

## THE BUTCHER OF PUNTA CANA CHAPTER 1

“Man, what a gorgeous day for the game. This place is golf heaven. Way better than Pebble Beach for my money,” the driver of the golf cart said.

There wasn't a cloud in the bright, blue sky. White waves splashed the stunning sea's blue-green water against the natural coral and large, black boulders which abutted the golf course's emerald fairways and manicured greens.

The cart driver was one of four golfers from central New Jersey who were playing the ninth hole at the championship Punta Espada golf club in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

The foursome started their match at seven in the morning and were nearly at the turn by nine-fifteen. On the ninth tee box, one of the golfers stepped up and placed his white ball on the tee. He stepped back behind the ball, surveying where he intended to place his shot. He took two practice swings before addressing the ball and making the shot. The middle-aged golfer took a slow back swing, but at the moment of contact, he dropped his left shoulder slightly. The result of his drive was disappointing, so he let out a word that made his buddies chuckle. The drive towered way left onto a waste bunker in front of a grayish coral cave, one of several similar caves that dotted the pristine golf course. There were two carts in the group, each carrying two golfers. Each cart was assigned a caddie, both dark Dominicans wearing white jumpsuits, baseball caps, and sneakers. The caddie that was on the errant shot, Tony, said he saw the ball land, and it was safe, meaning the ball was playable and not out of bounds.

One of the carts went toward their drives in the fairway, while the other headed to find the ball in the crushed coral waste area.

The caddie for the errant shot followed on foot, as caddies were forbidden to hitch a ride on the back of the cart at Punta Espada.

“Not a cloud in the sky. Eighty-five degrees and a cool, steady breeze off the water. This is one of the few holes not actually alongside the sea. Spectacular!” the other golfer announced.

“Yea, but by the time we finish, it will be so freakin' hot out here, it'll be unfit for this Jersey boy.”

“I hear you, pal. That's why an early morning start is always smart here. No way I would start after seven, seven-thirty.”

Their caddie ran a few yards in front of the golf cart, pointing toward the ball. As he predicted, it was in the waste area not far from the coral cave. The driver entered the cart onto the waste area, the sound of the crushed coral interrupting the quiet glide of riding on the perfectly maintained, lush, green fairway.

“I dink ju hab a gud shot to the green my fren,” the caddie announced. “One seventy-eight-shot.” The tall, skinny, twenty-something caddie, with two gold front teeth in his otherwise brilliant white smile, handed a number 4 rescue club to his golfer.

“I was thinking about just laying up with a nine iron, Tony,” the golfer offered.

“No, my fren...dis is jur bess club. Take a full swing an don dink about de groun. Finish high and ju will be berry happy my fren,” the caddie argued. His thick Dominican accent was understandable and charming. He really didn't speak English well, but his golf English was perfect.

The Jersey golfer went behind his ball to fix a target before taking his practice swing.

“Jesus Christ...what the fuck is that smell?” he blurted. The golfer gagged a few times before he walked away from the ball. As he moved ten or so yards from the cart, his partner, who was the driver, used the steering wheel for leverage as he pulled his large belly out of the cart.

“Holy shit, that’s nasty. Smells like something crawled into that cave and died. Mother of Christ, that’s bad.” He, too, gagged a few times before upchucking some clumpy, watery vomit onto the crushed coral.

Tony, the caddie, took a green bandanna he had around his neck and fastened it over his mouth and nose. The other two players, who were ahead in the plush fairway waiting to hit their second shots, jumped back into their cart to drive over and investigate the commotion. Their caddie was already at the coral cave; he had also tied a handkerchief about his nose and mouth.

“Ay, Dios mio. Hay un cuerpo en la cueva. Hay moscas por donde quieras,” the caddie shouted.

“What did he say? Give me that towel, will ya,” the heavysset golfer hollered. His partner handed him a green hand towel, which each golfer had in their golf cart. He poured a bottle of cold water over the towel and wrapped it around his face. Slowly, the golfer made his way to the cave. He stared in disbelief for a long ten seconds.

“Oh my God. It’s a woman. She’s black and bloated and there are a million maggots and flies all over her, holy fuck,” he announced. The other golfers, wanting to see the body with a macabre sense of curiosity, followed their buddy’s lead with their green towels.

Tony took out his cell phone, pounded on the numbers, then began yelling into it in ultra-rapid Dominican Spanish. He had the foresight to call the starter to describe the scene.

“Her pussy was chopped up and it looks as if her nipples were ripped off. Holy shit!” one of the golfers blurted.

“Can’t see her face, her head is covered by something,” another golfer shouted before he got a good whiff, losing his early morning buttered roll all over the front of the cave.

The clubhouse was very close. Several golf carts came screaming across the fairway toward the death scene. The club general manager, the caddie master, and the head greenskeeper were among the Punta Espada employees who raced to the horrific scene.

When the men all approached the cave, Jim McCabe, the general manager, quickly retreated from the horrific odor.

“Oh, my good God. Not another one!” McCabe exclaimed.