



THE CASE OF THE ROAD HOLE BUNKER

Excerpt

The fog threatened to chill my lungs, so I lit a cigarette as I hurried to the sea wall once more. It had settled in for a long spell, and there was no traffic on the road. Locals hereabouts learn fast that it pays to be tucked up safe and warm when the North Sea fog rolls in. For one thing it's cold, and for another, tourists always seem surprised by it and lose their ability to drive. The local traffic cops hate the fog; it always leads to a spate of minor traffic calls, arguments and recriminations. Private Investigators love the stuff; it gives us a chance to snoop and look mysterious at the same time.

I kept walking down past the car parks to the shore. At this point I started heading off at ninety degrees to my eventual destination. The Seventeenth green is in easy reach by the path down the west side of the Eighteenth, the 'road' that gives the hole its name. But if this turned out to be a set up I wasn't stupid enough to make it easy for them. I headed down to the sea road and across the burn to the bus park at the far end of the first hole.

There was no one around. I could have been alone in the whole world and things couldn't have been any quieter. I stood for a minute, smoking down the cigarette before stubbing it out on the gravel. I checked there was no one watching, and clambered over the security fence and cut back through the rough, past the Second tee and across the Second fairway.

The fog brought the visibility down to ten yards, less in places. I wasn't worried. As teenagers we'd spent many an evening on the Old Course, sitting in the bunkers drinking, smoking and trying to persuade the local lassies to go all the way with us. No matter that we never managed the last bit; the memories of summer nights spent under starry skies were still with me. Back then I could probably have walked the course blindfold, so a bit of fog didn't bother me now.

It seemed I was the only one stupid enough to be out on a night like this. There wasn't even the screech of gulls to keep me company as I crossed onto the Seventeenth fairway.

I approached the green from the north. The noise of a vehicle cut through the fog, not too far away, but I couldn't tell from which direction, and the sound of the engine was soon lost in the night.

I stopped well short of the green and checked the time on my pocket-watch. The fog had just enough luminosity for me to read the face and see it was just short of the hour. If something was going down, it would happen soon. Adrenaline jolted through me, telling me to go charging off in the opposite direction. I focused on my client, and kept going.

Feeling slightly foolish I paced forward, keeping to the short fairway, up the little incline towards the green. I moved slowly, straining for the slightest sound. But there was no noise; there was just the damp, grey, fog that enveloped me like a blanket. I walked up onto the green itself; the highest point at this part of the course, and tried to peer through the gloom. All I could see was the darker patch in the fog where the ground fell away into the road hole bunker; a deep sand trap that had caught many professional golfers over the years.

I remembered the fuss during one of the Opens when someone, a man worth many millions of pounds, had been humiliated when his ball had gone into this trap and he'd been unable to play it out for stroke after stroke as he got redder and redder and his ball got plugged ever deeper in the sand. That was the image I had in my mind of this hole, but that image was about to be changed.

I'd been right about the set-up; the trap had caught another American. His sister had described him pretty accurately, although she hadn't mentioned that he might be a bit pale.

Hank Courtney lay there, face-up, in the bunker, dead eyes staring at me accusingly. The fine blonde hair above his left ear was matted with blood, but that wasn't what had killed him.

That would be the large knife sticking out of his chest.

It is a routine case for PI John Royle - until a body turns up in the Road Hole Bunker at the 17th on the Old Course at St Andrews. Soon he's up to his ears in bodies and red herrings.

The trail takes him through the social strata of town and gown,

And soon Royle is fighting, to preserve the history, and the very future, of the old course itself.

