

5-2013

# Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club

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**MOSSY BOTTOM GOLF AND HUNT CLUB**

MOSSY BOTTOM GOLF AND HUNT CLUB

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By

Andrew J. Albertson  
University of Mississippi  
Bachelor of Arts in English, 1999

May 2013  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

This is the story of Greg Goforth and Rick Hale, the owner and director of golf, respectively, of the Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club. Greg and Rick work together through many comic mishaps in attempt to bring the 2015 U.S. Open to Mossy Bottom, Mississippi.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I have been fortunate to learn from , and have my life enriched by, a remarkable group of teachers, including Father George Tribou and Professors Molly Giles, Don Harington, John Duval, Ellen Gilchrist, and Barry Hannah. My deepest thanks go to Professor Skip Hays for his many years of friendship, guidance, support, and inspiration.

I am grateful for the support of my friends at the School of Law, Deans Stacy Leeds, Cyndi Nance, and Steve Sheppard.

My family has been a constant source of inspiration and joy. Thank you to my mother and father. My unending love and gratitude to Kristen, Caroline, and Andrew.

## **DEDICATION**

For my family.

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## Putting Green

David Fay's Long Island compound, just five minutes drive from Shinnecock Hills, is decorated in a nautical theme. The white oak paneling in the dining room was reclaimed from a schooner downed ninety years ago, and a Fitz Hugh Lane hangs over the hearth. There's an eight-foot bronze sculpture of a whale in the guest cottage.

Two years ago, Mrs. Fay had the house done in faux French Quarter, going so far as to have six live oaks – complete with Spanish moss and colored bottles on the branches – shipped from Natchez, Mississippi, and planted to line the driveway. And it seems like only yesterday came the disastrous experiment with pastels and Miami modern.

In all, there have been five redecorations in nine years – hardly noteworthy in the Fays' social circle but for the fact they've never done their home in what might simply be called “golf.” Though many of their friends have dining rooms draped in tartan and garages made-over into putting greens, the only room in the Fays' you'll find so much as a sand wedge is David Fay's study.

It's an arrangement the couple settled on years ago when David said, “Do what you want with the house, but my room is off-limits.” Mrs. Fay was only too happy to comply, and as the current décor elsewhere leaves him a little seasick, David Fay spends most of his time in the study.

It is in this study David Fay now sits in a nutmeg brown leather executive chair – a gift from Arnold Palmer on behalf of the Bay Hill Club and Lodge – behind an antique mahogany desk bequeathed to him years ago by his friends at the Royal and Ancient in St. Andrews. On the

wall above him is a framed Augusta National Green Jacket. The Fays' golden retriever, Nicklaus, teethes on a gutta percha golf ball.

The Fays' longtime helper Carmencita knocks gingerly at the door and brings in a tray holding a pitcher of fresh-squeezed lemonade, a silver bucket filled with ice, cocktail napkins, and a highball glass. With her free hand she clears a spot on the desk and leaves the tray, shuffling out and nodding "gracias" to David Fay.

The rest of the desk is a disaster. Boxes and manila envelopes swamp its worn leather top and more mail spills onto the Persian rug. David Fay pours himself a glass of lemonade, takes a sip, loosens his bow tie, and reads the label on the first package:

David Fay  
Executive Director  
United States Golf Association

Despite all the years he has held his, the most rarefied, title in the golf world he still experiences a sudden warm pleasure every time he sees his name printed next to the words "Executive Director." The rush of such a moment now past, he rips off the packing tape with surprising vigor for a slight man. Inside the box are golf shirts, wind breakers, visors, and an auburn sport coat. Each piece of clothing is adorned with a tiny, embroidered swallow. There's also a handwritten letter from the president of the Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa. This being July 1<sup>st</sup>, David Fay doesn't bother to read the note. He knows it will ask the same question that every other handwritten letter in every other gift box he'll receive over the next month will ask:

“May we (fill in name of country club) have the honor of hosting the 2015 United States Open Championship?”

After a few hours and several dozen such care packages, David Fay is exhausted. His fingernails are split and his teeth ache from tearing out staples and peeling away tape. Scattered around the desk are golf clubs of every make and loft; clothing for sun, rain, and sleet – all with the logos of their respective courses; fifty-eight professionally produced DVDs; autographed photos of sports stars along with front row tickets to their sporting events; countless handwritten, heartfelt letters from presidents of country clubs and heads of state; and other enticements too numerous to mention.

David Fay’s pitcher of lemonade is empty. He heaves himself out of the chair and lies down on the couch for a nap.

He’s disturbed by Nicklaus, who’s whining and pawing and chewing at something wedged under the desk. David Fay rolls off the couch and crawls over. He dislodges the object of Nicklaus’ agitation – a huge, oblong envelope fashioned out of duct tape and covered with Nicklaus’ slobber. The envelope is addressed in smudged Sharpie to “Davey Fay.” David shakes the envelope. It makes a dull, thudding sound. Reenergized by the prospect of more gifts he rips this last parcel open and finds a camouflage duck cap, complete with ear flaps. There’s another, smaller object, one David Fay doesn’t recognize. It’s a turkey call, hand-carved with the words:

WE’LL SEE Y’ ALL AT  
MOSSY BOTTOM GOLF AND HUNT CLUB  
MOSSY BOTTOM, MISSISSIPPI  
U.S. OPEN 2015

## Number One: Last Easy

Dawn is still an hour off at the Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club in Mossy Bottom, Mississippi, but its rolling hills and hardwood forests are alive with the light tread of deer and wild turkey and hares. Hawks circle, owls hoot, toads croak...moccasins slither and swim languorously through ditches black and knee-high with rainwater. A kangaroo hops to his den off the fourteenth fairway.

Up two hills from the den and over a gar pond to the first hole – named Last Easy – sits a redbrick home, just beyond the bunker guarding the dogleg left. In its master bedroom, a man sleeps in a queen-sized bed with his wife, five-month-old daughter, and ten-year-old mutt. They all snore, their noses stuffed by allergies to fresh-cut grass.

High above them, a rocket screams and detonates. Its red explosion lights up the sky and illuminates the face of the man in the house on the first hole. The man's face, in that red instant, is childlike – chubby cheeks and drooling mouth. He looks like a hairier version of the baby asleep beside him. A second later, the concussive sound of the explosion reaches his ears and shakes the windowpane.

“God almighty,” says Rick Hale, Director of Golf at Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club. There's no anxiety or annoyance in his voice, just resignation. He sits up in bed, sees his wife and daughter still sleeping, heaves his legs over the side, and throws on a pair of khakis. The mutt, Brisket, whines and thinks better of getting up with him.

Meanwhile, the sky sparkles in greens and golds and blues. It's like the Fourth of July out there, but a week early – a steady stream of Roman candles, crackling phantom balls, silver salutes, and whistling busters. Mossy Bottom's wildlife – the deer, the snakes, the fowl – observe

the spectacle from the shadows. They've come to look forward to this, the way every morning at five o'clock sharp the night is eviscerated.

For Rick Hale, the fireworks display means it time to go to work. For Merle, eighty-one-year-old cart boy and explosives expert, there's simply no better way to welcome the day than with some heavy munitions.

\* \* \*

Rick walks gingerly, barefoot, across his gravel driveway. Naked from the waist up, he curses himself for leaving his flip-flops at the clubhouse and for letting himself go so long that his gut spills over the front of his khakis. Passing by his family's old Camry, he climbs into his personal golf cart, #3, the one Merle customized by ripping out the speed governor.

This is Rick's favorite time of day. The drive from his home to the clubhouse takes less than three minutes (five in a normal cart), and then it's another blissful hour before Adcock shows up. Rick parks his cart by the door to the clubhouse's kitchen, hops out, enters the code to the security system (his daughter Molly's birthday), starts the coffee maker, and shuffles upstairs to the Member's Room to take a shower.

For this hour, he is king. He makes liberal use of the complimentary soap, shaving cream, aftershave, and talcum powder meant for the members. He tiptoes back downstairs to the storage closet – he's the only person who has a key – and opens the door. Inside are more golf shirts and sports slacks that a man could wear in two lifetimes. Each garment is meticulously ironed and situated with care on a maple hanger. The clothes are his secret passion, a passion he keeps from his wife and friends but shares with his colleagues, the peculiar brand of fashionista known as the club pro.

He selects a salmon-colored pique polo by Cutter and Buck and black poly-cotton, double-pleat Polo slacks. He ties it all together with a woven leather belt with nickel buckle and Dry Joy saddle shoes.

Finally dressed, Rick swings by the kitchen for a cup of coffee and heads to the pro shop at the front of the clubhouse. Dawn is only minutes away. Rick switches on the lights, boots up the computer, and unlocks the front door.

At precisely six a.m., the automatic front gate to the club swings open, and two vehicles enter. Rick has a scorecard and pencil ready for the two men in the green Buick sedan and a new magazine for Adcock, the enormous man in the F-150.

\* \* \*

A little-traveled path winds past the cart building, through a thicket of live oaks, and spirals down, down until it spills out onto a marsh. On a bluff overlooking the marsh are a parking lot and a fiberglass-green maintenance shed. This is where Mossy Bottom's grounds crew gathers every morning at five, reeking of Heaven Hill and Milwaukee's Best. Since there's a bunk room in the maintenance shed, most of the crew never leave. They mow the fairways, set the pins, move the tee markers. Afterwards, they start drinking. Then they joyride on their carts and ATVs through the hidden paths they've cut throughout Mossy Bottom. Sometimes they wake up in the shed, sometimes in town, sometimes out in the woods.

Dale, Luther, Dale's son Dwight, Pablo, and Mex are usually very relaxed guys, set in their ways and content with life. For the past several days, though, they've been on edge, semi-sober, and a little pissed off. They've spent extra time on the course, installing French drains at the wet spot on number nine and setting up deer blinds behind the tee at sixteen.

It's Thursday. And since last Sunday, Mr. Goforth's been in the parking lot.

More specifically, Mr. Goforth's gargantuan RV – bought at a cut rate from “Long Gone” Don Manly during his lean, un-sponsored years – is parked right outside the shed. Mr. Goforth has a first name – Greg – but the guys on the greens crew don't know it. They only know him as “Mr. Goforth,” or “Bossman,” or, when he's out of earshot, “Fucker.”

Despite the early hour, the RV is rocking. The grounds crew can hear just about every cuss word in the ongoing fight between Greg and his wife, Sharon.

“You dumb ass! You stupid fucker!” she screams.

“Heh,” says Dwight. “She don't take to him neither.” The other guys chuckle, even Mex, who doesn't understand much English.

“How the hell do you mean to explain that losing \$12,000 a month's not that bad?” says Sharon.

“We're getting market share, sweetie. Word's getting out,” says Greg.

“Market share? There is no market in Mossy Bottom, idiot!”

“Independent research shows we're becoming a destination resort.”

“Independent research?”

“Well, not actual research, but I've heard people in Memphis are talking about the club. They say we're the next Pinehurst.”

“That's it! You ignorant, stubborn moron. I'm going. I'm taking the kids. Don't bother coming home until you're turning a profit or you unload this money pit on some other half-wit.”

Sharon bursts out of the RV with the Goforths' twin daughters, eyes glued to their Game Boys, following close behind. Seeing the grounds crew there making no effort to hide they'd been listening, Sharon snorts loudly and drags the kids to the Yukon. She peels out, spraying gravel against the side of the RV.

“I wouldn’t let my woman talk at me like that, nope,” says Dale.

“That’s why you ain’t got a woman,” says Luther.

“Luther’s talking the truth, Daddy. Momma done left ten years ago,” says Dwight.

“Shut up, fucker,” says Dale.

Mex laughs. If there’s one word he’s learned through extreme repetition, it’s “fucker.”

\* \* \*

About a decade ago, dozens of national publications hailed Oxford, Mississippi, as a Mecca for retirees. According to census data, twenty-seven retirees bought into it. Two of them, Mark Torgesen and Gil Peters, make the half-hour drive north up Highway 7 every morning to play golf at Mossy Bottom. The weather is never a factor – they’ve booked and showed up for a 6:30 tee time each day for three years running, save Christmas and Easter. A hailstorm in north Mississippi still beats winter in their former home of Hibbing, Minnesota. It actually beats most of the spring and fall, too.

Rick wishes every golfer could be like Torgesen and Peters. In fact, outside his daughter Molly, they’re the only people he knows who don’t annoy the hell out of him. For these past three years, they’ve eased Rick into daily human interaction, and they’ve never complained about the greens. Conversation is simple, pleasant, and so consistent it’s like they’re following a script.

Today’s no different. Torgesen and Peters come through the front door with broad smiles on their faces.

“Good morning to you, Rick,” says Peters, a small man with a waxed red mustache and matching red sock cap.

“Great weather!” says Torgesen. He’s small, too, but his mustache is silver. As always, he wears a polo shirt with a Golden Gopher stitched on the chest, and khaki shorts.

“Mr. Peters. Mr. Torgesen,” says Rick with genuine affection. “We’ve got a pot of coffee back in the kitchen. Help yourselves.”

“Thank you, Rick. Don’t mind if I do,” says Peters.

“Are we ok for 6:30?” says Torgesen.

“You can tee off early if you want. Let me know if anyone holds you up.”

“Hah! Good one, Rick! Did you hear that Peters? Rick says to let him know if anyone holds us up! Would you be a pal and bring a coffee for me? I’ll load the cart.”

And off they go. Their eighteen-hole round will take just over an hour-and-a-half – about a third of the time it takes most golfers to play a round – and Rick won’t see them again until the next morning. It’s like heaven.

But Rick’s contentment is always short-lived. As soon as the Minnesotans head to the first tee, Hank Adcock shuts off his truck and trudges to the clubhouse. He’s one of the mid-South’s most successful building contractors, and he’s roughly the size of Torgesen and Peters combined. This morning he’s dressed in sweatpants and a pit-stained nightshirt, screen printed with “PROPERTY OF OLE MISS ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT XXL.” He barely fits in either one.

