a few journalism classes here.”

“How do you know that?” Tyler asked.

“First, I am an English major like you, and I have elected to minor in journalism. Therefore, I know the teachers, so

they are willing to talk to me about what students are in their classes if I need a little background on an article subject. Secondly, I'm a fifth-year senior. I have developed a few connections over the years. I can get access to almost anything," Charlie said smugly.

Tyler shook his head and looked down at the grass.

"Don't worry, though. None of the teachers had anything bad to say about you. They said you are an exceptional student. Someone who might do well in the journalism world."

Tyler looked back up at Charlie. "Oh really?"

"Yeah," Charlie said, nodding his head. "Which actually brings me to the other reason I am here. See, I'm not just doing a story on you. I also want to recruit you. To work for the *Clarion*. I could use a reporter, especially over the summer. Even though school is out, we still produce the weekly edition, and a lot of my reporters have left for the break."

"I don't know," Tyler said. "I really need to practice. I don't know if I'll have time."

Charlie waved a hand at Tyler. "Don't worry about that. There will be plenty of time. Besides, it's not like you need that much practice. You're an incredible golfer, hence the hype and the story I'm working on."

"I've never written for a paper before," Tyler said, twirling his putter in his golf bag.

"Stick with me," he said, putting a hand on Tyler's shoulder. "I'll teach you the ropes. Maybe the two of us can finally win a Texas Intercollegiate Press Association award. I've been trying since I got here. I would love to get one of those and have that plaque hanging on the office wall."

Tyler looked at Charlie.

Charlie smiled again. "You're right. You need time to think about it. Tell you what, why don't you meet me at the clubhouse after you finish your round. I will interview you for my story, and then we can talk about working at the *Clarion*. If you want."

Tyler nodded. "Okay. That sounds all right."

"Great!" Charlie said. "See you after bit."

With that, Charlie turned around and walked away. He crossed the fairway to the cart path and began a casual stroll toward the course's clubhouse.

Tyler watched him go.

"That was weird," Tyler said to himself.

He picked up his golf bag and once again slung the straps over his shoulder before continuing his journey to his ball.

He found the white, dimpled sphere sitting dead center in the fairway, less than two hundred yards from the pin.

Tyler fished his 8-iron out of his bag and took a swing. The ball flew toward the green, hit and skipped over, coming to a rest in a sand trap.

"Crap," Tyler said to himself.

Tyler Fox never overshot a green from this close. His mind was clearly occupied, and his game didn't improve.

By the time Tyler got to the short par-three No. 14, he worried he might not even finish with an even par, especially since fourteen was the most treacherous hole on the course. It was tucked down at the far south end of the course. It was heavily wooded and doglegged sharp to the left. Even though it was so short, the green couldn't be seen from the tee box.

Some golfers liked to try and go over the trees and drop the ball onto the green from above, but that carried its own risk. There was a pond hidden behind the green, and it swallowed any golf ball that came near it.

Tyler teed up and swung. He sliced. The ball sailed into the trees. Tyler didn't need to hear it splash. He knew the water had it.

Tyler slammed the club head on the ground. He never sliced. His game was going down the tubes, and it was Charlie Harrison's fault.

It wasn't the reporter coming up to interview him that bothered Tyler. He had talked with reporters before. Though he didn't like to admit it, he was a good golfer, and newspapers had shown interest in him before. When he won the state golf championships for the Goessel High School team, he was all over the papers in the area, and he was okay with it.

No, what had Tyler's mind on things other than his golf game was the offer Charlie had made. He hadn't ever told anyone, but he decided to major in English because in the back of his mind he had always thought he would like to work for a newspaper.

His grandfather had done just that. Alfred Sterling had worked at *The Canton Pilot* when Tyler was a youngster. Tyler fondly remembered going to visit his Grandpa Al in nearby Canton and smelling the newsprint and ink that stained his hands and clothes. He wasn't a press operator. He was a reporter, but the *Pilot* was a team effort. Everyone helped with everything, and Grandpa Al enjoyed helping with the delivery, which always left him smudged while he proudly dropped each new issue into the news racks.

