

# CHAPTER 18

**T**wo geese gracefully glide across the pond, their pristine white feathers contrasting against the mirror-like surface of the water, reflecting the two cumulus clouds in the sky and the vibrant green canopy of trees. Golden rays of sunlight filter through the leaves, casting dappled shadows on the lily pads and illuminating the delicate ripples in their wake, while the air hums with the gentle symphony of rustling leaves and distant birds chirping. These sounds are music to Gus's ears as he peacefully sits on the bench with his fishing line awaiting a bite from a small fish. This image looks like a masterpiece painted by an artist that is on sale in a gallery. Beautiful and peaceful Sundays like this are why Gus moved to Port Washington.

The two geese get spooked by the ripple of a fish getting hooked on Gus's line and flock away. The lily pads spread apart as the fish wiggles. Gus stands up with his rod and tries as hard as he can to reel it in despite feeling a stabbing sensation in his shoulder from the fall earlier that morning.

Pete is parking his car uphill from the pond and sees Gus struggling with the fish. This brings a smile to Pete's face as this is the type of companionship he has been seeking from somebody on Long Island for years. He grabs the rod from his trunk and jogs down to greet him.

Pete is watching Gus battle the fish. His instinct is to help him, but after getting to know Gus briefly last night, he knows how vital pride is to him. Instead of sprinting over to bring in the fish together, he decides to cheer him on from the distance.

"Hey, Gus! You got this! Bring it in!"

Still pulling his rod, Gus is startled by Pete's presence. Now that there is an audience, Gus's inner performer kicks in, and so does his adrenaline. He takes a big step back and yanks the rod back as hard as possible. A wail emerges from him, and the fish lands on the shore.

Gus is exhausted. Pete walks over and is smiling ear to ear.

"Wow! Gus, that was impressive! Good job, man. You going to keep it?"

Gus looks up at him and has no idea who Pete is. He puts the rod down on the ground, and the fish is flopping around, still hooked to the line. He starts to cough repeatedly and then looks over to Pete. "That's just a baby," he says. "Toss her back in for me. I gotta sit down, kid."

Pete walks over, takes the fish off the hook, and gently puts it back in the water. Pete finds it funny that Gus called the baby fish a "she" when referring to it. Pete sits down on the bench next to Gus. As Gus continues hacking up another lung, Pete picks up Gus's water bottle off the ground and suggests he take a sip.

Gus takes a deep breath, which feels like breathing through a straw, and grabs his water bottle from Pete, gulping instantly. As the water helps ease his cough, all the memories from last night rush back to him like the bulls in the streets of Spain. He remembers meeting Pete. He recalls the Yankees winning. He still has a hatred for Scott. Gus remembers that Pete got him home safely. Gus is in wonderment