“Fuck, it’s cold out there.”

“Mr. Adcock.” Rick puts special emphasis on the second half of his name. “It’s already eighty degrees outside.”

“Whatever. The girls clean the shitter yet?” asks Adcock.

“They clean it every night.”

“And I’m Calvin Peete. What you got for me?”

“Latest issue of Veranda.”

“What?”

“Veranda. My wife subscribes. This one’s on decorative sconces.”

“Jesus H. Christ. What about a golf magazine?”

“You’ve read them all. Twice.”

“Fine. Hand it over. But this is bullshit.”

Adcock grabs the magazine and heads upstairs to the Members’ Room, where he’ll remain for a while. It’s been this way since he wed his second wife, a former exotic dancer at Platinum Plus in Memphis. Even though they’ve been married for over a year, he can’t bear the thought of her knowing he has irritable bowels, an affliction his first wife never grew tired of moaning about. So Adcock does what he considers the logical thing and makes the forty-five minute drive down from Memphis every morning to relieve himself in comfort.

Normally Rick would find something to break at this point. His office is littered the snapped shafts of countless old putters and lob wedges. But not today. No matter how much Adcock condescends to him, Rick promises himself he will keep his head. Because today’s his chance to make big money. Long Gone, Willie, and Lance are coming to play Mossy Bottom.

## Number Two: Luther's Nose

The second hole at Mossy Bottom is a par four measuring 391 yards from the tips. Most players take a 3-wood off the tee, since the fairway's narrow and the rough is deep. The hole gets its name, Luther's Nose, from Luther Goforth of the Mossy Bottom grounds crew. Luther's a fifty-two year-old black man with a round belly, a Roman nose, and a graying Afro that bubbles from under his salt-stained Memphis Tigers cap like the head on a pint of Guinness. Luther inherited his nose and his last name from one of the region's oldest white families. He's also Greg Goforth's cousin.

\* \* \*

There's a corny old golfer's joke, repeated more times than the God and Jack Nicklaus one, that is told when the tees are back, the pins are tucked behind bunkers, and the greens are rolling fast. No one bothers to tell the whole joke anymore – the punch line suffices. "Looks like the greens keeper found his wife in bed with the milkman!"

There is more truth to the joke than most people know. Golf course maintenance crews tend to be poorly paid by their employers and underappreciated, if not outright despised, by the golfers they serve. Think about it – your average golfer has paid \$75 for an average round. He's been stuck at his desk all week and just last night his boss tasked him with developing a mission statement and list of best practices for his division, to be handed in by Wednesday noon. His wife insists on buying organic food even though it costs twice as much as regular food, and it all tastes like kidney beans. His calf hurts, but he doesn't remember tweaking it. He only sees his college buddies about three times a year, and today they're meeting at the golf course.

In short, he's really been looking forward to this round of golf, and he does not want his tee shot held up because some guy's mowing the fairway. I mean, that fairway should've been mowed before he ever got there, right? So, he goes ahead and tees off, sending his ball whizzing right by the grounds crew member's head at ninety miles per hour.

The greens keeper – that guy out on the industrial riding mower – doesn't know anything about the golfer's job or wife or friends. He does know what it feels like to be hit with a golf ball, though, and it hurts. It can kill you. And now that he's narrowly avoided a concussion, he doesn't care about the golfer or his job or his wife. He is righteously pissed. At golfers. At golf. And, sadly, he is not alone. It is a curious irony, and one that is almost universal: greens crews fucking hate golfers.

However, the greens crews are not powerless. In fact, they wield near-absolute power over golfers, club pros, and course owners. They control the condition of the course. They can let the rough grow to ankle length, and, all of a sudden, foursomes are losing a couple balls per hole, and the average round takes five-and-a-half hours. They can shave the greens and “forget” to water them. Next thing you know, your golfers are putting on table tops and breaking clubs over their knees.

In this way, the grounds crews assert their will and voice their displeasure.

At Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club, the members still talk in hushed tones about the day Dale, head greens keeper, left work early and came home to find his wife in bed with another man (not the milkman – a local alderman). Rumor has it that Dale didn't say a thing. He grabbed a Little Debbie honey bun from the cupboard and headed back to Mossy Bottom. He was back on the course before anyone besides Torgesen and Peters.

That day no one, not even Rick, broke ninety. The old timers swear they could hear a mad cackle emanating from the trees – with each ball that landed on the green and somehow ended up in the pond, with every sand wedge scarred by a buried bit of gravel, with every sideways bounce that shot balls into the snaky woods.

\* \* \*

Rick is going through a checklist scribbled in pencil on the yellow legal pad he carries everywhere when he's on the clock.

- Open up shop, check
- Coffee for MN guys, check
- Chick mag for Adcock, check
- Tee times sheet for Jason, check
- Make sure pins are set

Rick grabs his walkie talkie off its charging dock and switches it to channel two.

“Luther, you read me?”

Silence.

“Luther, what's the status on the pins? You done yet?”

Silence.

“Goddammit, Luther. Wake up and get your ass to the pro shop!”

Some dull moaning emanates from the walkie talkie.

“Get up here!”

“I'm comin'.” Rick thinks he catches a mumbled “asshole” before Luther signs off.

A few minutes later Luther comes stumbling through the front door. His eyes are bloodshot in the extreme and his Memphis cap is askew. He walks into the pro shop, sits down on the floor, and rubs his temples.

“Dammit, Luther, you know today’s a big day,” says Rick. “I got my money game in an hour, and we’ve got 70 rounds booked. If it wasn’t for Greg, I’d...”

“What?” says Luther, suddenly alert and staring daggers at Rick. “Go ahead and say it. You’d shoot me. You’d shoot me dead and hide my bones in a swamp.”

It’s Rick’s turn to stare. He takes a few seconds to regroup.

“No, Luther, damn,” he says. “I was going to say I’d suspend you for a week without pay. Not shoot you. Please go easy on the Heaven Hill. Now get out there and set the pins. Torgesen and Peters are already out there, so you’ll have to start on one.”

“You’d shoot me if you could, but you know I’s watching and you know I’d kick yo’ ass before you got me in yo’ sights.”

“You are certifiable,” sighs Rick. “Now set the damn pins! I’ve got a lot riding on today.”

“Yeah, I’ll set ‘em,” says Luther. “That’s all you want. Set some good pins. All you ever see in me is the guy sets the pins.”

“No, I see the drunk ass whose job it is to set the pins but who’s passed out half the time. Please go away.”

Luther rolls over onto his side and pulls himself up by the rain shirt display. He mumbles an unbroken string of curses on his way out the door and heads to his ATV. From the window, Rick watches Luther take a giant swig of some unholy looking pink drink in a forty-four ounce plastic cup.

After handing over the pro shop to the assistant pro, Jason, and greeting Torgesen and Peters as they make the turn in just under 40 minutes, Rick stuffs his pockets with a handful of tees and a couple pennies for ball marks. Adcock comes waddling through the shop, finally finished with the bathroom. He stops and looks Rick over and says, “Try not to lose your ass, pro.” Then he’s out the door and in his truck and back off to Memphis.

Rick does his breathing exercises, then grabs his cart and points it in the direction of the practice range. All he has to do is golf, the one thing he knows down-deep he can do, and at the end of the round he’ll be rewarded with thousands of dollars. Everything’s been arranged. The next foursome won’t tee off until Rick and his group are on the fifth hole.

Once he gets to the practice range, he starts negotiating the day’s bets with Willie, Long Gone, and Lance. He watches Long Gone and Willie hit range balls. Long Gone looks bad, really bad. Since getting booted from the Tour, giving up drinking, and divorcing his third wife, he’s put on some serious weight and upped his cigarette smoking. Between drags, he’s barely able to take a full swing. Even so, his drives look to be averaging 310 yards a pop. They’ve got a nasty slice on the end of them, though, that balloon the shots fifty yards off-target.

Willie looks bad, too, but he always looks bad. It’s his thing. His Duck Head khakis are faded, frayed, and about four inches too short. His gut is a revelation, its fishy whiteness exposed to the sun, jutting out from between his belt and logo-less polo shirt. It’s not his clothes or his physical condition that jars onlookers, though – it’s his golf swing.

Willie draws the club back low, flat, and very slowly. At waist-level, the club shoots violently up then dips, the club head almost smacking him in the ear. The downswing is impossibly fast – the club whipping around, that monstrous belly clearing out of the way, and the

head somehow connecting with the ball. The follow-through is abrupt, a bastardized version of Arnold Palmer's.

Willie shanks a seven-iron. "Looks like it just ain't my day," Willie says to no one in particular.

"Cut that shit out, Willie," says Lance. "Rick's played with you before."

"Right," Willie says. "My bad." He makes a subtle adjustment, bends his knees a little deeper, and launches his next seven-iron 170 yards, the ball trailing off just a tad to the left.

"I can't believe you brought that low-rent hustler to my course," says Rick. "We're trying to class up the joint."

"I had to let him come – this is his last hurrah, Rick. After he won the Mid-South, his hustle dried up. He's had to go straight-and-narrow. He even made the Walker Cup."

"You're kidding," says Rick.

"No lie," says Lance. "It's all over the Internet."

"We don't get that here."

"Jesus, right. Anyway, just so we're in agreement, it's you and Long Gone versus me and Willie – pros versus amateurs," says Lance.

"I don't know, man. Long Gone looks rough."

"He's won two majors."

"That was a hundred pounds ago."

"Enough...you and Long Gone against us, \$200 a hole, automatic presses, \$500 Nassau?"

"Yeah, that sounds good," shrugs Rick.

"And you're playing me \$100 a hole, \$500 Nassau, declare presses?"

“Yes.”

“And you’re spotting me three a side,” says Lance.

“Right...wait. No, I’m not giving you strokes.”

“You’re a pro.”

“I’m a club pro.”

“Two a side,” says Lance.

“Done,” says Rick.

“I want four a side,” Willie shouts over his shoulder.

“You ain’t getting shit,” Rick shouts back.

\* \* \*

Down the cart path to the maintenance area, in the kitchen nook of the giant RV, Greg Goforth sits hunched over a stack of Excel spreadsheet printouts. His brow is wrinkled. A lock of unwashed hair hangs limp over his lazy eye. The news is grim:

June

Rounds-per-day: down, to fifty-five on weekdays and ninety-two on weekends.

Cart rentals: down twenty-one percent.

Pro shop sales: down thirty-three percent.

Membership: three cancellations, no new members.

Food and beverage: off eleven percent.

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Particularly upsetting is that this is supposed to be peak season, the coming out party for Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club. Mossy Bottom has joined the Mississippi Golf Trail, a loose alliance of upscale yet affordable public golf courses scattered across the state that promise great

golf at good prices for golf fanatics – mostly northerners – unused to paying less than three-figures for a good round of golf. Greg cut the check for \$25,000 for marketing and TV ads himself. But, so far, the golfers haven't come.

For the first time, Greg is worried about making payroll. He looks over the employee directory, searching for some fat he can trim all while shuddering to realize he just thought of his employees in such unfeeling terms:

Golf Operations and Pro Shop

Rick Hale, Director of Golf; Jason Hebert, Assistant Golf Professional; Stacy Williams, Pro Shop Services

Food, Beverage, and Events

Dina Long, Director of Marketing and Event Planning; Amanda Gillespie, Waitress; Bob Benson, Chef; Beth Ann Dawson, Beverage Cart; Mindy Chadwick, Beverage Cart

Grounds and Cart Maintenance

Dale Jenkins, Greens Keeper; Dwight Jenkins, Greens Crew; Luther Goforth, Greens Crew; Domingue "Mex" Escoto, Greens Crew; Pablo Gomez, Greens Crew; Merle Daniels, Cart Manager

Add to that the five or six high school and Ole Miss kids who are always coming or going, helping out around the cart shed, in the kitchen, and up at the register. It's a pretty lean operation.

Greg rubs his eyes, scratches his nose, clears his throat. He misses Sharon and the girls – the loneliness makes him feel like he's missed a day's worth of meals. Greg nods once, hitches himself up, and opens the door to the RV, ready to do something about it all.

### Number 3: Little Bill

Mossy Bottom's third hole is a bear, and that's not just because it's a 447 yard par four. To start with, the golfer is faced with a tee shot with a lengthy carry over a ravine filled with kudzu, scrub pines, and assorted wild bushes and weeds. If the ball happens to make it over the ravine and happens to roll out to 250 yards, the golfer next must contend with the sixty-degree dogleg right and a 200 yard approach shot down a narrowing, oak-lined fairway. No running it up either – a bunker crouches short and left of the green, and the terrain drops away sharply just over the green. To sum it all up: the drive is really tough, the approach near-impossible, short means a bogey at best, and long is dead. A good portion of the membership of Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club skips the third and pencils in a five.

Not that many people ask, but both an official and an unofficial explanation for the hole's name, Little Bill, exist. The official story is that Greg Goforth's kindergarten-aged nephew, Bill, happened upon a stack of architectural sketches Greg had made in the early stages of the course's development, and he added a hole of his own that provided the inspiration for number three. This explanation works well, as it helps justify the difficulty of the hole – only a kid who's never golfed before would dream up something this tough. Of course, Greg doesn't have a nephew named Bill, but the fabricated story is quite a bit more palatable for most than the real one.

The truth is, Greg worked and re-worked the design of Little Bill, fully cognizant of how tough it would be. The course of his dreams, the one he ended up building at Mossy Bottom, wasn't a garden-variety "anyone can play it and do well" resort track. It was envisioned as a championship caliber test of skill, modeled after the country's greatest, most celebrated courses. And though Greg had no training or education as a golf course architect, he largely succeeded in

creating a masterpiece. A student of the game and course design will find nods to Pine Valley, Winged Foot, Pinehurst Number Two, Olympic, and, above all, Augusta National. It was Greg's same devotion to the great courses that berthed Mossy Bottom's somewhat troubling slogan: "The Augusta National of the South."