Tyler decided to give up his round of golf. He carried his golf bag over to a bench near the No. 14 green and sat down. He pulled a bottle of water out of a pouch in his bag and took a long drink.

He looked around at the most secluded part of the course. The trees closed in around him, and it felt like more than just a golf course. It was his future. Tyler didn't know if he would be able to make the PGA tour, and he wasn't sure what he could do with an English degree. Even though he was only entering his sophomore year, he felt his future pressing in on him.

Maybe he was being melodramatic, but ever since he was a freshman in high school the only tough decision he had had to make was which club to use. Perhaps his sudden anxiety over a simple job offer was warranted. He actually had a decision to make.

Tyler put his bottle of water back in his bag and cut across the course toward the No. 18 tee box. He decided to play the final hole up to the clubhouse in order to ward off any unwanted questions about his game.

He teed off and played out the hole. He got a double bogey, but he barely noticed. He just wanted to get inside and talk to Charlie.

Tyler found the newspaper editor sitting at a table in the corner. He had a bag of popcorn laying on the tabletop so the buttery puffs spilled out for easy access. He was idly tossing handfuls into his mouth as he stared up at a television showing the Golf Channel.

Tyler sat his bag on a rack near the entrance and made his way over to Charlie. Tyler was coming up behind him, but as soon as he got close, Charlie said, "Hello."

"That was quick," he said, without turning around.

Tyler went around to the other side of the table and pulled out a chair. He sat down so he was facing Charlie. "How did you know I was coming? I didn't make a noise, and you weren't even looking at me."

Charlie smiled coolly and tossed more popcorn into his mouth. "I'm that good."

Shaking his head, Tyler protested, "No way. You expect me to believe you are some sort of psychic or something?"

"No," Charlie said. "I expect you to believe I'm observant."

He pointed one buttery finger toward the wall behind Tyler. Tyler craned his neck to look. A mirror was partially protruding from behind a display of golf balls for sale.

Tyler faced Charlie once again. "Nice."

Charlie flashed a grin. "See. Being observant is an important part of being a journalist. You've got to keep your head on a swivel and see things others overlook. That's how you get the story. Or the photo. See, no one else would have known you were practicing today unless they happened by. Not me, though. I noticed you practicing here yesterday around this time as I was walking across campus, and I figured it was a daily occurrence for a pro like you. My observations paid off."

"I guess so," Tyler said with a shrug, indifferent to Charlie's spiel. "So shall we get on with the interview?"

Charlie leaned forward and wiped his hands on a napkin. He fished his pencil from behind his ear and pulled his narrow reporter's notebook from the back pocket of his tan cargo shorts.

“You’re absolutely right,” he said. “Enough of my yammering on. Let’s talk about you.”

And so the interview began. Charlie asked Tyler everything from about growing up in rural Kansas, to being so far from home, to his goals in life and his expectations for the coming golf season. Tyler answered every question with honesty and candor. He considered himself a pretty open person, so he wasn’t inclined to hold back as long as someone asked. It wasn’t very often he voluntarily gave up such information, but he didn’t mind sharing when prompted.

The interview lasted for the better part of half an hour, and when it was over Charlie pushed back from the table with a wide smile.

“That was great, Ty,” he said.

Tyler winced at his named being shortened. It wasn’t that he didn’t like it. It was just that no one had ever done it before. He had to admit, though, he kind of liked the way it sounded. He decided not to protest.

“You are so easy to talk to,” Charlie continued. “The interview just came naturally. It’s going to be a great story.”

Tyler smiled slightly. “That’s good to hear. I thought it went well too.”

Charlie leaned forward once again. “You know, someone as easy to talk to as you should really be in a position to do some of the question asking.”

Tyler looked at Charlie. It hadn’t taken him long to bring up the job offer again. Tyler sat back in his chair. He still hadn’t decided what he was going to do, although he felt closer to an answer than he had after Charlie mentioned it the first time on the course.

