



SANDRA WINTER-DEWHIRST

The Open

Rebecca



The early morning light bathed the tall grass that lined the eighteenth hole. Rebecca stopped the car on the entrance road, just before it crossed the fairway. She wound down the window. A slight sea breeze caressed her face, and the pungent blend of salt and seaweed wafted into the car. The day was already warm. The temperature was forecast to reach thirty-eight degrees Celsius by mid-afternoon. It was going to be a hot day for golf. Rebecca smiled to herself at the quirkiness of the prestigious Royal Adelaide Golf Club having an access road that crossed a fairway, as well as a passenger-train line that dissected the first and second holes and ran behind the thirteenth. There were no fences, boom gates, or barriers within the course to separate the train track from the golfers. She glanced over to her right, beyond the clubhouse, to the mound that supported the Adelaide-to-Grange railway line.

‘Only in Adelaide,’ she said quietly to herself. ‘It’s a wonder no one has been killed.’

As Rebecca drove the winding road to the car park, she saw festive bunting lining the verandah of the low-slung bungalow clubhouse. A group of golfers putted on the practice green immediately in front. Others were sitting on wicker chairs scattered along the deep verandah, and more were milling about

in an adjacent marquee. While Rebecca was excited about the day ahead, she also felt a tinge of anxiety but couldn't put her finger on why. She drove on.

Rebecca was grateful her boss had allowed her to take a few days off from her job to be a volunteer at the Women's Australian Open Golf tournament. As the food and wine editor at the *Advertiser*, she had endured a harrowing few months being personally entangled in a series of bizarre murders in Adelaide while, at the same time, covering the murders for the paper. As the paper's food and wine specialist, Rebecca had been in unfamiliar territory writing about murder. But given she was on the spot when the 'Popeye Murder' was discovered, as it was subsequently dubbed, the paper's editor insisted she cover the story. It had been challenging. She needed this break. And given Rebecca's passion for golf, being a volunteer at the Women's Open was a perfect escape.

Rebecca had previously attended a volunteer briefing session where she was told her marshalling duties would be restricted to the second tee over the four days of the tournament. She parked and joined a throng of about a hundred women and a few men in branded blue shirts standing about in one of the marquees, awaiting the pep talk from the manager of volunteers. Rebecca was unfazed by the fact that the shirt she had been given was a size too small as well as being a men's cut. Despite the shirt's shortcomings, she thought it managed to enhance her best assets.

At thirty-seven, Rebecca was still an attractive woman, with just a few laugh lines beginning to show around her vivid blue eyes. She reapplied her fire-engine-red lipstick without the use of a mirror, grabbed a sponsor's cap, and picked up her 'Quiet,

please' baton from a trestle table. She decided she could skip the pep talk and make her way to the second tee.

It was seven o'clock and the general public had only just been allowed into the grounds. Rebecca knew it would be a few minutes before a gallery joined her at the tee. She'd brought a canvas stool, which she placed discreetly behind the sponsor's billboard and adjacent to the championship tee block. Sitting, she looked down the fairway and heard the train before she saw it. The yellow-nosed Adelaide-to-Grange train rattled past within a hundred metres. Rebecca shook her head, bemused that golfers and spectators had to be on the lookout for trains that would cross various sections of the course every fifteen to thirty minutes.

Rebecca's duties would not only include keeping the crowd quiet and still when the players drove off the tee, but also ensuring no one lingered on the train tracks.

Even though the sun was low over the hills, it was getting warmer by the minute. It wasn't long before a hat-wearing contingent of spectators joined Rebecca near the tee block. She could see an even bigger crowd beginning to fill the area surrounding the first tee. *It won't be long now*, she thought, getting excited about the opportunity to watch some of the best golfers in the world. The biggest crowds would arrive later in the morning to follow world number one, Mee Po.

Rebecca used her 'Quiet, please' baton once or twice but, not being too keen on rules or officious bureaucracy, and seeing that the spectators were well behaved, it wasn't long before she gave up on the baton and joined the crowd enjoying the spectacle.

Pixie Browning executed a couple of textbook practice swings and then stepped up to the ball. She coiled her body clockwise then

anti-clockwise, straightening her wrists as she swept the ball off the tee. The ball sailed about 240 metres down the right-hand side of the fairway, landing in a good position. The crowd applauded.