All of this might lead one to conclude that the name "Little Bill" is therefore steeped in the mythology and lore of the game. One would be mistaken. After finishing his final sketch of the third hole, Greg thought it resembled nothing so much as the description Monica Lewinsky gave of President Clinton's member.

\* \* \*

The legendary gambler Jack "Treetop" Strauss is often credited with the quote, "The guy who came up with poker was bright, but the guy who invented the chip was a genius." The simple beauty and truth here are that the poker chip, a cheap disc of clay or ceramic or injection-molded plastic, allows gamblers to forget or ignore that they are risking real money. They begin thinking in terms of red, green, black, or purple chips, and not in terms of five, twenty-five, one hundred, or five hundred real dollars. In turn, they act more recklessly than they would otherwise.

Rick Hale doesn't have the chip excuse to fall back on as he fidgets and takes half-hearted practice swings on the first tee. Lance, Long Gone, and Willie are counting out stacks of hundred dollar bills in preparation for the game. Willie has his money folded over and secured with a fat rubber band. The roll is as big as Rick's fist.

Without meaning to, Rick starts adding up what he could lose if things go wrong for him today, and a lump crawls up his throat. Just as quickly as the thought rises, he tries to push it

down and let it settle somewhere. That somewhere is his stomach, where it sits like leftover meatloaf.

Long Gone tosses a tee in the air. It hits the ground, bounces a couple times, and comes to rest, pointing at Lance. Lance and Willie will have the honors to start the match.

Rick takes another practice swing, but it feels rushed, a product of his quickening breath. Another thought bubbles up, this time the much repeated and oft-butchered quote from another gambler, golfing great Lee Trevino, “A five dollar bet and only two dollars in your pocket – that’s pressure.”

The problem for Rick isn’t five dollars. It’s that he doesn’t have five thousand dollars in his pocket.

“Fuck,” Rick whispers through clenched teeth.

“You ok, hoss?” asks Lance.

“Um, yeah,” says Rick. “Just stubbed my toe.”

For the first time in some time, Rick is aware of the creeping dread he felt the night before the final round of the 1996 St. Jude’s Classic in Memphis. Going into Sunday with a two-stroke lead he felt keenly a pressure unlike any he’d felt before.

“Good luck, fellas,” Lance says.

Lance addresses his ball and lets his swing follow naturally, easily. His is not an amateur’s swing, and the shots it produces are professional grade. The ball fires off at a low trajectory and perfectly straight, hugging the right side of the fairway, at once flirting with the pond and yet never giving an observer cause to think the shot will end up anything but perfect. It comes to rest on the fairway, an easy wedge to the pin.

Willie is next. He takes an awkward, loping practice swing that unearths a clump of sod the size of his shoe.

“Willie!” shouts Lance. “We already negotiated the bets.”

“Right. Sorry.”

Willie scuttles off and replaces the divot. Then he lines up his shot, uncorks that hideous swing, and sends the ball off. It’s a long drive, but the ball’s taken the longer path up the left side of the fairway. He’ll have a bad angle and an eight-iron to the flag.

Great, thinks Rick, they’re both in the short grass. This has all the makings of a long day.

There was a time that Rick didn’t let so much of a hint of a negative thought cross his mind while he was on the golf course. In fact, there were times he approached the unspoken nirvana of serious golfers – he didn’t think at all. This had been the case over the first three rounds of the St. Jude Classic. His body was a vessel that produced the swing that led to the shots that produced a final, low score.

Long Gone steps up to the tee box and tosses his driver’s head cover to the side. He doesn’t take a practice swing. He doesn’t even take the cigarette from his lips. He takes a mighty swing that produces a sharp CRACK, and then he leans over to grab the head cover.

“Where’d it go?” says Willie.

“Don’t know,” grunts Long Gone.

Rick catches a glint at the periphery of his sight. “There it is,” he says.

The ball is impossibly high in the air and at least seventy yards to the right of the fairway. It seems destined to end up in the pond, but it keeps going, going, until it lands with a dull thud on the opposite bank.

“Is that out-of-bounds, Rick?” asks Lance.

“I’m not sure,” Rick says.

“What do you mean, you’re not sure? This is your club. You’re the pro.”

“I’ve never seen anyone hit it there before,” says Rick. “It’s not marked, so I guess it’s in play.” Not that it’ll do much good, he thinks, seeing that there’s a thicket of trees between Long Gone’s ball and the green.

It’s Rick’s turn. His opponents are in great shape, and his partner might be drinking again as bad as he looks. He’s got three hundred dollars riding on this hole, and that doesn’t even take into account the Nassaus.

\* \* \*

Greg Goforth unlocks the door to the RV and drops off the first of several armfuls of supplies he’s brought back from town. He’s got dozens of sketch pads, several sticks of charcoal and a few packs of number two pencils, erasers, beef jerky, a case of Kraft macaroni and cheese, a fridge-pack of Dr. Pepper, a head of iceberg lettuce, red plastic Dixie cups, some Worcestershire sauce, and, because he felt it’s the kind of thing he’s supposed to buy during times of crisis, a handle of Jim Beam.

He fixes himself a stout pour of the bourbon on the rocks in one of the Dixie cups and takes it to the breakfast nook. Taking a seat, he opens one of the sketchbooks and breaks off a thumb-length bit of charcoal. The first sip he takes of the Jim Beam is pure hell, and he remembers why he doesn’t drink the stuff. He grabs a Dr. Pepper and takes a giant swig. He gets up and dumps the rest of the cup down the sink and resolves to give the bottle to Luther.

Greg starts by sketching a map of the course and the surrounding property. Parking’s going to be a problem, he thinks. It’s already tight on weekends and just about unmanageable

during the Member-Guest tournament. Next issue is lodging. Mossy Bottom only has three hotels, each with about 150 rooms. They are not nice hotels.

As he continues sketching, Greg starts to confront the real issues – no one that matters has heard of Mossy Bottom, and they sure as hell couldn't tell you where it was. It's taken a few years and a boatload of money for him to come to this realization, and now that he has, Greg feels an enormous sense of clarity and relief.

What I do know for certain, thinks Greg, is that I've got one hell of a golf course. The trick is going to be getting people here.

\* \* \*

One last practice swing and Rick steps up to address the ball. He visualizes the shot: start it left-center of the fairway, give it a gentle fade, land it softly ten yards past Lance. Swing easy.

Rick draws the club back as he's done tens-of-thousands of times before – a little more quickly than most, with a bit shorter backswing than most, the club never making it to parallel with the ground. The downswing is a thing of beauty, the hips clearing, the club face square. Rick holds the follow through a little longer than maybe's necessary. No need to follow the ball with his eyes. It's going right where he wanted.

Just like that, he thinks. Remember this is an easy game.

“Woooo, look at pro,” says Willie. “I reckon we'll be paying your mortgage this month.”

“Nice shot, pards,” says Long Gone. “What you think's the quickest way to get to my ball?”

Rick smirks and feels the weight in his stomach lighten a bit, then considerably more when he rolls in an eight-footer for birdie to take a one-up lead in both individual matches and on the team bet. He's already up three hundred bucks.

\* \* \*

Three Dr. Peppers later, Greg has produced some pretty compelling drawings and the beginnings of a plan. He is convinced the plan will work, so he goes about setting it into motion.

His first stop is the closet of the RV, which Greg has converted into a gun locker. Pushing aside the shotgun, the 30.06, and the shells, he finds a handsome wood turkey call. Perfect, he thinks. He needs more to fill an envelope, though. There's a mud-splattered safari vest, a duck stamp print...nothing that says "Mossy Bottom."

Greg heads back to the bedroom, where the tartan plaid comforter lies crumpled at the foot of the double bed that's built into the back of the RV. Clothes are strewn about the floor; nothing's clean. Greg surveys the room and rubs his fingers along his jaw. He's surprised to find a solid three days' worth of stubble there – he's never been one to go more than a day without shaving. He needs a miracle, he thinks, and there it is: his lucky duck cap.

\* \* \*

Rick's got an easy eight-iron into the green at Luther's Nose. He took a five-wood off the tee for the express purpose of being the first to hit an approach into the green. He knows down deep in his bones that he'll knock his shot stiff and put the fear of god into Willie and Lance. Long Gone's ball is somewhere way off in the woods, but that's not going to matter today.

He goes into his routine, visualizing the ball high in the air, arcing downward, landing ten feet past the pin and spinning back to rest by the hole. Deep breath, exhale. Swing easy.

The ball flies exactly as planned, lands softly, and comes back like it's on a string. It's tracking at the hole, slowing to a crawl, missing by inches to the right. Rick shoots a cocky grin at Lance and taps down his divot.

"Damn, look at that," says Willie.

The ball still hasn't stopped rolling. It catches the ridge of Luther's nose and picks up speed. The ball has traveled well into the fairway by the time it comes to rest.

"Guess I learned something there," Lance says. He replaces his nine-iron with a five-iron, chokes up on the club, and hits a low, driving shot directly into the ridge. The ball pops up and over the ridge, settling fifteen feet past the cup.

Rick feels his jaw clench up. Luther's triple-cut the greens, he thinks. He's liable to be on the eighth green by now, and there's no telling what tricks he's cooked up in his gin-soaked head.

## Number Four: Malebolge

Twenty yards down the steep hill behind the third green is the first of several stepped tee boxes for the fourth hole, Malebolge. Number four is a short par-three (167 from the back tee) that drops precipitously to an expansive three-tiered green framed by two bunkers – short-left and short-right –and a pond wrapped around the back. Visually, the hole’s terrifying. The green looks tiny from the tee and the pond looms large. Greg tells folks that the tee shot put him in mind of looking down onto Hell itself, but the truth is Malebolge is picturesque and stunning, one of the most photographed holes on the course.

It’s pretty easy, too. For most golfers, it’s a relaxed wedge or nine-iron. Aim for the center of the green, far away from the sand and the water, and hope to roll in a birdie putt.

Today, Luther set a sucker’s pin – back-right, five paces from the bank of the pond. Lance and Willie have found the fat part of the green on the left, and though they don’t have much chance of birdie, par is a shoe-in.

Rick knows better than to shoot for the pin, so he aims to land the ball on the front right of the green and let it roll out. It’s a makeable, straight putt from there. He hits a solid gap wedge right where he’s aimed it. The ball pops up like it’s hit asphalt and caroms over the green and into the pond. Rick swings his club at the ground and gets the head stuck in the tee box.

Long Gone completely overshoots the green and flies his ball directly into the water.

\* \* \*

The walls of the RV are almost completely covered in sketch paper taped up at odd angles. The sketches themselves are impressive – in one, a steep grandstand envelopes the eighteenth green on three sides. In another, a shuttle bus whisks a crowd from the practice area to an off-site parking lot. Yet another shows the MetLife blimp high above the clubhouse.

Greg Goforth sits with legs crossed on the floor of the RV. His hair is sweaty and stuck to his forehead, and his fingers are stained black from the charcoal. His tongue pokes out from the left side of his mouth as he carves away at the duck call with his rusty pocket knife.

So I built it and they did not come, he thinks. But after the U.S. Open, everyone will know about Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club. It's not about the money, even though it sure would be nice to have some again. It's about getting people out on my track.

\* \* \*

Rick holds the cell phone to his ear the best he can. His hands are shaking wildly. He's not paying any attention to the babbling coming back from the assistant pro on the other end of the line.

“Just find Luther, Jason! Call Dale. Call somebody. That son-of-a-bitch was right. I am gonna shoot him.”

The match is not going well. It's taken Rick until the eighth hole to figure out not to aim at the flag on any hole, but Lance and Willie solved the puzzle long before then. Rick's trying his best not to think about how much money he's down or, especially, how he expects to pay off his debts.

“Get him to fix me a couple burgers, Rick,” calls Long Gone.

“What? Hang on, Jason,” says Rick. He holds the cell phone away from his ear and looks over at Long Gone.

“I need a couple burgers. And three cans of Diet Coke.”

“Did you get that?” says Rick.

“And lots of mayo.”

“Two burgers, mayo, and three Diet Cokes,” says Jason. “How’s Long Gone playing?”

“He’s been in his pocket five out of seven holes. He’s killing me.”

“Man, sorry,” says Jason. “Hang in there.”

“Shut up.” Rick flips the phone shut and tosses it at the golf cart.

\* \* \*

In a bunk in the cart shed, under a rust-stained quilt, Luther snores, passed out and contented.

\* \* \*

“Man, I needed that,” says Long Gone as he chokes back a belch. He reclines in the golf cart and rubs his belly. On his lap are the remnants of the burgers and sodas.

“You don’t look like you needed it,” Rick says. He holds his head in his hands and again practices the breathing exercises Tracie’s been trying to get him to use.

“I hadn’t eaten since the day before yesterday.”

Rick turns to look at him. “Seriously? How’d you manage that?”

“Just forgot, I guess. You got a dip I could bum off you?”

Rick gets up and unzips one of the dozen compartments on his professional golf bag. He fishes out what appears to be a cloth pouch for storing tees. He opens it and takes out the can of Kodiak he keeps hidden from Tracie and tosses it to Long Gone.

Up on the tenth tee box, Lance and Willie are pouring over the score card, tallying up the bets. Willie’s wearing a grin that can only be described as shit-eating.

“Friends,” says Lance, “I’m afraid this just isn’t your day. But all is not lost. Out of the goodness of our hearts, Willie and I have decided to let you both out of your responsibilities on the back nine for twenty-three hundred each.”

Rick throws up a little in his mouth.

“Nope,” says Long Gone.

“Now Long Gone,” Lance says, “I know you’ve got a Claret Jug at home, but let’s face it, you’re not exactly tearing it up today. In fact, I’ve got you down for a 52 on the front.”

