



THE  
putting green  
*Whisperer*  
A NOVEL

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AUTHOR OF *Calculated Risk*

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Putting Green  
Whisperer

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**The Putting Green Whisperer**

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## *Dedication*

To my golf-loving family, John, Dad, Kathleen, Marcia,  
and Scott.



## *What People are Saying*

### *Calculated Risk*

Dating on the rebound, meddling parents, opposites fighting the attraction...with humor and tenderness, Zoe M. McCarthy puts fun, fresh spins on these favorite themes. No risk involved in picking up this romantic read! ~Becky Melby, author of the Lost Sanctuary Series

It's easy to enjoy this story of faith, family and how two people find love at the exact time in their lives they need each other most. I loved spending Thanksgiving with Nick's family almost as much as Cisney did! *Calculated Risk* is a perfect title for a story of two people whose lives and livelihood must include measuring risk, but there is no risk for a reader in choosing this delightful romance! ~Maureen Lang, author of *All in Good Time*







# 1

Allie turned the volume down on the radio and rested her forehead on the steering wheel. How would she unglue her behind from the seat and go inside?

After several moments, she sat up, bounced her knee against the locked steering wheel, and tapped down the sun visor, blocking the glare from October's late afternoon sun. The rearview mirror reflected all her earthly stuff mounded in the back of the SUV. Would her old bedroom be available to dump her things, or was it now a storage or sewing room? Maybe Dad and Karen would direct her to the basement bedroom, which had once been used for guest overflow.

The front door was still painted Carolina blue to honor UNC. The dogwood in the middle of the yard had filled out from the spindly tree Mom planted a few months before she died. Except for the bushier tree, everything else looked the same as it had before she'd left North Carolina to live with Aunt Mae in Atlanta.

Now, seven years and a new stepmother later, she was back in Cary. Maybe that was a good thing. Since Aunt Mae had moved to California, nothing was left for her in Atlanta.

Allie drummed her thumbs against the steering wheel. Maybe she should've driven to California. Aunt Mae would've welcomed her. Allie had saved enough money from her spring and summer jobs to make the

trip from Atlanta to the now defunct Florida position. Would her savings have taken her to California?

Sure. If she'd starved herself and had run on fumes the last hundred miles.

Allie grabbed her tan canvas bag from the passenger seat and got out of the car.

*Mom, I need you. Ask your God to help Dad and I reconnect. Please.*

After a chicken-hearted hesitation, she shouldered her canvas bag, stuffed her hands into her overalls pockets, and trudged up the slate walkway.

Midway through the doorbell chimes, Dad opened the door. "Allie!" His blue eyes were wide and his smile broad. "You don't have to ring the doorbell." He stood aside to let her in.

"Hey." She crossed the threshold, passed Dad, and looked around for her not-so-evil stepmother. Karen's plumeria scent hung in the air and interfered with the smell of home. "Where's Karen?"

"It's her bridge night."

"Oh." She pivoted to face him. Her rubber flip-flop refused to spin on the tile floor, and she stumbled.

Dad moved from the door, ready to steady her.

She regained her balance, and avoiding Dad's eyes, flipped her ponytail over shoulder. Well, that was awkward.

Dad's hands slid into his pockets. "I'm sorry the job in Florida lost its funding."

Not as sorry as she was. "Yeah. Teaching golf to kids is my thing. The coaching job would've been perfect."

"At least you didn't drive all the way to Florida before you got the bad news."

She nodded.

Dad looked...fresh. His eyes seemed brighter, and even with gray hairs at his temples, he looked younger. Handsome. More like the Dad she'd known pre-Mom's car accident.

She looked down at her clothes. Why hadn't she dressed in something nicer than her knock-around overalls and long-sleeved UNC T-shirt?

Dad drew his hands from his pockets and ushered her toward the living room. "Come in and have a seat."

The front room was still set up as part sitting area and part game corner. Mom and Dad had seldom entertained, so Mom had decided it was ridiculous to waste a room for the possibility of company.

Allie averted her gaze from the table, where the three of them had played so many board games. But not quick enough. Man, the stab of pain to her heart hurt like a lightning strike.

They settled into white armchairs. Classical music wafted from Dad's fancy sound system. A book lay open facedown on the round table beside his chair. Most likely one of his thrillers.

