

Melanie watched the battle-scarred Lincoln pull into the lot and turn around. The driver backed up against the fence and parked, hood ornament aimed at the gate. An overweight man with his hair combed back and a rumpled suit opened the door and struggled to get both feet on the ground. With considerable effort, he pushed himself to a standing position and headed toward the office, slamming the car door behind him.

He walked funny. Melanie started analyzing it. By the time he reached the door, she had a theory. He walked with his feet splayed out. One foot seemed floppy, and the leg on that side moved awkwardly. If she had to guess, she'd say hamstring.

At first Melanie felt a twinge of sympathy. Carrying extra weight was hard enough. Then she realized he had packed on the weight in spite of his bum leg. Bad idea. She swiveled her chair to face the door. She watched through the window as he hobbled up the steps and shouldered his way into the office. She popped her gum at him when he entered.

"How's your golf game?" she asked.

He looked around with a sniff of disgust.

"I don't play games," he snarled. "Where's Junior?"

"Too bad. All we do here is play games. It's a laugh a minute," Melanie said.

She aimed her thumb over her shoulder and blew bubbles at the guy as he passed. She was pretty sure nobody but a lawyer would come out here. This had to be the guy folks called Tiltin' Stilton.