“No deal,” says Long Gone. “We press.”

Rick shakes his head. “Please don’t,” he whispers. Long Gone gives him a wink in return.

## Number Five: Past the Horizon

If Greg made a mistake in the design of Mossy Bottom's golf course, that mistake is the fifth hole, Past the Horizon. It measures an obscene 636 yards from the tips, the last 155 yards an abrupt ninety-degree dogleg right, straight uphill over a quiet creek to a sharply sloping, two-tiered green. As if that's not enough, the bunker guarding the green is lined with cedar planks, an ode to the golf course architect Pete Dye. The planks are very pretty, but any ball that hits them is destined to fire off into the creek or woods or parts unknown.

Greg dubbed the hole Past the Horizon when he realized it was so long that golfers couldn't even see where they'd hit their third shot. Others have come up with their own names in the years since, likening number five to an oversized putt-putt hole. Of the multitude of candidates, Adcock's name stuck: Where's the Windmill?

Past the Horizon is an example of what happens when Greg gets a little carried away. Far-flung ideas compete with one another, shouting out over the squeaky voice of his internal editor. How else to explain a hole that requires pros to hit driver, five-wood, five-iron just to reach the green? How else to explain giving a hole a name that's straight out of a low-rent motivational poster, especially when the hole before had a nod to Dante?

None of this crosses Greg's mind as he motors up the cart path from the maintenance shed to the clubhouse on his four-wheeler. An overstuffed manila envelope is wedged down the back of his pants. Once he gets to the clubhouse, Greg leaps off the vehicle without bothering to turn it off.

Jason, the assistant pro, sits behind the register in the pro shop, thumbing a dog-eared copy of Veranda. He snaps to attention when Greg bursts through the front door and yells, “Give me the magazine!”

Jason almost throws the Veranda at him.

“Not that one! A golf magazine!”

Jason stumbles over himself to get to Rick’s office and the several years’ worth of back issues of Golf, Golf Digest, and Golfweek that are piled up in a corner. He grabs a stack of magazines and rushes them back out to Greg.

Greg scans the first few, flipping the pages wildly then tossing the magazines aside. Finally, he slows and backs himself into an armchair, never taking his eyes off the column he’s found:

#### FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

At the USGA, we are always “in the swing of things,” but come summertime, we’re in “full swing.” With a packed slate of tournaments including the U.S. Open, all eyes are on the great game of golf and its incomparable competitors.

That is why it is more important than ever that we, the members of the United States Golf Association, embody fully the lofty ideals and aspirations of the game we dearly love. The world is watching.

While there is no question that a round of golf is a great way to bring friends together, to convene with nature, and to engage in some competition, I would like to submit that there is a much more compelling reason we call ourselves golfers.

Golf calls us to be better people. Golf requires absolute honesty and integrity and a strict adherence to rules. After all, in what other sport do the players call penalties on themselves?

Sure, there are times when it would be a lot easier to move our ball from behind a tree or fib on a score, but that is not what we are all about. I believe – and I have a strong feeling all you, the membership of the USGA, agree with me – that we were meant to golf. Golf helps make us better people, and we in turn help make ours a better world.

So go out there, tee it up, and have fun! But do so with the conviction to play the game the way it is meant to be played and to live life the way it is meant to be lived.

Until next time, may your drives find the fairways, your irons the greens, and your putts the hole.

David Fay

Greg read the column three times through, each time choking up a little more. By his last read-through, he was bawling. Here, in David Fay, was a man after his own heart. Here was a man who understood the transformative power of golf. Here, surely, was a man who would see the wisdom of bringing the greatest spectacle in the world's greatest sport to North Mississippi, for, surely, this was a place that could use some bettering. He could almost hear David Fay calling out his name...Mr. Goforth, Mr. Goforth?

“Mr. Goforth, are you ok?” asks Jason.

“Of course,” says Greg, clearing his throat. “Here, read this. Tell me this isn’t about the best thing you’ve ever seen.”

Jason spends a couple minutes over the column before looking up.

“Isn’t this the one he did last year?”

Greg grabs the magazine back. “It doesn’t matter – it’s the message that matters. Don’t you see? We were chosen to bring golf to the world.”

“You and me?”

“All of us, Jason. Golfers. We’ll light the way for everyone.”

\* \* \*

While Long Gone is teeing up his ball for his drive on number fourteen, Willie is hiding behind the golf cart, stealthily applying a thin coat of Vaseline to the face of his driver. After decades of trial-and-error, Willie has determined the perfect amount of jelly to use for ensuring that all the spin is taken off the ball, which leads to dead-straight, scary long drives. The temptation is always there for him to add a little bit more Vaseline to see if he could coax another couple of yards from his shot. Willie knew from experience that the drawback to this was embarrassing and possibly life-threatening in a big gambling match – if the sound the club head makes at impact is more “splat” than “thwack,” it’s a good bet that your opponents are going to raise holy hell, or much worse.

Even with this in the back of his mind, Willie thumbs on a little extra jelly. Things had gone from good to middling in a hurry in the match, and he was willing to risk an ass-kicking to turn things around. No doubt that Long Gone could break him in half, but the prospect paled in

comparison to dropping a few grand. Willie and Lance weren't there yet, but ever since they teed off on the back nine, Long Gone had returned to a form unlike anything folks had seen in years. The match was essentially all-square.

Long Gone unleashes a monster of a drive that splits the fairway and rolls out 340 yards at least. He leans back on his heels and admires the flight of the ball, takes the cigarette from his lips, flicks it into the woods, and lets go with a low whistle.

"Phew...that felt better than your wife, Lance."

"Easy now, big fella," says Lance. "We were having a civilized game out here. No need to get personal."

"It was civilized right up to when your boy greased his club, asshole," says Long Gone. He jerks his head in Willie's direction. Willie starts to work himself up into a lather, but then thinks better of it. He shrugs and wipes the driver off on his pants leg. The Vaseline leaves a long, oily streak on his khakis.

"What the fuck is that?" yells Rick. "The match is off! I told you not to bring a hustler to the course, Lance!"

Though he sounds convincingly outraged, Rick is hugely relieved. The match has turned around, true, but the pressure has gotten to him. While Long Gone is four-under on the back, Rick is playing bogey golf on the same holes. He realizes it didn't take much to shake his confidence, and now all he wants is to get out of the match without losing his shirt.

"Easy there, Rick," says Long Gone. "If they ain't beating us when they're cheating, no way they're gonna beat us straight-up."

Rick nods and gets up from the golf cart with a sigh. As he grabs his driver from the bag, Long Gone sidles up beside him and whispers, “You got any more Diet Cokes? I’m starting to lose my buzz. Oh, and hit a good one.”

\* \* \*

“Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club, this is Jason.”

...“Right, ok Rick. You need how many?”

...“Well, I kinda can’t right now.”

... “Easy! It’s not my fault! Mr. Goforth’s here.”

... *Whispering* “He’s kind of acting, I don’t know, crazy.”

...“Like he’s crying and hugging me and saying stuff like humanity and the children and my children’s children depend on me. I don’t even have kids, Rick.”

... “No. He’s freaking me out.”

... “Ok, I understand. Mindy’s supposed to be getting here in a few. I’ll have her carry you out a six-pack.

... “Hang on, let me write this down...and another burger, add mayo, and a pack of Marlboro Reds.”

\* \* \*

When Sharon first started settling claims and inspecting damages in Greg’s stead, it was awkward. Greg was uncomfortable taking entire afternoons off from work. He would pace

around the Mossy Bottom town square, drinking sweet tea from a go-cup and waiting for Sharon to run screaming from the office.

As that never happened, Greg eventually let his guard down and ventured a bit farther. He tried bass fishing at Sardis Lake but snagged his line so often that he soon grew tired of retying hooks and spinners. Thinking it might be the fishing gear that bothered him, he tried noodling – the art of catching catfish with your bare hands, or, rather, of shoving your entire arm in a catfish’s mouth and dragging it to shore. The noodling experiment didn’t last more than a couple hours. The first time Greg spotted a catfish circling his legs in the lake, measuring as it did somewhere in the neighborhood of three feet long, he ran, splashing and screaming, from the muddy water.

Some friends suggested golf. The closest eighteen was thirty minutes away – a dusty, ill-conceived track that serves as Ole Miss’s home course during Southeastern Conference competitions. When his friends pulled up in an old Ford Bronco loaded to the gills with beer, coolers, and golf clubs, Greg felt a sudden stab of anticipation. He felt like he was playing hooky, felt like he was back at Mississippi State and big man on campus again. They cracked open their first beers on the drive down and were good and buzzed by the time they arrived in Oxford.

To an outside observer, their six-hour round would’ve been worse than ugly. If Greg had been keeping score, it would have been in the neighborhood of 200. That didn’t matter to Greg, though. He was thrilled by the ceremony and lingo of the game, “Watch you don’t step in his line,” “Just an easy draw over the beach,” “Another snowman for me.” Best of all, he felt a

hundred miles away from any concerns, any stress. It was just him, his buddies, a crisp fall day, and his only goal was to put a little white ball in a hole.

It's not enough to say Greg was bitten by the bug. He had fallen in love.

\* \* \*

Greg's love has reached a fever pitch and he rushes from table to table in the pro shop grabbing whatever Mossy Bottom logoed apparel he can. Jason grows increasingly agitated as Mindy is later and later arriving. He'd bring the burgers and smokes and cokes out to Rick himself if he felt comfortable leaving Mr. Goforth in charge, but he fears Mr. Goforth isn't the kind of guy who would understand detail work like running a cash register, even if he wasn't crazed and talking about how golf is the roadmap to a brighter future. Jason's cell phone keeps vibrating, as it appears Rick has him on speed dial at this point.

Mindy Chadwick finally arrives for her afternoon shift as "drink cart girl" at 1:33, dressed in her uniform of a yellow polo shirt with the Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club logo and cutoff jean shorts. Nineteen years old, tan, shapely, and blonde, Mindy's appearance has an unnerving effect on the golfers whose beverages she delivers. She is, as she had come to understand, the stereotyped ideal that male golfers envision when they think "drink cart girl." Her appearance on the course, travelling first from the eighteenth hole and backtracking around, is enough to send some golfers into hysterics. Guts are sucked in, salaries are bragged about loudly, names are dropped, wives are forgotten. And always, there is the amateurish flirting of middle-aged men.

Not that any of this foolishness offends Mindy in the least. Every time she sells a Miller Lite for three dollars, she's guaranteed to keep the change on the five dollar bill. She regularly

comes home from a four-hour shift with more than a hundred dollars in tips, making her job one of the more lucrative in all the town of Mossy Bottom. In fact, she probably earns more than Rick.

Her job is also the kind that she's never had to take home with her at night. She doesn't even know who her boss is, or if she has one. So, it comes as a surprise to her when she strolls in to find Jason feverishly seeking her out.

"Where have you been!"

"Um, this is, like, when I always get here," says Mindy. "More or less. I had some stuff to do."

"Whatever, get this to fifteen as quick as you can!" says Jason. He hands over a red plastic milk crate containing a six-pack of Diet Coke cans, a bag of ice, a soft pack of Marlboro Reds, a tin of Kodiak, and a hamburger so slathered in mayonnaise that fat, creamy globs of the stuff are spilling out over the sides of the bun.

Mindy retreats from the crate a few inches, mostly on account of the mayo.

"Take it! Rick needs you!"

She grabs the crate, and as she turns to go, Greg bursts out of Rick's office clutching a manila envelope with "DAVEY" written in big black letters on the front. Greg's eyes are wild – his lazy eye is rolled far up and left – and so blurred that it's obvious he's been crying. He has a Sharpie clenched in his teeth – it's uncapped and bleeding black on his lips.

"Hi there," he says to Mindy.

“Yeah, um, I’ll get this out to Rick,” she says, backing away to the door.

“Wait, can I tell you about golf?” says Greg.

“I really need to get this to fifteen, I think.”

Mindy turns slowly, not taking her gaze from Greg until she feels the door handle at the small of her back. She grasps the handle, opens the door quietly, scarcely moving, tentative, as though surrounded by a pack of rabid coyotes. She steps a foot back through the open door and clutches the milk crate to her breasts. She feels Greg’s eyes move instinctively to her bosom. A gust of wind hits her. She pivots and sprints to the drink cart.

I better get a hell of a tip for this one, she thinks.

\* \* \*

Hank Adcock leans way back in his reclining desk chair and reviews the month’s sales figures. Once again, sales are good – very good. While the economy has taken its toll on most of the rest of the construction industry, warehouse construction is booming, and that’s Adcock Contracting’s specialty.

Adcock sighs contentedly and looks across his office at the portrait of his young bride in the fashion of a southern belle, hoop skirt and all. The oil painting was done last year by a disciple of LeRoy Neiman in exchange for a five-piece dinette set and a pleather loveseat left by a deadbeat whose warehouse Adcock renovated. Adcock loves the portrait. He loves all the purple and pink and green and the way his wife’s curls spill down and tickle the tops of her very round breasts. Even more than his sales sheets and bank statements the portrait fills Adcock with the feeling that he has made it to the big leagues.

At moments like these, he likes to do one of two things: light up a very stinky cigar or drive down to Mossy Bottom to heckle Rick Hale. The cigar is easy enough for Adcock to understand – he likes the way it tastes, he likes the way it smells, and he really likes the way he looks smoking it. He doesn't understand the delicious thrill he feels when tormenting Rick, but it feels so good that he's given up worrying about it.

Yes, a glorious afternoon like this one calls for another drive down Highway 78 to Mossy Bottom, he thinks. I want to bring some good cheer to my boy Rick. That choke artist oughtta be down a thousand bucks by now.

\* \* \*

“Did you see the legs on that one, boys?” asks Willie after Mindy drops off Long Gone's order. “Make you wanna slap your granny.”