Now what would they talk about? The weather? The boring drive up from Atlanta? His blissful life with Karen?

Or maybe his sudden decision to return to the PGA to play golf on the Senior Tour? *Please let it be the latter.* Since he hadn't played on the PGA tour since Mom died, his reasons for going back to pro golf was something she'd like to know.

Dad crossed one leg over the other and tapped his thumb against his knee.

Think. Say something. "How—"

"I—sorry, you go ahead."

"No. No. What were you going to say?"

He paused. "I have a job that might interest you."

Really? Where did Dad have clout to get her a job that had something to do with golf? She was in no position to turn down a job, but waitressing at Greenside Restaurant at Lochmere Golf Club would dry her out like beef jerky. Would she offend Dad if she asked to keep her options open for a week to see if she could find some kind of job teaching golf to kids? Hopefully, she appeared more interested than fearful. "What job is that?"

"How would you like to caddy for me for the rest of the Senior Tour? I'll pay you the going percentage of my winnings."

Her back left the chair. "You're kidding!"

Dad's shoulders relaxed. "I was hoping you'd react that way."

"Caddy on the PGA Senior Tour? Well, yeah."

Dad chuckled.

"Talk about a dream job. This's really fantastic, Dad."

"Good. You start work the day after tomorrow here at Prestonwood. The tour ends in four weeks."

Questions about her new job popped like popcorn. What caddy duties did he expect, other than those she'd done when she'd caddied for him in the past? Could she bring her clubs as they traveled from city to city? Would she have any of her own time to play golf? She took a breath to ask the first, when "Jeremiah Was a Bullfrog" broke the silence. Dad pulled his cell from his pocket.

No way! Classical-music Dad had "Jeremiah Was a Bullfrog" for his ringtone? She'd installed that same song on her own phone. Had he remembered from his first PGA come back—when she was his biggest fan—

that the song was her favorite tune?

Dad looked as though he'd be on the phone awhile. Allie eased outside through the French doors off the sunroom and walked the short distance through the woods to the fourteenth hole on Carywood Golf Course. She perched on a tree stump at the edge of the tree line overlooking her favorite green.

Wow. Her homecoming was off to a good start. Four weeks on the Senior Tour, traversing the links with the over-fifty golfers she'd admired since she was fourteen. And she and Dad would travel together again. Just the two of them.

The Carywood course looked in good shape. Maybe she'd enjoy playing a round tomorrow—as soon as she unpacked the SUV. How she'd missed jogging through the woods to this hole early in the morning before the parade of golfers hiked up the rise in the fairway. There was nothing better than watching the morning sun rise over the green, turning dewdrops into diamonds. A breeze ruffled her bangs and cooled her face.

She could do so much for Dad's game. He'd paid UNC big bucks so she could become a sports trainer. He could add conditioning and training to her caddying duties. That was, if the over-fifty pros did much training anymore. Picturing paunchy, balding men puffing while they worked the weights, she couldn't help smiling.

Three balls dropped onto the green within minutes of each other. The raised green hid the fairway leading to it and the approaching golfers.

She breathed in to fill her lungs with North Carolina's autumn scents. The aroma of steaks grilling nearby jarred the moment. At least her empty stomach

seemed to think so.

The golfers' chatter preceded their golf caps rising above the knoll. Their laughter rang out as four twenty-something guys gradually emerged. The length of their shadows on the Bermuda grass confirmed they'd have a tough time completing their round before dark.

Three of the guys drew out their putters and dropped their golf bags on the fringe of the green. The tall guy carried a putter but no golf bag. He strode to the flag and removed it. Why did he tote only a putter? She counted three balls on the green, which the other guys had claimed. As far as she could see, no fourth ball lay on or off the green. Curious.

Of the four, the tall guy was the most athletic-looking. He seemed at ease on the course. And his tan was deep. He probably spent many hours on golf courses.

Before each of the other three men putted, the tall one traveled the green, bending, squatting, and raising his putter like a plumb line. Then for each of his companions, he moved closer to the hole and pointed the toe of his putter to a spot on the green. All three took his advice and sank their putts.

Allie blinked. Wow!

The three men pitched their golf balls to various places on the green that were difficult to putt from. Were they planning to stop their play and practice putting? Couldn't they see the sun was rushing to the horizon?

The tall guy moved to each ball, studied the green's undulations, and then putted. Each ball sank home.