Sensing Tyler was still teetering on the edge of the decision, Charlie jumped up. “How about a beer? This is a Catholic joint, and every good golfer enjoys a cold brew. What-cha say?”

“I can’t,” Tyler said, shaking his head. “I’m only 19.”

“So? I’m buying. You’re just drinking.”

Tyler protested again. “Thanks but no. I don’t drink.”

This stopped Charlie dead in his tracks, and his eyes went wide. “You mean to tell me that you, a country kid who is attending a Catholic school in Texas, don’t drink? Well now I’ve heard everything.”

Unable to help himself, Tyler smiled, and Charlie returned the grin.

“Then I’ll have a beer, and you can have a Coke. Still my treat.”

“Sounds good,” Tyler said as Charlie ambled over to the counter and came back with the beverages.

After taking a few sips from their drinks of choice, Charlie looked Tyler directly in his brown eyes. “Listen, Ty, I’m going to cut the crap. I need your help. You’ve got the abilities to do this, and I only have a damned columnist hired for the summer. Do you know how helpful a columnist is in trying to fill a paper? Not very. My photographer and I can’t do it all by ourselves, and our ad director always seems to sell enough ads to make a relatively thick paper, which means we need the content. So will you help me out? Will you be a reporter for the *Clarion*?”

“I don’t know,” Tyler said. “I’ve never done it before. I’m not sure I could do a good job, and if things are so tight, I’m worried my schedule with practice and whatnot might be more of a hindrance than a help.”

Charlie was shaking his head furiously even before Tyler finished. “No. No. No. You can do this. The scheduling won’t be an issue, and I will be your mentor. I will teach you everything I can. You’re good at golf. I’m good at newspapering.”

A slight smile tugged at the corners of Tyler’s mouth. “You called me modest earlier. From the sounds of it, I’m surprised you know the meaning of the word.”

“So you got jokes?” Charlie said wryly.

Tyler shrugged.

“Think of working for the *Clarion* as doing me a personal favor.”

“I don’t know you well enough to owe you anything.”



Charlie flopped backward in his seat. “You’re killing me, Ty. Throw me a friggin’ bone here. I’m asking you as nicely as I possibly can.”

Tyler smiled openly and tipped his chair back on its two back legs with his arms crossed over his chest. “What’s in it for me?”

Charlie shook his head, and though he was fighting it, he was smiling. “Fame and esteem. All the girls in their little Catholic school outfits you can handle. Hell, as if the possibilities of wild romps in the sack with a coed aren’t enticing enough, I’ll even pay you. I can offer you thirty dollars per story. It’s all the paper can afford.”

Slowly, Tyler lowered his chair back onto all fours. “Catholic schoolgirls, eh?”

“Sure, but maybe we should just focus on the thirty bucks at first. The girls will come later. Kind of like a bonus for working at the paper long enough.”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” Tyler said with a chuckle.

“So are you in?” Charlie asked, though he thought he knew the answer.

Tyler extended his hand across the table. Charlie’s eyes lit up as he grasped it with his own in a firm handshake.

“I’m glad to have you on board,” Charlie said.

He stood up and raised his glass of beer. In one swallow, he drained the drink and slammed the cup down on the table.

“I’m excited, Ty. I think this is going to be great! You remind me a lot of myself when I was an underclassman.”

Tyler looked up at his new boss. “Is that an insult?”

“Ha! That’s what I mean. You’re a character, and soon you too will see that.”

Tyler stood up. “Really though, I’m kind of excited. For so long now all I’ve been allowed to focus on is golf. It feels good to make a decision for myself.”

“That’s right,” Charlie said, coming around the table and clapping him on the back. “It’s going to be great. Just don’t

let your golf game slip too much. St. Albanus needs that championship as much as the *Clarion* needs a press award.”

Tyler chuckled. “You got it, boss.”

“I’m not your boss yet,” Charlie said. “You need to swing by the office and fill out the necessary paperwork. Then we can get you an assignment to cut your teeth on. From there, we’ll be off to the races.”