Lance, Long Gone, and Rick pay him no attention. Lance is grim-faced and determined, in full grinder mode, as he lines up his drive on the short par-four sixteenth. Long Gone is stuffing his face with the burger and wiping the mayonnaise from his cheeks with the back of his hand. Rick is praying a quiet, desperate prayer, as he and Long Gone have just fallen behind by two holes with only three holes left to play.

\* \* \*

“Jason, that young lady is lovely,” says Greg.

“Yeah, Mindy's pretty fucking hot,” says Jason. “Uh, sorry, I mean, excuse me, Mr. Goforth.”

“I want you to start calling me Greg. Tell me about that girl, Jason.”

“Well, um, Greg, she works here. She’s a drink cart girl.”

“Has she been working here for long?”

“She’s been here like a year or something,” says Jason. “I tried laying the rap down to her, but she wasn’t having it.”

“What’s that?”

“I think she’s into rich dudes.”

“Oh. Well that’s nice to know.”

Greg wanders off to the window overlooking the parking lot and stares at the spot where Mindy’s drink cart once sat.

“What were we doing, Jason?”

“When, Greg?”

“Before that sweet girl came by.”

“Mindy?”

“Yes. Mindy.”

“You were crying a lot and saying some stuff about golf and how children are the future and how we can’t let them down.”

“That’s right,” says Greg. “Where’s that envelope?”

“Over here,” says Jason. “I don’t know that it’s gonna stay shut. It’s packed pretty full.”

“Do we have any scotch tape?”

“I don’t think so. Just some duct tape and the lead tape Rick puts on the back of his putter every time he makes a three-jack.”

“Better use the duct tape.”

\* \* \*

Four Diet Cokes, a dip, and three Marlboros later, Long Gone ties the team match with a birdie on seventeen. But while this limits the damage to Rick’s pocket book somewhat, he’s still more than a thousand down to Lance on his individual bet. Rick stands on the tee at number eighteen knowing that a birdie here is his only chance to get close to even for the day and avoid a very unpleasant talk with Tracie.

The wind is coming from the west and helping a bit, so Rick goes down to a three-wood. He aims left of where he normally would, knowing the breeze will carry the ball back to target. He checked the pin while the foursome was making the turn, so he knows the flag is short-left. A solid drive will leave him an easy eight-iron approach.

Rick steadies himself over his ball and takes a deep breath. He visualizes a towering fade that disappears over the hill and comes to rest on the right side of the fairway. He cocks his neck left and then right, waggles the club head. Swing easy.

## Number Six: Mass

One of the best times of Greg's life came several years back: his two-week pilgrimage to play the greatest golf courses of Ireland. It was in Ireland that Greg first experienced the old tradition of naming golf holes – sure, Greg knew Augusta National has named holes, but he'd never had the chance to play there – and he lifted a couple names from Irish courses like Waterville Golf Club. Waterville's first hole provided the name of Mossy Bottom's first, Last Easy, and Waterville also gave him inspiration for the name and design of Mossy Bottom's sixth hole, Mass. At Waterville, the name of their twelfth is actually "Mass Hole," and Greg still hasn't figured out if the first association that leaps to mind is intended or not.

He does remember vividly stepping up to the tee at Mass Hole on the kind of dreary, mystical Irish day that makes the eyes of romantic Irish-Americans go as misty as the weather. Through the fog and chill Greg could just make out the modest, circular green some 170 yards away, seemingly floating above the deep hollow separating the tee from the landing area. It was an intimidating sight, and Greg gripped his club more tightly than usual. But before Greg had a chance to address his ball, his caddy stepped to the front of the tee box, blocking Greg's shot.

"Many and hundreds of years ago," the caddy began, facing away from the foursome and staring down at the hollow, "the Catholics of the Ring of Kerry were hard downtrodden. The English persecuted us, beating and killing anytime they found us in numbers. My forefathers came to this place, this sacred hollow hidden from both wind and sight, to worship their God and celebrate Mass. I ask only, should your ball come to rest in the hollow, that you leave it be."

The caddy's soliloquy thus ended, he walked back along the perimeter of the tee box and took up his customary place behind the foursome. Greg and his golfing buddies stared at the

caddy, who seemed unfazed by their puzzled looks. For the previous eleven holes, the caddy had been utterly unremarkable, speaking up only to suggest what iron to hit, which line to take on putts, and to point out hazards hidden to the first-time visitor to Waterville. Like most all the caddies Greg had encountered in Ireland, this one was of indeterminate age – anywhere from his early twenties to his late forties – lines etched in his face from the wind and cold, smelling faintly of whiskey and strongly of the hand-rolled cigarettes almost always cupped in his palm against the gusts off Ballinskelligs Bay.

After what seemed a very long while, one of the other caddies coughed politely into his fist. Greg took this to mean that a suitable amount of time had passed, and that they could go ahead and hit their balls. Greg nodded stiffly, gripped his six-iron even more tightly, and resolved to hit an approach that honored the long-departed souls of the hounded Catholics of the Ring of Kerry.

He took a deep breath and gazed out across the hollow. He waggled, unaccustomed to the pressure he felt after his caddy's moving story. He said a little prayer. Finally, he drew the club head back.

“AHEM!”

Greg tensed his muscles and willed his swing to an abrupt stop. He spun around to face his caddy, whose eyes were downcast while he shook his head softly from side-to-side.

“Oh, no,” said Greg, the blood rushing to his face. “I'm sorry to have offended your people.”

“Oh, it's nothing like that, Mr. Greg,” the caddy said softly.

“Well, that's a relief. What's the problem?”

“You’d do well to take the five here. ‘Tis a long carry over the hollow, and that six-iron would land your ball among the parishioners.”

With the help of a few earth movers, Greg created a faithful reinterpretation of Mass Hole at Mossy Bottom. The tee box, the hollow, and the green all match Waterville’s. The only elements missing from Mossy Bottom’s version are the wet Irish weather and the ghosts.

\* \* \*

On the eighteenth green, Rick is dealing with some ghosts of his own. Long Gone has already made his third straight birdie to clinch the team match, one-up. Now Rick is standing over an uphill, seven-foot birdie putt that would get him to one-down overall to Lance and even on his nine-hole Nassaus. A made putt here would mean Rick would only have to fork over three hundred dollars, a minor miracle considering how poorly Rick had played most of the day.

Back in his touring pro days, a seven-footer without much break was as good as automatic. Take a quick look at the line, visualize the ball rolling in, and hit it. End of story. But then the FedEx St. Jude Classic happened, and Rick was never quite the same.

Going into the final round of the 1996 St. Jude’s, Rick had a two-stroke lead and all the makings of a Cinderella story on his hands. Here was something the sports writers could sink their teeth into – local boy made good on all his promise and talent, finally establishing himself as a quality touring professional. For Rick had been Memphis’s great young golf hope only a decade before. He’d finished top-ten in the Mid-South Amateur, made the quarterfinals (twice) of the U.S. Amateur, and been a member of the junior Walker Cup team – the junior version of the Ryder Cup and arguably the highest honor an amateur can attain.

When Rick accepted a scholarship to attend the University of Tennessee, the announcement was tantamount to a guarantee that the Volunteers would be at the top of the college golf world

for the next four years. Once Rick arrived in Knoxville, however, some of the qualities that helped make him a great junior golfer intensified and mutated into full-blown liabilities. His fire and competitiveness morphed into a nasty temper that resulted in broken clubs, staccato bursts of swearing, and triple bogeys. His risky approach to course management – if there's a chance, however slim, to get the ball near the hole, go for it – evolved into a taste for gambling of the monetary variety. And for the fact that Rick doesn't hold his liquor well, there were no warning signs. Some people just shouldn't drink.

Rick limped through college in five years. He often worked odd jobs to pay off his debts to the local bookie, whose clientele consisted mostly of Knoxville's fraternity population. On and off of academic probation, Rick missed two spring seasons and earned a 2.23 GPA. When he did play, he was often quite good, if prone to blow-ups. Most observers felt robbed when he only made all-conference twice. The golden boy who seemed such a sure thing was now a cautionary tale about the dangers of being too good, too soon and of all the temptations that awaited impressionable young people at college.

One factor that didn't get enough attention was that Rick was separated from his father, Kevin, for the first time in his life. Kevin's a Coca-Cola distributor only seventeen years Rick's senior. He raised Rick on his own, dropping out of high school to start working to support his infant son when Rick's sixteen-year-old mother moved with her parents to Bowling Green, Kentucky, mostly to remove her from a very sticky situation. Kevin and Rick never heard from her again, and it wouldn't be any stretch to say that father and son are best friends.

So while Knoxville's many temptations did factor into Rick's downfall, the lack of a grounded, well-meaning friend and mentor probably had more to do with it. Add to it that Rick

had never really worked at anything before, and it's easy to understand how he could get off course in college.

After he finally graduated, Rick returned to Memphis, chastened and humbled. He set about proving his detractors wrong and reminding those who'd forgotten him that he was a talent to be reckoned with. It took some time. He spent two years on the mini-tours with some modest success (a couple second-place finishes, earning around \$80,000 each season – not nearly as much as it seems when one factors in travel and caddies) before qualifying for the PGA Tour through Q-School in 1995. Kevin used up all his vacation days to carry his son's bag that week, and the calm it brought Rick was enough to pull him through.

Rick's first season on the Tour was unremarkable. He bagged a sponsorship with Bryan Foods – the hot dog company – that covered his travel expenses. Rick wore patches on his shirts with the Bryan logo, "The Flavor of the South," or names of products, like "Juicy Jumbo." Though Rick never made the connection, he got a lot more hecklers and shot, on average, three strokes higher per round on "Juicy Jumbo" days.

He only made twenty-seven percent of his cuts in 1995 and finished with \$127,000 in earnings, not enough to qualify automatically for a spot on the big Tour. But a season of playing with the very best had taught him much. He learned about course management. No longer did he take dead-aim at every flag. There were times it paid to shoot for the center of the green and take the easy par. Often times, it didn't make sense to try to hood a four-iron out of the rough and around the tree ten yards in front of you. Better to choke up on a nine and chip out into the fairway.

The most important lesson he learned might seem counter-intuitive. While Rick was making more thoughtful decisions about how and where to hit his ball, he was teaching himself to stop

thinking. He couldn't help but notice that the very best players on the PGA Tour were some of the blandest, most boring people he'd ever encountered. They didn't say a word to you on the course. They barely noticed the fans behind the ropes, and if they did, the most they'd do is give a half-hearted wave after hitting a particularly good shot. Post-round small talk consisted of agonizing replays of every shot hit during the day's round.

Here were very famous people with wives and kids – and sometimes girlfriends, too – and millions in the bank, and yet the only conversation most of them could carry on started with openers like, “It hit me on sixteen tee – I needed to grip with the right thumb pad more than with the index finger.”

It was little wonder to Rick, too, that the more thoughtful, interesting players on Tour tended to fortify themselves with alcohol before, during, and after dinners with their competitors, if only to keep themselves from falling asleep or screaming “Get a personality!” Some of the “thinkers,” as they were dismissively known, drank (secretly) on the course. Others turned to the harder stuff. What they lost in coordination they more than made up for by being able to put the myriad distractions the world throws at you out of their heads.

With the hard-won experience of a year travelling on the PGA Tour, Rick once again survived the grueling six days of qualification in Q-School, finishing an impressive second overall. Bryan Foods re-upped with him, so he now was wearing a Bryan-branded visor and “Flavor of the South” polo shirt. More importantly, Bryan was footing the bill for Rick's caddy, too. Wilson Staff took notice and paid Rick \$20,000 to use their clubs and carry their bag for the season.

With his finances in order and his confidence higher than it had been since his Walker Cup days, Rick was on his way to a successful season. He made a surprising Top-Ten at the Bob

Hope Chrysler Classic and followed it up with three straight made cuts. By the time the Texas swing came along, Rick was comfortably in the top hundred on the money list, in the top twenty in greens-in-regulation, and was making the cut more than two-thirds of the time.

With his consistent performance on the golf course came more consistent attention from the women who follow the PGA Tour. Not all are groupies, some are the forgotten and remarkably well-preserved wives of successful men who've fallen for a new love – golf. A touring pro makes for the perfect combination of physical satisfaction and revenge for the shunned wives – the pros tend to be physically fit, tanned, simple-minded, and gone within the space of a week. Plus, they're the absolute best at doing the one thing their absentee husbands wish more than anything they could do – again, golf.

In the first half of 1996, Rick shared (at different times) a bed with two groupies, three married women, and one cocktail waitress who had no idea who he was. Though the couplings were nice and much appreciated, Rick had forgotten about each one by the time he'd hit the road for the next Tour stop.

That all changed after the first round of the 1996 FedEx St. Jude Classic at the Tournament Players Club Southwind in Memphis.

Kevin had once again gotten time from the distributorship to carry his son's bag. His presence combined with the support of the scores of Memphians who turned out to follow Rick around the course made for a magical day. Rick shot a 65, his lowest score ever on the PGA Tour.

One of the fans who showed up to cheer on Rick was a young dental hygienist in training named Tracie Strickland. Tracie was twenty-three and a tiny five-foot-one, a vision of down-home loveliness with her curly bangs, tank top, and cutoff jean shorts. Rick didn't know it at the

time, but Tracie had been waiting to meet Rick for a very long while. As a heartbreaking thirteen-year-old beauty in Cordova – the whiter, trashier suburb of Memphis – Tracie had spied a photo of the high school golf star Rick Hale on the front page of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*. He looked so impressive, so serious, concentrating over a putt with his spiky black hair and his squinting eyes. Here was a guy with a purpose, someone going places in life. Tracie already knew she wanted to come along. Even at her young age, she had her fair share of suitors, but their aspirations rarely exceeded racing cars, getting drunk, and, hopefully, some heavy petting with Tracie.