Pixie was from Springfield, Illinois, and was currently ranked eleventh in the world. She cut an impressive figure, standing at 1.8 metres tall. Her slim body was poured into fuchsia-pink shorts with a white belt and a white top. Her long chestnut-brown hair was pulled tightly into a ponytail.

While she watched Pixie pick up her tee off the ground and tuck it into her hair behind the brim of her pink visor, Rebecca was aware that one spectator was still applauding vigorously. He didn't appear to know when to stop. He was wearing a bad toupee, the hair on the crown of his head a darker brown and duller than the hair at the sides. Even though it was a warm day, the man was sweating more than most. He made Rebecca feel uneasy.

She noticed Pixie looking over at the wildly applauding man and frowning.

While still applauding, the man started to make his way toward Pixie. Rebecca reacted quickly, placing herself between them.

'I'm sorry, you can't interact with the players during the tournament,' she said. 'Please step back.'

'But I'm her biggest fan, aren't I, Pixie?' said the man, leaning to one side of Rebecca so as to keep Pixie in view.

'I've told you, Bruce, don't talk to me when I'm playing,' Pixie said in a cold voice, turning her back on him.

Bruce addressed Rebecca. 'I follow the tour. I've been to every tournament Pixie's played at for the past three years.'

Rebecca wondered how this sweaty, overweight, badly groomed

man with a mangy toupee could afford to travel the world to watch golf tournaments. 'I'm sure Ms Browning appreciates your support, but please step back and don't interrupt the ladies while they are teeing off.' Rebecca felt uneasy for Pixie. She instinctively knew Bruce was trouble.

Sue Barker was up next. At thirty-six, Sue was one of the oldest women on tour. Being an old Adelaide girl, she had a parochial crowd following and cheering her on. While Sue was now thirty-fourth in the world, she had been as high as number six. She had gone to school with one of Rebecca's good friends, Penny Tavanagh, and the two had been introduced. Sue was close to retiring from the circuit and wanted to get into golf media, so Rebecca had agreed to go with her to an event that night to introduce her to some of her media buddies. As Sue stepped up to the tee, Rebecca could see that she was in business mode.

Sue's backswing was shorter than Pixie's, giving her less distance but more accuracy. Her ball stopped about twenty metres short of Pixie's but was bang in the centre of the fairway. The crowd applauded warmly.

Hideko Kita was next to walk up to the tee block. Despite Hideko's diminutive frame, she was a long hitter. Hideko pulled the club back and turned her shoulders fully until the club looked like it was protruding from her left ear. Her hips turned to start the downward swing path, her weight shifted to her left leg, and the club head whipped through to smash the ball. Hideko's ball landed about ten metres ahead of Pixie's but on the left-hand side of the fairway.

Before the women were less than a couple of metres off the tee block, something caught Rebecca's eye. Momentarily, she thought it was a club on the ground.

‘Stop!’ Rebecca yelled.

Pixie, Sue, Hideko, and their caddies came to an abrupt halt. A metre-long brown snake slithered across their path, heading toward the bushes to the eastern side of the fairway.

Pixie screamed and ran back to the tee block. Hideko was frozen to the spot, as was her caddie. Sue and her caddie, however, casually walked on while the crowd quickly dispersed, giving the bushes a wide berth.

‘It’s okay,’ said Rebecca to the players and caddies who had remained behind. ‘It’s gone now. It’ll be more frightened than you are. But I’ll call the clubhouse. There’s a snake catcher on site throughout the tournament.’ As she dialled she added, ‘There’re dozens of eastern browns on the course at this time of the year. In summer they’re very active, and we knew there would be sightings.’

‘Dozens!’ screeched Pixie. ‘But aren’t they poisonous?’

‘Deadly, actually,’ said Rebecca. ‘Come on. You all need to get going before you get penalised for slow play. The snake isn’t going to follow you.’

‘Slow play? You’ve got to be joking!’ scoffed Pixie.

Sue Barker and her caddie stopped and looked back expectantly.