Tyler nodded. “Okay. How about right now? I mean, I have to go drop off my clubs, but I could head that way pretty quick.”

“Sounds great, Ty!” Charlie said. “We’ll see you in a bit. The *Clarion* is located in the basement of Cormac Hall. You can’t miss it, unless you venture into the boiler room. Of course, the boilers should be a giveaway that you’re not in the right room.”

“Okay. See ya.”

With a wave, Charlie stepped out of the clubhouse and bounded down the sidewalk. Cormac Hall was on the other side of the campus, but Tyler guessed Charlie would make record time. He was excited to have Tyler as part of the staff, and Tyler was excited too.

“I’ll finally be able to be like Grandpa Al,” he said to himself before slowly drinking the rest of his Coke.

When he was finished, he threw his and Charlie’s cups away. Then he retrieved his golf bag and walked down the short outdoor ramp to the equipment room.

A staffer worked the desk every weekday from 7:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. All athletes were expected to keep any of their outdoor equipment in the room to prevent loss or theft. They could check out their own equipment anytime the desk was open, but they had to return it by closing that day so the clubs, tennis rackets, javelins, or whatever else could be safely locked away for the night.

Tyler thought the rule was a little strange, but he didn’t mind. It saved him from having to keep his personal and his school-issued clubs all in his cramped dorm room. Besides,

he liked talking with the girl who most often worked the desk. Her name was Brooke Nichols, and she was a petite, auburn-haired beauty. He often had to guard himself from getting lost in her dark green eyes.

Brooke was a senior at St. Albanus studying to become an athletic trainer, and to make extra cash she worked at the equipment room. To Tyler's delight, she was working the desk that afternoon.

"Hey, Brooke," he said as he walked up to the counter.

"Hey, Tiger. How did you play?" Brooke asked as she pulled up the logging software used to monitor when and who checked out what.

Tyler shrugged. "Okay, I guess. It could have been better."

Brooke smiled at Tyler. He about melted. "Oh, I'm sure you did fine. You're the best one on the team."

"I don't know about that," Tyler said, blushing. "A lot of the guys are good too."

"You're so modest," she said. "It's sweet, but you need to knock it off. You need to get a little more intense and get that competitive edge. You need to win."

Tyler never knew how to react to such comments from Brooke. He wanted to flirt back, which is what he thought was happening when she called him things like "sweet," but then when she kind of lectured him with an intensity that belied her small stature, he didn't know what to think.

"I know, Brooke," he said, hanging his head.

"See, there you go," Brooke said. "Don't look down. Look me right in the eye and tell me to shove it!"

Tyler looked up with wide eyes of bewilderment. "What?"

Brooke smiled again. "You're too easy to mess with, Tyler."

Tyler mustered a weak smile. Brooke was domineering and due to her intensity, a little scary. But she was beautiful. What a mystifying combination. It truly boggled Tyler's mind.

Apparently he had been standing there speechless for too long. “Hello? Tyler?” Brooke said, waving a hand in front of his face.

Tyler snapped out of it. “Sorry. You must have really got to me that time. I don’t know if I will ever recover,” he joked, with more confidence than he truly felt.

Brooke laughed. “Oh, Tiger. Just when I think you’re out for the count, you come swinging back. So you going to check those clubs in?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Tyler said, lifting the golf bag up onto the counter.

With ease, Brooke grabbed the bag and placed it in its specified place. Then she officially checked the clubs back in via the computer system.

“You’re all set,” she said with a smile.

“Thanks, Brooke,” Tyler said with a wave as he walked away. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As Tyler emerged back into the hot Texas sun, a large smile spread across his face. Was it because he just got done talking to a gorgeous woman? Not really, though it didn’t hurt. More importantly, he was getting ready to do something he had secretly always wanted to do. He was going to be a journalist.

Tyler broke out into a slow jog as he made his way toward Cormac Hall. By the time he hit the front steps, he was sprinting.

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