Rick's 65 tied him for the tournament lead after the first round. Walking out of the scorer's shed, he was surprised to find a crowd waiting for him. There were reporters, not just from the *Commercial Appeal*, but from *Golf Digest* and *U.S.A. Today*. There were high school buddies, old playing partners, friends of family. And lots and lots of very attractive women.

Rick did his best to talk to everyone and thank them for coming out to support him. It took more than an hour before he finally noticed the tiny knockout with the flirty, wishful grin. Rick stopped talking mid-sentence to much-friendlier-than-remembered Knoxville bookie and went to introduce himself to Tracie.

“Hi, I'm Rick Hale.”

“I know that, silly,” she said, rocking coquettishly to-and-fro.

“Oh, right. Are you a golf fan?”

“Not really.”

“Oh.”

“I'm a dental hygienist. Well, I'm going to be,” she said. “Or a meteorologist.”

“Nice.”

“Yeah, it’s nice. I’m Tracie.”

“Hi Tracie.”

She laughed a merry, chirping laugh. “Hi Rick.”

He smiled. “Would you have dinner with me tonight?”

“Of course.”

Rick found his dad and told him he’d meet up with him in the morning. Kevin looked at Rick and said, “Watch yourself, son.”

Rick took Tracie to an Outback just off Nonconnah Parkway. The first half-hour the two of them did little but shoot glances at one another across their booth. After Rick had finished his second Miller Lite and Tracie most of her first Wallaby Darned, conversation flowed. They shared a couple Auzzie-Tizers, never breaking eye contact. By the time Rick’s t-bone and Tracie’s Alice Springs Chicken arrived, they had learned that they both came from single-parent families. In fact, Tracie’s mother was only sixteen when Tracie had been born, and the two of them remained best of friends.

“Plus, um, I still live with her,” she said.

“Well, you’re still in school,” Rick said. “It’s tough to make ends meet.”

Tracie looked gratified by his understanding. “Still,” she said, “it kinda makes dating tough. You know, living with your mom.”

“Maybe you need to meet a guy with a place of his own.”

“That might be nice.”

“Even if it was just a hotel room...maybe.”

“A hotel room would be nice.”

“I have a hotel room.”

“It sounds nice.”

Rick took a hundred dollar bill from his money clip and put it under his beer mug. When the waiter came by to check on them, he found the steak and chicken completely untouched.

When Rick woke at dawn for his early tee time, he was relieved to find Tracie in bed next to him. He'd slept a little uneasily, knowing that he'd fibbed to her the night before – he hadn't really had a hotel room. He'd been staying at his dad's house. Luckily, the Adams Mark had vacancies.

Tracie was sleeping, deeply, on her stomach. Rick couldn't help himself. He lifted the sheets enough to take a long look at her backside. “Holy shit,” he said hoarsely.

It felt perfectly natural to drop her off at her mother's house an hour later, and no alarms went off when she leaned across the car to kiss him and say, “I'll see you on the course.”

Kevin was waiting at the practice range. Rick hit a few half-wedges to warm up and then moved straight to his driver. He cranked several out, all three hundred yards or more.

“That good?” asked Kevin.

“That good, Dad.”

When the time came to tee off, Rick searched the gallery for Tracie. On account of her height it was tough to find her, but when he did Rick felt immediately at ease. He played his way around the course to the tune of an easy, no-drama 68. It was good enough to keep him in a three-way tie for first.

Rick grabbed a sandwich in the clubhouse and Tracie on his way out. They skipped Outback that night and ordered in room service.

\* \* \*

Back in the present on Mossy Bottom's eighteenth green, Rick trembles imperceptibly over his putt. He can't pull the club back. Though he's not a religious man, he thinks back to his Catholic school days and tries to recite the Lord's Prayer in his head. He reaches in his pocket for a penny and marks his ball, steps away, and studies the break again. He thinks about Tracie and how good she still looks in a bra and panties. He thinks about how angry she gets when he comes home from work with less money than he left with. All he wanted all those years ago was to marry her, make a bunch of money on the Tour, and spend all that money on her. At times like these, he realizes he sold her a false bill of goods.

Rick turns away from the hole and practices his stroke three times. Willie laughs to himself, but hard enough to see his belly bounce under his ill-fitting polo shirt.

Long Gone at first stares without interest, then with mild sympathy. He's never had the yips, but he's sure as hell had the shakes before. He tosses a half-smoked cigarette into the pond and walks over to Rick, putting his arm around his partner's shoulder.

"Just walk up and hit it, Rick."

"I'm fine, just going through my routine."

"You ain't fine," says Long Gone, "but you're okay. You're still the best golfer in the South, you're just head-fucked. So get out of your head and walk up and hit the fucking ball. I'm hungry and I need to hit the road."

Rick is pissed off and ashamed. He catches Willie snickering out of the corner of his eye. He just wants to be done with the round.

So he walks up and hits the ball. And the putt goes in.

After some cursory handshakes with the other team, Rick walks into the pro shop, takes \$300 out of the register, and sticks a pink Post-It Note on the computer monitor. It reads “HEY GREG IOU 300.”

Rick doesn't notice Adcock sitting in one of the armchairs in the pro shop, but he certainly recognizes the voice. “So, you shit the bed again, son?”

## Number Seven: Turkey Run

For the accomplished golfer, Mossy Bottom's par-five seventh hole represents the best opportunity on the course to post a birdie or better. To the high handicapper, number seven is terrifying. The first eighty yards require a carry over knee-high, chigger-infested rye grass. It's crucial that the ball flies straight, too – left of the fairway is thick with scrub oaks and snaky undergrowth, while right of the fairway is the deep “Mass” hollow that fronts number six green.

Should his drive find the fairway and roll out to two hundred fifty yards, the golfer is faced with a choice – a classic high-risk, high-reward approach to the green or a much safer, much more vanilla, lay-up. For the adventurous golfer, on offer is a two hundred yard shot over the L-shaped pond that protects the front and left of the green. Thinned shots that clear the pond will roll through the green and into the deep bunkers that hunch on the other side. For the golfers that do fly the pond and land softly enough on the green to stay on the putting surface, their persistence pays off. The green has very little break and minimal elevation change. Eagles are there for the taking.

Greg named this hole “Turkey Run.” As with many of the names at Mossy Bottom, there's more than one meaning. The scrub oaks to the left of the fairway are home to the flock of wild turkeys that can be spotted on the course from time to time – at least that's where they most often make their appearance. “Going on a Turkey Run” is also Greg's euphemism for trying something clearly beyond one's ability, like going for the green in two. Plus it sounds nicer than “That's Stupid.”

\* \* \*

Greg is deeply confused. The satellite television technician working with Greg is getting very frustrated.

The job started out simple enough. Up went a commercial-grade satellite dish, pointing south from the roof of the Mossy Bottom clubhouse. Receiver boxes were set up for televisions in the pro shop, the grill, the bar, and the Members' Room. High-speed internet hookups were installed in Rick's office, the pro shop, and Greg's office.

The hang-up comes when the technician plugs the Ethernet cord into Greg's laptop and asks him to open his browser.

"How do you mean?" asks Greg.

"Open up Explorer. Or Chrome. Or Firefox. Whichever one you use."

"I'm not following."

"Click that big 'E' right there."

"Okay."

"Now navigate to your favorite site," says the tech.

"What's that?"

"Go to a website," says the tech, a little sharply.

"I don't know how to do that."

"Just scoot over and let me do this."

"I learn by doing," says Greg. "I'm what's termed an 'experiential learner.'"

The tech exhales and says, slowly, "Type E-S-P-N-dot-C-O-M."

Greg types. Nothing happens.

"Press the enter key."

The screen fills with sports headlines and photos.

“Well, look at that! Smoke won at Charlotte!”

“Right,” sighs the tech. “Let’s try another. See that box up there? That’s called a search box. Type something in there and press enter again. Try typing in your name.”

Greg hunts and pecks his way to spelling his own name. The search engine brings up several results, the top of which is his State Farm agency. The next is Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club.

“Now click on one of those with your mouse.”

Up pops a slick-looking site for his insurance agency. The professional headshot that Sharon insisted Greg sit for five years ago is prominently featured at the top-right of the homepage. There are links for reporting accidents, requesting quotes, contact info, and FAQs.

“Good one, Mr. Goforth!” says the tech. “You had me going for a minute there. You wouldn’t believe some of the luddites I bang up against in this line of work.”

“Beg your pardon?”

“That’s a nice website you’ve got there.”

“I’ve never seen this thing in my life. Sharon must’ve done it.”

“Well, how do you know when your clients need your help?”

“I reckon Sharon calls me if she really needs me. She doesn’t call that much, though.”

Greg laughs. “To tell you the truth, I think she’s better at this stuff than me.”

“You don’t say? Now click up there – that’s called the ‘back’ button. Let’s see what you golf course’s website looks like.”

Greg returns to the search results and clicks ‘Mossy Bottom.’

“Whoa,” says the tech.

“I like the way that logo blinks and flashes!” says Greg.

“It shouldn’t do that,” says the tech. Unable to help himself, he nudges Greg aside and scrolls to the bottom of the screen. “This website is eight years old. All this stuff on here is probably out-of-date. My god, I didn’t even know you could still run a site on GeoCities.”

“Well, the phone number’s right,” says Greg. “They can always pick up the phone and call us.”

“Is it really \$35 to play a round of golf?”

“Ha! No, not for about eight years now.”

“You ever get folks come in here expecting to pay that?”

“Hang on...JASON, WE EVER GET FOLKS TRY TO PAY THIRTY-FIVE A ROUND?”

Jason’s voice comes from the other room, “All the time, Greg. You and Rick said to charge ‘em full price no matter what, remember? Dudes get pissed. I think they’re looking at our website.”

Greg cups his head in his hands. “Why didn’t anyone tell me we had a website?” He turns to the tech. “Can you fix this?”

“No, sir,” he says. “Sorry, Mr. Goforth. Why don’t you get that Sharon person to do it? Your insurance site’s nice.”

Greg cuts the tech a hefty check for the satellite and Internet installation and ponders his next steps. He decides to ask Rick, who’s on the phone in his office. Rick’s desk is immaculate and ordered, just a phone, his new computer, a pencil, a thin-tipped black Sharpie, and his omnipresent yellow legal pad. The floor is a different story. It’s littered with putters of every make and model – Scotty Camerons, vintage Pings, belly putters, even an old Wilson 8812 – and

almost all of them are customized in some way, be it with lead tape, oversized grips, or hand-painted aiming lines.

“I’m sorry, Tracie,” Rick says into the receiver. “No, I didn’t know it was time to pay the daycare. You’re right, you’re right...No, I don’t need to be playing with our money if I’m not going to win, but I’m better than those guys. Things just got weird out there. That asshole Luther shaved the greens and set the pins to spite me. And...I got a little anxious out there again.”

Rick looks up and sees Greg standing in the doorway. Rick cups his hand over the receiver and drops his voice to a hoarse whisper.

“Oh, shit, honey, I gotta call you back...I know this isn’t over...Yes, he’s here right now. I’ll talk to him. I’ll let him know you said hi...I know this isn’t over. Kiss Molly for me...right. Sorry. Goodbye.” He hangs up and smiles at Greg sheepishly.

“Listen, Greg, I didn’t mean what I said about Luther. I know he’s trying his best out there.”

“Think nothing of it, Rick. I know my cousin can be a little ornery at times. But I think he has a pure heart. He’s just lost his way a bit.”

The two men look at each other, both nodding gently, waiting for the other to speak.

“Would you like to sit down, Greg? Let me get those putters out of your way.”

Rick hurries out from behind the desk and clears a path to one of the two nail head, faux leather office chairs facing him. Greg takes a seat, heavily, and leans way back.

“I’ve got my eye on a new putter,” says Rick. “An Odyssey White Ice they say takes the pulls right out of the equation. I’ll finally be able to get rid of all these old sticks. Yessir, once I get the putter figured out I’ll be back in the saddle. I feel like I might be drawing it out to the inside. Hard to get the club head back to square that way.”

“Rick, you having some lady troubles?”

“Oh, well, you know, just the usual stuff with Tracie. Nothing we can’t get past with a little help from our friends.”

“I understand all too well,” says Greg, a wistful smile crossing his face. “Me and Sharon aren’t exactly seeing eye-to-eye these days. Some days I feel like that’s the worst thing in the world and other times I think it just might be better for us to go our separate ways. It’s a big world, lots of fish in the sea and all that. I worry though that she’d have a hard time getting along without me. We’ve got the agency and the girls, you know, and they’ve got their dance lessons and the horses on Thursdays...anyway, do you know anything about guys coming in here trying to pay thirty-five dollars to play?”

“Yes, sir, we get that all the time,” Rick says. “I’ve got to where I just point at the sign by the register and say, ‘It says here seventy dollars.’ That shuts most of them up. Some of them turn and leave, and others of them say something about how it says thirty-five on our website. That’s when I hit them with, ‘We don’t have a website.’”

“We have a website, Rick. That satellite guy who came down from Memphis tells me it’s awful.”

“When did that happen?”

“Just now,” says Greg.

“No, I mean when...how did we get a website?”

“No idea. Sharon might’ve set one up when I wasn’t looking or maybe one of the Ole Miss kids we’ve always got working around here did it when they weren’t running carts to the shed. Anyway, we’ve got to fix it.”

“I’m not sure I even know how to turn on this computer, Greg.”

“No, I guess we’re going to have to hire someone,” says Greg. “I don’t know where in the world I’m going to get the money for that. Money’s real tight. It’s been a rough, rough season.”

“Oh...well. Greg, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that. You know, it’s rough for a lot of us. Tracie was just saying the other day how I really need to start bringing in more cash. That daycare’s expensive...”

“Don’t you worry, Rick. I’ve got you taken care of. I’ve got us all taken care of.”

Rick exhales in relief. That went a lot easier than he figured it would. He hadn’t even realized he’d been holding his breath.