While Rebecca spoke to an official about getting the snake catcher, she saw Pixie’s caddie take her aside. Whatever the caddie was saying to Pixie, it didn’t appear to calm her down. Rebecca couldn’t hear what the caddie was saying, but she could hear Pixie’s shrill reply. ‘This is crap. My life shouldn’t be in danger playing golf. The organisers should have captured these damn snakes before the tournament.’

Rebecca stifled a laugh and thought, *This is Australia, lady. Snakes are part of the deal.*

But it appeared the snake had unsettled Pixie. Rebecca thought that Pixie's anger was ramping up rather than dissipating. Pixie turned back to her.

'I demand to talk to that asshole of a course director. Get him on the phone and tell him to get here now!'

'I know you've had a fright, Ms Browning, but I think you just need to play on,' said Rebecca in a calm, assertive tone.

'Don't you dare tell me what to do,' said Pixie. 'Who do you think you are? You're just a volunteer. Get the course director!'

Rebecca thought Pixie might have a point; she must remember not to overstep her authority, but it wouldn't be easy.

Rebecca dialled the number of the course director on her mobile. She thought momentarily about possibly starting further down the chain of command, but seeing how upset Pixie was and the potential for a major incident, as well as the fact that she always liked to go straight to the top, it didn't seem wise.

'Mr Hendy, Rebecca Keith here. I'm a marshal on the second tee. We have a problem. An eastern brown snake has slid across the fairway in front of the players. No one was bitten, and I've called the snake catcher. However, Pixie Browning is refusing to play on and wants you to come here now.'

'Put her on the phone,' said Hendy bluntly. Rebecca handed her mobile phone to Pixie.

Pixie launched in. 'This is bullshit. Leaving deadly snakes to slither around the course is crap.'

Rebecca couldn't hear what the course director said in response, but whatever it was didn't appease Pixie.

'That's it. I'm not playing on. I refuse to be involved in a tournament where the organisers won't do the goddamn basics!'

Pixie threw Rebecca's phone to the ground and yelled to her

caddie, 'Come on, Stacey. I'm not playing until they do something about these damn snakes.'

Rebecca watched Pixie storm off with her caddie trailing. Some in the crowd decided to boo, at which point Pixie's obsessed fan, Bruce, yelled out, 'Shut up, you idiots. Pixie's right. These snakes should have been cleared before the tournament!'

'Well, that went well,' said Rebecca under her breath as she picked up the phone. 'Are you still there, Mr Hendy?'

'Yes. Pixie Browning's disqualified herself. Tell Sue Barker and Hideko Kita to play on,' said Hendy.

By this stage Sue Barker, Hideko Kita, and their caddies had re-joined Rebecca on the tee block.

Rebecca hung up the phone and addressed the players and their caddies, 'Okay, ladies, you need to play on minus Ms Browning.'

Sue Barker looked over at Rebecca and gave her a cheeky grin before saying, 'That's golf. What a roller-coaster. This will probably get Pixie the publicity she craves.' With that, Sue and her caddie strode off down the fairway to the applause of the few spectators still near the tee block. Hideko Kita and her caddie did a shuffling run to catch up.

Penfolds



That evening, just before seven o'clock, Rebecca pulled her old BMW into the parking bay of the Hilton Hotel on Victoria Square. After golf, she had only had an hour to get ready: enough time to shower, wash and style her long blond hair, and pour herself into a slinky black cocktail dress. Her red stilettos matched her clutch and her lipstick. Sue Barker was waiting for her out the front of the hotel.

'What a day!' she said as she hopped into the front passenger seat.

'You can say that again,' replied Rebecca. 'My boss Reg asked me to file copy on Pixie Browning storming out of the open. When I said they signed me up as a volunteer marshal on the proviso that I wouldn't be covering the open as media, he went nuts.' Rebecca flicked the car's blinker on. 'What are the other lady golfers saying about it?'

'Oh, they're not surprised. Most think Pixie's done it for publicity, especially Matilda Lambert. She's apoplectic with rage. Matilda thinks Pixie should be disqualified for life. But then, she would. Matilda has a pathological hatred for Pixie. But, of course, you heard some of Matilda's dark thoughts about Pixie when you played with her in the pro-am,' said Sue.