Who was this guy? He was like a dog whisperer

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possessing an eerie understanding of canines and their ways, except this guy could read the greens. The others were good, but Green Whisperer had a gift.

Engrossed in their play, the men hadn't noticed her, but, boy, she wanted to stride over and shake Green Whisperer's hand.

The golfers moved on toward the next tee.

As soon as their backs were to her, Allie rose and crept along the edge of the course, staying hidden as much as the trees allowed. If Green Whisperer borrowed a driver at the next tee, she'd get to see him drive. She had to know how far this guy's golfing miracle went.

Once the men reached the tee, Allie stopped, crouched behind a young holly tree, and peered over its prickly leaves.

Green Whisperer stood away from the other guys. While Orange Shorts executed a few practice swings, Green Whisperer bounced a golf ball off his putter head as if it were a rubber ball tethered to a paddle. Confidence oozed from everything he did.

Her foot cramped. Sheesh! Wouldn't popping up from behind the bush like a jack-in-the-box be a charming way to introduce herself? With fumbling fingers, she loosened her shoelaces. Biting her lip, she unfolded her leg behind her and stretched her toes toward her shin. The pain remained.

She stood and rocked her weight onto her toe. The cramp tightened. She hobbled farther into the woods and stamped her foot again and again. Once the muscle finally released its death grip, she skulked toward the holly tree, making sure she didn't stumble on her shoelaces.

The *pock, pock, pock* from Green Whisperer's ball

against the putter ceased. She froze. Had her cramp-dance drawn his attention? She peeked over the tree.

Green Whisperer craned his neck in her direction. She dropped to a squat, her ponytail catching on holly leaves and bending a prickly branch against her face. She remained motionless and bore the pain.

*Crack!* Orange Short's drive.

The pocking sound resumed.

Leaf by leaf, Allie freed her hair from the holly tree. A berry dropped into her mouth. Yuck. Were holly berries poisonous? *Thpwoo*. She wiped her tongue on her sleeve.

The threesome completed their drives, collected their golf bags, and marched toward their fairway lies, the irons in their golf bags rattling. Green Whisperer rested his putter over his shoulder and followed, whistling an upbeat tune.

If only he'd borrowed a driver and hit a drive from the tee. Then she'd know if he was a stunner. She turned away from the retreating men and strode home through the woods.

How could she find out who Green Whisperer was?

If she wasn't careful, she could become a fan—a groupie. A chuckle percolated inside.

As if Allie Masterson could be anyone's groupie.



## 2

Allie focused on the road and gripped the steering wheel with both hands. Only ten more minutes before she and Dad reached Prestonwood Country Club. Would she live up to Dad's expectations of a caddy today?

He looked so calm in the passenger seat, studying his yardage book. His aftershave filled the car, and images surfaced of the good old days when he drove them to tournaments. Would he turn his yardage book over to her so she could enter tomorrow's distances to the holes, or would he relegate her to pseudo caddy? She hadn't had a chance to talk to Dad about her duties.

Dad closed the narrow notebook and slipped it into his back pocket. "Are you nervous?"

"A little."

"Me, too." He studied her. "Some nervousness is good, you know."

"I remember you telling me that on your last bout on the PGA."

That came out wrong. Would Dad think she criticized his bouncing career? She hadn't meant to.

He nodded and looked out his side window.

Bummer. He must have misinterpreted her remark. Nevertheless, what she'd said was true. His career had been like a golf ball bouncing on a cart path. After he'd graduated from college, he'd made it into

the PGA. Then she'd come along, and he'd dropped off the tour to open his own financial planning company and be near Mom and her. For some reason, when she was fourteen, he succeeded in a PGA comeback. The two most wonderful years of her life, traveling summers and holidays with Dad on tour. And now, here he was back on the Champion's Tour.

As she pulled into the clubhouse parking lot, Dad released his seatbelt. "Let me out at the bag drop."

Should she retrieve his golf bag from the trunk and set it on its tripod legs, like any good caddy would?

At the bag drop, she put the car in park and reached for the door handle.

"I'll get my clubs." Dad looked at the dash clock. "Meet me at the practice green as soon as you pick up your bib."

She plopped her hand back on the steering wheel and followed Dad's progress in the rearview mirror.