“I don’t know what to say, Greg, except thank you. Tracie’s got expensive taste and I guess I never figured having a kid would cost this much, plus, you know, I haven’t been playing my best and I’ve leaked a little money to the boys lately.”

“My pleasure, Rick,” says Greg. “Once we get that phone call from David Fay, we’re all going to rest a lot easier knowing that success is on its way. Now I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, no sir. There’s a lot of work to be done around here. We’re going to need grandstands, a hotel, lots of parking, maybe a concession stand or two out on the course. I’m thinking about a petting zoo for the kids. We might try taming that kangaroo off fourteen fairway. And, like I said, we’ve got to do something about that website. The satellite guy says it’s the way most people find out about businesses like ours, so I’m going to have to scrounge up some money for that, too. That reminds me, I saw that you owe me three hundred dollars. You think I could get that here in the next day or two?”

This last bit catches Rick’s attention. He’d been daydreaming of all the fun things he’d get to do to Tracie when he told her he got the raise.

“Well, um, Greg, any chance we can take that money out of my raise? Payroll’s in five days, and I’m a little cash-poor right now.”

“Come again?”

“Maybe you can just hold the three hundred out of the raise we were just talking about.”

“Rick, weren’t you listening?” Greg asks, incredulous. “There’s no money for raises. Hell, there’s no money for a website guy. I’m probably going to have to break down and ask Sharon to do it. Buddy, we need that money for the Open. I’m half-thinking we need to trim some of the fat, shall we say, around here.”

“Can we back up a sec? What open? And are you talking about firing people? I’m already working sixty hours a week. There’s not a lot of fat around here.”

“Didn’t I tell you? No, I guess not. I guess I’ve only talked to Jason about it, but he’s on board. Good soldier, that Jason. Helping me out with that Mindy girl as well.”

Rick waits for Greg to clarify.

“Rick, we’re getting the U.S. Open! I don’t know why it took me so long to figure it all out! Once folks out there see the scenic beauty of Mossy Bottom, the deer in the fairways, the pros pushed to the limit by my track, they’re not going to balk at paying seventy bucks a round. They’ll pay twice that! We’re not going to have slow days. We’re going to turn them away! We’ll have a hotel for big golf outings. We could get AutoZone down here and FedEx and International Paper and all those guys up in Memphis. You know this is a better track than Southwind, and they’re raking in the cash up there. Yeah, they’re a TPC and they got the St. Jude’s Classic, but they don’t have the U.S. Open. But the cash is just a little part of it. I mean, don’t get me wrong, it’ll be real nice for all of us to have some more money in our pockets. I’m

tired of that old saying 'You gotta spend money to make money' but, boy, let me tell you it's the damn truth. The damn truth.

"No, Rick, we're all going to have to sacrifice a little now to reap the big, big rewards on down the line. I'm talking about people coming from all over the world to share this special place with us. To witness firsthand what southern gentility really means. To meet the members of Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club and recognize that right here's a group of men who embody the noblest precepts of the game of golf."

"Greg, Hank Adcock is one of our members. I'd put Torgesen and Peters up there with the best guys I've ever met in my life, but as much as I hate to say it, they're the exception to the rule."

"I think you just need to dig a little deeper, buddy," says Greg. "I hear Hank's a fine man once you get to know him. And maybe some of our members are a little on the rough-and-tumble side, but they're good people. Not a thief or a pervert among them, I'd wager."

Rick sucks his lips in and looks up at the ceiling. "What am I gonna tell Tracie? We're barely scraping by, Greg."

"Tell her what I always tell Sharon. Tell her the truth. Tell her you're not doing this for the money. Tell her you're doing this for the game you love and that you're building something big, really big, here. Right, buddy?"

"I don't think that's gonna fly."

"Tell her that it's all going to work out in the end."

"That's not much better," says Rick. "You really think we got a shot at the Open?"

"Rick, you've played a lot of courses in your time. Isn't this about the best one you've seen?"

“Yeah. That’s why I took the job in the first place. I thought you were crazy as hell, but I knew you built a great track.”

“And now?”

“I haven’t changed my mind about either thing, but it’s tough, Greg.”

“It’ll get better. So are you on board?” asks Greg.

“I reckon I’ve come this far.”

The two men stand up and shake hands.

\* \* \*

That night, instead of hopping in his cart and heading straight to the first hole – and to have a very uncomfortable talk with Tracie in their home off the first fairway – Rick lingers, drinks a couple Lites, and messes around on his new computer. As he’s got experience running the computerized register in the pro shop, he’s quick to grasp concepts like double-clicking. Soon he figures out how to surf the Internet. He keys in “u.s. open golf” and finds that Pinehurst No. 2 was just announced as the host course for the 2014 Open. He looks up “Pinehurst” and clicks around, growing more despondent with each detail he reads, with each photo he enlarges. They’ve even got videos that look as fancy as the puff pieces they show during the Masters. Not even taking into account the accommodations in the town of Pinehurst, there are three luxury hotels, eleven four-bedroom villas, and dozens of condos on the property. Eight golf courses, each of them rated higher than Mossy Bottom in Golf Digest. And, well, Pinehurst No. 2 is only the course that the granddaddy of all golf architects, Donald Ross, decided to settle down and make his home. Ross never stopped tweaking the design, each day improving a little bit on golf perfection. The course is a place of worship, a pilgrimage site for golf’s followers.

Rick notices a link for “Career Opportunities” at the bottom of the page. He clicks through and finds listings for an assistant golf professional and one that matches his title, director of golf. Curious what the job responsibilities are at one of the most famous golf courses in the world, he pulls up the director listing. Oversight of golf operations, pro shop, course maintenance, and food and beverage. Same as his. He scrolls down and spits up some beer. “Salary: Based on successful applicant’s experience, but ranging from \$210,000 - \$300,000. Benefits are very competitive. Expectation to work one weekend per month.”

More shocked than angry, he navigates to the assistant pro listing. The job responsibilities are par for any course. Expected to open the course six mornings a week, work every weekend, do all the grunt work so the head pro and director can schmooze with the golfers. Basically indentured servitude with little-to-no opportunity to play any golf, ever. But now Rick’s good and pissed off – the assistants at Pinehurst make thirty grand a year more than he does.

\* \* \*

Greg’s back in his office, picking up his phone and setting it back in its cradle, trying to drum up the courage to dial his home number. He knows he needs Sharon’s help, but it’s not that easy, he thinks. He wants to see his daughters and catch up on what’s happening at school. He wants to settle back into his easy routine with Sharon, the comfortable familiarity and predictability of a long, successful marriage. He wants to see Mindy in just those tiny cutoff jeans she wears when she’s out delivering drinks and snacks to the patrons. Maybe with those high-heeled sandals the women wear these days. Never been with a girl looks like that Mindy, he thinks. But the clock is ticking. He’s got to get a move on. He dials home.

“Goforth residence,” comes Sharon’s voice.

“Hi, Sharon. It’s me. Listen, how are you? How are the girls?”

“Oh, hi,” she says. “They’re getting along. We’re okay. You?”

“Me? I’m fine, just lonesome, you know?”

Silence from the other end.

“I’m sorry, Sharon. I know you’re probably lonesome over there, too. I don’t mean to sound like a whiner.”

“No, it’s okay,” Sharon says. “I don’t always know what’s going on in that head of yours. It’s good to know, I guess, that you’re thinking of us sometimes.”

“Of course, baby. Of course.”

“So, how are the guys at Mossy Bottom? How’s that sweet Jason? Always such a treat to see him up in the pro shop.”

“Yeah, that Jason’s a keeper,” says Greg, ashamed that he’s been haranguing Jason to help him with Mindy.

“Speaking of the shop, how’s business? Getting better, I hope? I feel awful about the way I carried on the other day. I know you’re trying your best with the club, but maybe it’s time to start thinking about scaling back a little or bringing in an investor or two.”

“Well, it’s funny you say that, hon, because I’ve been giving that a lot of thought myself. I’m thinking that we’re right there at the tipping point. We just need a little push, or maybe a big push, to get us over the hump.”

“You know, one thing I was thinking about is, you don’t need to water the fairways every day, do you Greg? That’s got to be costing an arm and a leg.”

“Sharon, you know we can’t skimp on course maintenance. Folks are spending their hard-earned money to play a top flight golf course. They don’t want to see brown grass.”

“I’m just wondering if you shouldn’t set your sights a little lower,” says Sharon. “Scale back a bit on the watering and the mowing and all this advertising and get back to the core business of running the best little golf club in north Mississippi.”

“Now Sharon, you’ve known me for how many years now? Eighteen? You know ‘the best little anything’ wouldn’t be good enough for me. You ever know me to do things half-assed?”

“Twenty years, and yes, as a matter of fact, there’s a lot you do half-assed.” Sharon’s voice hardens.

“Like what?”

“Let’s see, you just forgot our anniversary, for one thing. Even a half-ass husband would’ve remembered twenty years.”

“Oh, shit. I’m sorry, Sharon.”

“No, don’t worry about it. Now, what else? You operate, and I mean ‘operate’ in only the loosest sense, a glorified Cub Scout camp for you and your buddies and you lose thousands of dollars a month doing it.”

“Sharon, I said I’ve got a plan for the club. A big plan that’s going to make things right. You’re going to be proud, honey.”

“Don’t...don’t ‘honey’ me. I’m not done yet. You are the agent of record for Goforth State Farm, and now when’s the last time you set foot in your office? Do you even know how the books are looking at your ‘other’ business? Do you even know we do half our claims and settlements online now?”

Sensing an opportunity to get the conversation back on track Greg says, “You know, an expert was just remarking to me what a fine website you’d set up there.”

“Well, that’s awfully nice of your ‘expert.’ I suppose your friend doesn’t know that I’m also the only one keeping up with every damn quote, every claim. Your ‘expert’ probably wouldn’t guess that I’m the one filling out every form, taking the pictures of all the cracked windshields and leaky roofs, cutting the checks and hand-delivering them. Oh, and raising our two daughters.”

“Sharon, we’ve got Mae to do a lot of that grunt work at the office, and you can always call me, you know.”

“No, we don’t. We don’t have Mae anymore,” says Sharon. “I had to let her go, temporarily I said, until things get better. But I don’t think they’re going to get better, Greg. People are getting the hell out of this town and heading to Olive Branch or Tupelo or Memphis. Anywhere but Mossy Bottom.”

“You could’ve called, Sharon. I didn’t know.”

“No, you’re too busy fucking up over at the club. The last thing I thought we needed was you fucking up the agency.”

“So that’s that?”

“That’s that,” she says. “You need to get your head out of the clouds, Greg, and figure out what’s really important. You can call me when you do. Or maybe email me on that website you just found.”

Greg hears her hang up.

\* \* \*

Rick stands in his living room, wide-eyed and with his hands pressed over his lips as if in prayer. Tracie stomps from one side of the room of the other, never taking her eyes off Rick as she lets him have it.

“So you mean to tell me that he’s going to spend your raise on bleachers and a petting zoo!”

“I don’t think he really means that part about the petting zoo.”

“Who cares! It’s the principle of the thing. I haven’t been following you around since the mid-‘90s just so I can scrape for every single dime that comes our way. Do you know how tired I am of working double shifts at the dentist’s? Do you know how freaking embarrassing it is to tell a day care center to hold off cashing your check for a week?”

“Honey, I’m sorry. I really am. I don’t like it any better than you do.”

Tracie stops her pacing and takes Rick’s hands from his face and holds them.

“Then let’s leave,” she says. “Let’s get the hell out of here. You’ve given Greg eight years of your life. Don’t you think that’s enough?”

“I don’t know. Maybe. Half of me feels like I ought to see this through. He really means it with this Open thing. I told him I’d be there.”

“Well he’s not there for you now. He’s paying you peanuts so he can live in his fantasy world. And you better believe I know enough golf at this point to tell you that there is no way in hell that Mossy Bottom is getting the U.S. Open.”

“Well, he sent a letter to the USGA and everything. Crazier things have happened.”

“Then do something crazy, but at least bet on yourself. Get back on the mini-tours if you want. We can move in with Mom for a while. Me and Molly can come see you play on weekends. You know there’s guys out there who’d sponsor you again.”

“I don’t know, baby. Maybe Adcock’s right. Maybe I’m just a choke artist.”

“Dammit, Rick. What happened to you? You used to be the cockiest S.O.B. I’ve ever seen, and let me tell you something, it was sexy.”

Rick moves closer and brings their hands around her waist.

“I’m still pretty sexy, right?” he asks.

“If you really think you’re getting some, you are not paying attention.”

Rick frees his hands from hers and takes a step back.

“Just promise me this – promise me you’ll get back some of that cocky? I hate to say it, but I didn’t sign up for this, Rick.”

### Number Eight: Get out of Jail Free

When he originally designed Mossy Bottom, Greg recognized that holes five through seven were going to be difficult for golfers of any ability. He also studied enough golf architecture to know that many potentially great courses had been ignored because they were just too damn hard. Most people don't play golf to be humiliated and beaten down. Golf's an escape for your average Joe. Number eight, Get out of Jail Free, is a nod to the duffers.

Just a hair over 380 yards from the back tees, the hole has a wide fairway with trouble only for the worst of drives. The hole is stock-straight with a long, flat green surrounded by grass mounds to the left, back, and right. The mounds nudge wayward approaches back to the putting surface.

Get out of Jail Free gives everybody a chance at birdie, a mulligan on a round gone off the rails. It's a chance to get back on track.

\* \* \*

Tracie's pep-talk, or threat, had spurred Rick to action. That is to say, it had led him to do a lot of research on the Internet. He read about how the Hooters Tour was still producing good PGA Tour golfers. The Nike Tour had become the Nationwide Tour, which in turn became the Web.com Tour. And there was always the straight line to the PGA Tour, Q School.

Rick is looking at the results of the latest Web.com tournament. There are a few names he recognizes, PGA veterans trying to claw their way back. Most of the names are foreign to him. Most of the faces in the photos are very, very young. Almost all the scores are very, very low.