'Sure did. Matilda left me in no doubt about what she

thought of Pixie Browning. She accused Pixie of using her sex appeal to sell herself. She was dark on Pixie posing nude for *Sports Frenzy*.’

Rebecca drove through Victoria Square and headed east down Flinders Street toward the foothills and Penfolds Magill Estate.

The media event was traditionally held on the night of the first day of play of the tournament. And while Rebecca wasn’t covering the event as a journalist, she didn’t let that stop her. She just didn’t tell Reg. The event committee invited the women golfers and the media. It was hoped that the journalists could get to know the players in a convivial atmosphere and therefore get better-informed press. Rebecca was looking forward to meeting a few more of the golfers. She had promised Sue Barker that she would introduce her to some media contacts who might be able to help her get into the media as a golf commentator after her retirement from the circuit later in the year.

‘So, when you retire from the women’s circuit, where are you planning to live? Here or in the USA?’ asked Rebecca.

‘Oh, I’m coming home to Australia, and I hope to base myself in my old hometown of Adelaide. I figure if I get a job in the media requiring me to go to tournaments in Asia, the USA, and Australia, it’s just as easy to commute from Adelaide as anywhere else in Australia. Although I may need to keep my home in Florida as a base for the US golfing season.’

Rebecca pulled into Magill Estate, the home of Penfolds wines, driving through the few hectares of vineyard to get to the restaurant. These innocuous vines were shiraz that contributed to Penfolds Grange.

As they pulled up, the soft light of the setting sun bathed the bluestone, glass, steel, and corrugated-iron buildings. The

fire-engine-red stone mouldings around the windows stood out and the red Penfolds lettering on the towering smokestack appeared to pop as if three-dimensional.

Sue and Rebecca climbed out of the car and for a few moments stood looking over the mass of green vines, heavily laden with grapes. Harvest was only days away. The green leaves, purple grapes, and crusty-brown soil eventually gave way to a distant view of the city silhouetted against the sea on the horizon.

‘Gee, this place gets more beautiful each time I come here,’ said Sue.

‘Wait until you get inside. What they’ve done to the place is stunning.’

They walked into the tasting room. Rows of wine bottles sat in checkerboard patterns in wall racks backlit by strong white light. The blond wooden floorboards matched the wooden cabinetry, mid-century modern tables and chairs, and even the acoustically designed ceiling panels. The stone and limestone walls of the older building sat alongside the clean lines of the new glass-and-steel extension.

‘Wow,’ said Sue.

‘I told you,’ said Rebecca. ‘Pretty cool.’ She scanned the room for familiar faces.

A young man with a tray of drinks came up to them. After discovering the red wine was a 2012 Max’s cabernet sauvignon, Rebecca eagerly grabbed a glass. She was shocked at Sue opting for a glass of mineral water.

‘Surely one glass of wine won’t hurt your playing prospects tomorrow?’

‘There’s one thing you learn if you want to be a successful professional golfer, Rebecca, and that’s discipline. My motto is

not to drink alcohol during a tournament, and I'm sticking to it. It won't be for much longer.'

The room was already crowded with journalists, golfers, and the inevitable hangers-on. Rebecca didn't classify herself in the latter category, even though she wasn't a professional golfer and, on this occasion, wasn't an accredited journalist for the event.

She saw a sports journalist from the *Australian* talking to a rather handsome man and a woman who looked to be of Japanese origin. Rebecca grabbed Sue by the elbow and walked over.

'Randall,' she almost shouted, both to be heard over the din and to grab attention. 'You know Sue Barker, of course?'

'Of course,' said Randall. 'Let me introduce you to Walter Mildren, an executive with ESPN, and Keiko Takahashi. Keiko is an official from the sponsor of the Women's Open, the Handa Group. Walter and Keiko, as you probably already know, this is Sue Barker, one of our Australian golfers.' Pointing to Rebecca, he added, 'And Rebecca Keith, a food and wine journalist at the *Advertiser*.'

Walter held out his hand to Sue.

'Pleased to meet you.'

He then turned his attention to Rebecca, his deep hazel eyes looked her up and down. Rebecca knew she looked sharp in her classic little black shift dress. Walter shook her hand but didn't let go. Eventually Rebecca pulled away so she could offer her hand to Keiko. Keiko gave a shallow bow. Rebecca was suddenly aware that Keiko was blind.