So, she was to be his token caddy? Chauffeur him to the golf course and driving his golf cart? Her shoulders sank as if she'd swallowed a bucket of golf balls. She wanted to be the best caddy he'd ever had, not just a convenience.

Allie parked the SUV and walked around the clubhouse to collect her bib. The smiling volunteer at the check-in table handed her a bib with a blue pocket and MASTERSON stamped on the back. She slipped it over her head.

Across the patio among socializing caddies, Green Whisperer conversed with a man, their arms crossed over their bibs.

Whoa. Green Whisperer—the guy who read greens like a desktop scanner—was a caddy? No way.

If his ball striking was anything like his putting, he belonged on the PGA tour as a player.

Allie moved away from the table and studied the dark-haired golf wonder. His easy smile transformed his face, bearing a solid chin and brown eyes, into knockout charming.

Fifteen steps would take her to him, where she could praise his green-reading skills.

Hold on. Ring check. His left ring finger was empty. If she gushed her esteem, he might think she was hitting on him. His talent, not the man, had fired her passion.

Green Whisperer clapped the other caddy on the back and moved toward the sidewalk.

Sheesh. He was getting away. Forget her fears. She pressed her lips together, getting an SPF 15 cherry burst, and maneuvered through caddies heading out to link up with their pros.

An older caddy stopped Green Whisperer. Rats. She slowed her pace. The older caddy shook Green's hand and then moved on. She increased her speed and zeroed in on her prey before any other well-wishing caddies could intervene.

Green took a step forward, and then his gaze landed on her and held. He waited.

She steeled her smile and blocked, "You have an amazing talent!" from spurting into the air too soon and landing on the wrong caddy.

Green's killer smile spread across his face, welcoming her approach. Had she imagined it, or had he executed a step in her direction?

"Hey! Shoo!"

Green's hand whipped toward the speaker in a holding-off gesture. His gaze remained on her face.

Shoo? She halted. Had Green responded to the name Shoo? As in Shoo Leonard, once called John, until his name had somehow changed to idiotic Shoo? Was this man the son of retired pro golfer Steve Leonard?

She spun a one-eighty and hiked toward the check-in table. No way would she have any kind of conversation with the sleazebag who'd put her through two hours of torture when she was ten.

The burly caddy ahead of her stopped short and shook out his folded bib. Allie sidestepped him, and her hip caught the edge of the check-in table, sending her stumbling sideways.

She bounced off the big guy's steamroller body. "Oh!"

Pain shot through her hip as the volunteer's laptop slid off the table. The volunteer reached for the machine, but it slipped through her hands and fell to the patio.

*Crack!*

Allie cringed. Caddies' heads turned, and a hush settled over the crowd.

The open laptop formed a tent on the patio. Blood would ooze from it any second.

Allie bent to retrieve it. "I'm so sorry."

"I've got it." The volunteer scooped up the laptop and righted it on the table.

Allie searched the woman's face for the verdict on the machine's wellbeing, her heart pounding.

The volunteer's eyes brightened, and she smiled. "It survived!"

Allie released her imprisoned breath, gave the volunteer a nod, and churned her legs away from the cheering caddies...and John Leonard.

~\*~

What was that all about? Shoo stared at the retreating caddy, whose blonde ponytail protruding from the back of her golf cap danced wildly as she hurried off. He craned his neck to keep her in sight as she wove through the caddies on the cart path.

Approaching him, she'd seemed like a girl on a mission. Her striking blue eyes, bright against her tanned skin, had focused on him, as if she'd rediscovered an old friend. No doubt about it, her smile had beamed at him. Then, *bam!* She'd done an about-face and slammed into the check-in table.

But he didn't know her. Did he?

He mentally scanned his female acquaintances. No match surfaced. Unlikely he'd have forgotten the petite blonde.

So, who was she?

As she'd fled, her ponytail had lashed against MASTERSON on her bib as if she couldn't get away fast enough. Maybe she thought she knew him, and then, embarrassed, realized he was a stranger.

Peanut butter scented fingers snapped in his face. He jerked away.

Mark stuffed a peanut butter cracker into his mouth. "Hey, man. Get back in the zone." Orange crumbs sprayed.

How long had Mark stood yakking at him?

He extended his hand. "Mark, my man. What's up?"

Mark slapped his hand into Shoo's palm. "Don't tell me you zonked out for the sprite who rammed the table and then ran off. She's not your type."