'Very pleased to meet you both.'

Keiko turned to Sue and in impeccable English said, 'It is an honour to meet you, Ms Barker. I have followed your career for

many years. Now that I have taken this role with ISPS Handa, I am honoured to meet so many of the women athletes I have admired for so long.'

Rebecca turned to Walter.

'I haven't seen an ESPN executive out here from the USA before. Thinking of expanding into the Australian market?' she asked with a cheeky grin.

'Well, actually, yes. I'm out here to start up ESPN Australia online and on Foxtel. I'm actually on the hunt for Australian commentators across a range of sports to join our new Australian-based team. Interested?'

His gaze was disconcertingly direct. Momentarily Rebecca wondered if the red wine had left a joker-like stain above her upper lip, and this, rather than her beauty, was fascinating him. She tried to lick her upper lip in a discreet way. It failed.

'Well, no, I'm not the one interested, but I know someone who is, and she would be a terrific asset to you.'

'Who?' asked Walter, smiling seductively.

Rebecca slapped Sue on the back.

'Sue Barker, of course. Sue is retiring from the circuit in a couple of months and would be perfect for you. She has it all – credibility, intelligence, access to the world's top women golfers, and she's a good broadcaster and a great writer. She ticks all the boxes.'

Walter looked at Sue and said, 'Very interesting. Very interesting indeed. We must talk, Sue.'

'Happy to,' said Sue.

Just then an almighty crash made Rebecca jump. She turned around to see a tray of drinks smashed on the floor and heard Pixie Browning before she saw her.

‘You idiot, Sol! What the hell do you think you’re doing? Can’t you talk without flailing those skinny arms around?’

‘I’m so sorry, Pixie,’ said Sol in a heavy New York accent. He grabbed a linen napkin from the waiter and attempted to dab at Pixie’s silver sequinned tube mini-dress, paying particular attention to her breasts.

‘Stop doing that!’ Pixie yelled at her manager, pushing him away. ‘You’re always ruining everything. I don’t know why I put up with you.’

Rebecca watched as Pixie stormed off with Sol Semler rushing after her.

The Adelaide-to-Grange Line



Rebecca had drunk more than she should have. When the phone alarm went off at five o'clock, she had to stop herself from flinging it across the room. She listened to the news and weather on the radio.

She couldn't face breakfast and instead spent the extra time in the shower.

It was just before seven o'clock as she walked alongside the railway tracks at Royal Adelaide, heading to her position on the second tee. The course was again bathed in a golden glow. Her footsteps left imprints on the fairway still damp from the overnight watering.

Rebecca heard the train's whistle, signalling it was about to pull off from the Seaton Park station. She could hear the ding of the boom gates. Within a couple of minutes, she saw the train in the distance as it emerged from the bushes by the fence line and started its journey alongside the fairway.

Rebecca was surprised when she heard the train's whistle again. It startled her. Something was wrong. The train only whistled as it approached walk-crossings on the golf course, and it wouldn't be approaching one for a few hundred metres. It shouldn't be sounding its whistle now, nor should it be putting on its brakes. She could tell by the screeching that the train was

stopping hard. Rebecca looked along the tracks and spotted a large red duffle-like bag sitting squarely in the train's path. There wasn't enough time to stop. She watched as the red bag was flung aside, rolled down the embankment, and came to rest just on the edge of the fairway.

Rebecca stood up and started to jog toward the train. Before she reached it, the driver jumped out of the cab and ran toward the red bag. He looked distressed. Within moments, Rebecca was standing next to him and they were both looking at a bloodied, severed arm lying a couple of metres from the torn bag. The duffle bag appeared to be made from expensive silk, embossed with what Rebecca thought was Chinese calligraphy. She was in no doubt the rest of the body was in the bag. The protruding bloodied leg was a giveaway.

'Oh my God,' moaned the train driver as he lowered himself to a crouch on the ground, resting his head in his hands.

Rebecca was pretty sure whoever was in the bag was dead, but she needed to know for certain. She walked up to it, undid the drawstring at the top, and gently lowered the silk to uncover the victim's lacerated face. Rebecca stared. The glazed lifeless eyes appeared to be gazing up to the sky. Rebecca not only knew the victim was dead, she also knew who it was.

'I'll ring the police,' she said calmly. Inside, her stomach was churning.

Rebecca grabbed her mobile phone from her pocket and clicked on her favourites. She hit *Gary*.

'Hi, Rebecca,' said Gary cheerfully. 'You've caught me just before a workout. I've been meaning to call you but I've been flat out.'

'Gary,' Rebecca interrupted. 'This isn't a social call.' She left

a couple of seconds of silence, gathering her thoughts before continuing. ‘There’s a dead woman. I’m at Royal Adelaide Golf Course volunteering as a marshal at the Women’s Australian Open. The body is in a red silk bag. It was on the railway tracks and has been hit by a passenger train. I don’t know if she was alive before the train hit her, but she certainly isn’t now.’ Rebecca hesitated before adding, ‘It’s Pixie Browning. The dead woman is Pixie Browning, a professional golfer from Illinois in the United States. World number eleven.’

She wasn’t sure if it mattered what ranking Pixie was but decided to add it anyway. She knew she would include the ranking in the story she was about to write.

Gary replied in a measured tone.

‘Okay, Rebecca. Stay where you are. Don’t let anyone touch anything. Don’t let anyone leave. I’ll send some patrol cars now, and I’ll be there in twenty minutes with forensics. Stay calm.’

Rebecca knew that, despite the gruesome scene, Detective Chief Inspector Gary Jarvie would not be shocked when he arrived. She knew he was used to seeing gruesome scenes, but she was concerned it would catch up with him one day. She knew it would catch up with her one day. For now, she had to push the panic down and get on with it. She had a job to do, just like Gary.

Rebecca turned to the train driver.

‘The police are on their way.’ Placing her hand on his shoulder, she said gently, ‘Why don’t you come back to the train? You need to settle the passengers and let them know the police will be here soon. You should also contact your manager. Let him know what’s happened.’ Rebecca helped the driver to his feet and led him back to the train. That done, she rang the tournament manager, Philip Hendy.

‘Bloody hell!’

Rebecca had to move the phone from her ear.

‘What the hell are we going to do?’ demanded Philip.

Rebecca restrained herself from saying, *How about doing what you are paid to do and show some leadership?*

‘I suggest you cancel today’s play. The police will not allow anyone to get near this fairway today and possibly for a few days. You need to consider moving the rest of the tournament or cancelling it completely,’ said Rebecca.

Hendy gave what sounded to Rebecca like a nervous clearing of the throat before saying in a more composed and authoritative manner, ‘Okay. I need to shut this place down before we have thousands of spectators to deal with. I’ll get my staff onto it immediately. And I’ll see you in a couple of minutes.’

Rebecca knew that her next call had to be to Reg. She knew she was no longer on leave and that once again she would be taken off the majority of her duties as food and wine editor to work on this murder case. It was déjà vu. It was only a few months since the Popeye Murder had consumed her life.

‘Hello,’ came the grumpy greeting. ‘Why are you calling me so early when you’re on leave?’

‘Reg, trust me, you want to take this call.’ She could tell by his silence that she had his attention. ‘I’m standing on the second fairway at Royal Adelaide, in front of the dismembered body of professional American golfer Pixie Browning. She’s been hit by the Grange-to-Adelaide train. I saw it happen. Police are on their way.’

‘Is she dead?’ asked Reg.

‘Of course she’s bloody well dead.’

‘Fantastic!’ cried Reg.

'I beg your pardon,' said Rebecca, trying to sound shocked despite knowing this was exactly the response her news would elicit.

'*Blood on the Tracks!* Brilliant headline! How soon can you give me three pars?' Reg uttered breathlessly. 'We need to get this online now. And I'll need three pars every fifteen minutes. We have to own this story. I'll get a photographer down there ASAP.'

'I'm on it already,' said Rebecca, smiling to herself at Reg's ability to come up with a great headline within seconds. 'You'll have the first copy within a couple of minutes. I'll send it as a text. I'll also text you a couple of photos I've taken with my phone.'

Rebecca could see golf carts filled with officials, including Philip Hendy, coming toward her, and she heard sirens in the distance. She knew she had to send the photos and text quickly.