He's not even on the course now, not standing over a big putt, but Rick feels that familiar anxiety creeping over him.

"I don't have it anymore," he whispers to himself. "And I don't think I want to put me and the girls through all that shit."

There has to be another way, he thinks. He starts searching the golf courses in Tunica, the casino town on the Mississippi River, to see if they have any openings. No dice, and probably for the best. Rick doesn't have the best luck with gambling. He looks at Tupelo, Jackson, and Olive Branch, but there aren't any golf director or head pro jobs there, either.

Finally he types "TPC Southwind" and clicks through to its Careers page. There it is, Director of Golf.

Applications accepted through October 15 or upon identification of successful applicant.

Benefits include: Highly competitive wages, 401k plus employer match, employer funded retirement plan, playing privileges, and employee discounts.

I don't make a competitive wage, and I sure as hell don't make a highly competitive one, thinks Rick. I don't have a 401k, Greg doesn't match anything, and I can't imagine I'll ever get to retire at this rate. I'd gladly give up the playing privileges and employee discounts for some stability for us, and we'd be back home.

Tracie's right, he thinks. I've given Greg eight years of my life. It's high time I take care of me and my family.

Rick types in "how to write a resume" and gets started.

\* \* \*

For the first time in a long time, Greg sits in his State Farm office on the historic Mossy Bottom town square. While much of the town has turned the corner and is sliding into a rapid

decline, the square and the two blocks of antebellum homes that surround it maintain a semblance of their old glory. His office is bookended by a Tru-Value hardware store and a diner where the local business owners meet for breakfast every weekday morning at 7:30 sharp. It's all straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting, until one looks a little closer and sees that the children of those same business owners went off to college and never came back.

To be more accurate, Greg sits in Sharon's office. His, with its big leather desk chair and certificates and diplomas, doesn't contain any of the information he needs to prepare for his trip to Memphis. He's on Sharon's computer, looking at an Excel spreadsheet of the ledger.

Sharon was right, of course, he thinks. Things are bad. Letting go of Mae only postponed the inevitable. Soon there would be less money coming in than is going out.

Still, it's nice being back in the old stomping grounds. Having a face-to-face with Sharon was pleasant, too. Though they only spent a few minutes together, she seemed pleased that Greg was taking an interest in the agency again. She was patient in explaining how to get to different pages on the spreadsheet. She even gave his hand a squeeze as she left the office and locked the door behind her.

She is, Greg thinks, a remarkable woman. He thinks back to his senior year at Mississippi State. Always one to go after what she wanted, Sharon approached Greg after their second class together, a required Intro to Agricultural Pests and Insects course, and told him he would be wise to invite her on a "Coke date" for the next afternoon.

Greg blushed crimson and said, "Yes, that would probably be a good idea."

Sharon stared at him, waiting. After several pregnant moments, Greg got the message, cleared his throat, and asked, "Would you like to go on a Coke date?" She said yes and started toward the door.

“Wait,” Greg said, “What’s your name?”

It has been, Greg thinks, a good run. Looking back over the books, he chides himself for ignoring his agency, ignoring his family, for all that foolishness about Mindy – beautiful and intoxicating as she may be. He prints out the past five years’ figures and puts them in an accordion folder with the rest of his presentation. Getting all my shops in order won’t be easy, but it’s going to happen.

Later that week, Greg sits in the lobby of the Fourth Federal Savings and Loan building on Poplar Street in Midtown Memphis. The bank retains much of its mid-century charm. Its chairs have narrow legs and their original nubby wool upholstery.

Greg shifts uncomfortably in his chair. He is packed into a blue pinstripe suit bought a decade ago and usually worn only on Christmas and Easter. A conservative rust red tie is pinched around his neck. He clutches the brown accordion folder to his chest and finds himself wishing he’d brought a handkerchief. It’s stuffy in the lobby, it’s hot in the suit, and he’s nervous. He’s never asked for a penny in his life.

After another ten sweaty minutes, Greg’s name is called and a fit man walks toward him dressed in a pair of black slacks and a periwinkle polo shirt buttoned up to the neck. Greg rises and notes the logo on the chest of the man’s shirt, TPC Southwind. This makes Greg feel a bit better. He’s got a golfer.

“Mr. Goforth, I’m Daniel Brubaker,” the man says, extending his hand. “I understand you’re interested in visiting with us about a loan.”

“Nice to meet you, Daniel. I am interested, yes.” Greg tries to hold eye contact. “Please,” he says, “Call me Greg.”

“Alright, Greg, come on with me to my office and let’s talk about your plans. We’ll see if we can’t help you out here at Fourth Federal.”

Greg follows him into a small, square room with a standard desk setup and two chairs for clients. The walls are wood paneled and covered with framed photos of Daniel’s pretty wife, two young kids, and golden retriever. There are dozens of pictures of Daniel with southern sports celebrities, many of them posed shots from charity golf tournaments.

“I see you’re a golfer, Daniel.”

“Yes I am. Safe to say if I’m not here or with the family, I’m out hitting the links.”

“Well then, I think you’re going to like what you hear,” says Greg. He takes a thick stack of papers from the file folder and begins handing sheet after sheet across the desk to Daniel.

“I am the owner and sole proprietor of Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club in Mossy Bottom, Mississippi.”

Daniel takes his eyes from the papers he’s being fed and looks at Greg. “You don’t say? I’ve played there a couple times. Good course. Tough course.”

“Glad you enjoyed it and found it challenging. That’s why I’m here today.”

“It’s been a couple years since I’ve been down there, but if my memory serves me it looks like from these drawings that you want to make some improvements on the facilities there,” says Daniel. “New parking, I guess that’s an addition to the clubhouse, and what’s this here?” He holds up a charcoal sketch of a brick building rising several stories high.

“That’s the luxury hotel,” says Greg. “Any destination golf resort has to have a high-end option. I’m basing mine on the Peabody, just on a little smaller scale.”

“Well, the Peabody is a fine hotel.” Daniel stacks the drawings up and sets them on the desk. “What I’m hearing is that you want to make Mossy Bottom a stand-alone resort, that

you've outgrown your current facilities and it's time to expand. Why don't you give me a sense of the whole project? Give me your two sentence pitch."

"Two sentence pitch, you say?" Greg thinks this over for a few seconds. "I want to make Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club a golf resort on par with Pebble Beach and Pinehurst. I want Mossy Bottom to host the U.S. Open in 2015."

Daniel cocks his head to the side and shrugs. "Well," he says, "I guess it's safe to say you don't aim low. I'm assuming you've brought the financials?"

Greg shifts in his seat. "To be honest, Daniel, I don't exactly know how much some of this stuff would cost."

"Sorry, Greg. What I meant was, did you bring the numbers for your club?"

"Um, yes, but first I'd like to share my insurance agency's books with you." Greg hands over the spreadsheets. Daniel takes a few minutes to review each page.

"These are good," he says finally. "You've got a solid business there. Numbers got a little softer than you probably liked earlier this year, but it looks like you've got a chance to turn things around with some hard work. I see, too, that you've done some cost-cutting on the employee side and that you're taking home less of what you make."

"Yes, well, you've got to do what you've got to do," says Greg. He didn't realize Sharon had given their family a pay cut, too.

"Now let's see the club's numbers."

"Before I hand these over, I want to let you know we've put an aggressive marketing plan in place that we expect will have a dramatic, positive impact on our revenues."

"Of course," Daniel says. He smiles thinly. "We'll take that into account."

With each page Daniel studies his smile recedes in measure. After five pages the thin smile is gone, replaced by a frown and furrowed brow. As he nears the bottom of the stack, he's only giving a cursory glance to each page. He gathers up the papers and hands them back to Greg. He tries, unconvincingly, to arrange another smile.

"I don't think we can help you, Mr. Goforth."

"But Daniel, I haven't even had a chance to make my presentation. The big reveal, if you will."

"Mr. Goforth, I don't think that's necessary. Looking through those drawings earlier put me in mind of a several hundred thousand dollar loan, if not more. I'm afraid you need to be thinking more about cutting costs than expanding. Frankly speaking, you could double your membership numbers and I still don't see how I could loan you the money for that parking lot, not to mention a hotel."

"Daniel, friend, I've got big things planned here," says Greg. He moves his head and bobs his shoulders, hoping to get Daniel to look him in the eye. "Just a couple weeks ago I sent a letter to David Fay – the David Fay – laying out our bid to host the U.S. Open in 2015. I'll wager the only way it's going to happen is if I can promise him I'll make good on building that hotel and the grandstands and..."

Daniel holds up his hand for him to stop. "Mr. Goforth, please. You seem like a nice man, and you do have a good golf course, but let's be honest. There is no way in hell that David Fay is putting his Open in a dirt-poor, ugly little Delta town. He won't do it if you build three Peabody hotels. And he won't do it because it would be stupid to do it."

"But we have a fine group of members. All we need is a shot. If you don't give us this loan, I will be forced to take my business elsewhere."

A different sort of smile crosses Daniel's face. "Mr. Goforth, Greg, let me offer you some advice. You need to put any ideas of expansion out of your head and concentrate on your core business model. It seems to me that you've got a solid membership base. You could raise their dues by ten percent, cut back on course maintenance by a third, get rid of your events department – I see no evidence you've held an event in the past three years – and run a marginally profitable small town country club. If you insist on watering the fairways and keeping all those employees, you have no choice but to take on investors, unless you're sitting on a pile of money you haven't told me about. But if you were, I guess you wouldn't be here right now, am I correct?"

"Yes. Yes you are."

"Then I think it's time for us to shake hands and say goodbye. I wish you the best of luck Mr. Goforth."

\* \* \*

It's taken a few days and several false starts, but Rick puts the finishing touches on his cover letter and resume. The guilt he felt when he started pulling them together has subsided to the point that he barely notices it anymore. He's done some reconnaissance work, too. Two phone calls with Lance uncover that Southwind's director is retiring at the end of the calendar year and that there are some heavy hitters lining up to take his spot. The mid-South has its fair share of former Tour players, and it sounds like a lot of them would love to make the job at Southwind the cushy capper to their careers.

Rick thinks back again to his talk with Tracie and reminds himself that he was once the most famous golfer in Memphis, he was the sure thing. He's got the chance to come full circle and move his way back to forefront of the city's golfing community. Maybe not as a Tour pro, but with the best gig a club pro could ask for.

He prints the letter and resume and places them in a manila envelope. The address is written in Rick's best golf pro calligraphy. There are a dozen stamps affixed. He doesn't want to take any chances with this.

### Number Nine: The Pit of Despair

Mossy Bottom's ninth hole is its number one handicap hole and maybe its best, a stout 415 yards from the members' tees. An elevated tee box is set deep into the woods, forming a narrow chute that opens out over a deep ravine rife with snake grass and brambles. It's only a 150 yard carry over the pit, but it's another 100 yards to the plateau that offers the best chance of a reasonable approach shot. The fairway is narrow and lined by heavy forest. The green is three-tiered, with the top left diagonal shelf home to the toughest pin placements. Mossy Bottom's club house is perched behind the green. The brick patio behind the club house is the perfect spot for the members to gather to drink beer and whiskey and heckle the players lining up their putts.

Since it's the ninth hole, a hefty portion of a round's big bets come due here. This, more than anything, accounts for the hole playing tougher than any other on the course. When you've got three presses carrying over, the fairway looks no wider than a parking space from the tees. The 150 yard carry may as well be a mile when there's money on the line. That's why the best place on the course to hunt for lost balls is on nine's "pit of despair."

Greg Goforth looks out over the ninth from the patio, watching the sun fade behind the pines he wistfully recognizes he'll have to chop down to make way for Phase Four of the subdivision, that is, if any of his plans ever come to fruition. He's gathered the members before to get them excited about Mossy Bottom as a subdivision, but tonight he's presenting an altogether different animal.

It's been a tough few months for Greg. As the weather's grown colder, rounds per day have decreased and so have cart rentals, food and beverage, and pro shop sales. To take up the slack, he's worked harder than ever to try to drum up business for his insurance agency. He

makes the rounds at the breakfast joints, the Missionary Baptist churches, the historically black college on the north side of town, the Elks Lodge, and all parts in between. Business ticks up a tad, but he knows he's fighting a losing battle.

Greg is dressed for tonight's occasion. Once again he's wearing his navy pinstripe business suit, more conscious here at the club of how uncomfortable it makes him to wear anything but loose fitting golf clothes or camouflage coveralls. He feels like he imagines a pot-bellied pig must, unnaturally domesticated. He'd rather be golfing, or scuba-diving, or any other activity one might read on a bumper sticker. Anything but begging his friends for money.

Around his neck is a bow tie, a pink and periwinkle diagonal striped number like he's seen David Fay wear in interviews. He hopes it will indicate to the members that he's a southern gentleman, a man of refinement, and a golfing visionary. Greg takes a deep breath, turns to the double doors leading back into the clubhouse, and walks purposefully inside.

Off to his right all the banquet chairs are occupied, and it's standing room only behind them. Jason is pouring drinks from behind the bar at the back of the room while Rick hands out ice cold cans of domestic beer. The special events director, Dina, has done a good job covering up the foam board posters with the velvet drapes she's borrowed from upstairs and finding a good spot for the podium on the left side of the room. It pains Greg to know that hers will be one of the first positions he'll have to axe if his presentation tanks.

No one has noted his entrance. The men of Mossy Bottom are talking in loud voices. Greg recognizes for his first time that the only women he ever sees at the club work there, save for the rare mornings Torgesen and Peters drag their wives along for brunch. He reaches into his jacket pocket and flips open his worn Moleskine, jotting down "WE NEED WOMEN" on the

first clean sheet he finds. He flips back a few pages to his notes for tonight's presentation and uses his thumb for a bookmark. He catches Rick's eye and gets a nod in return. It's show time.

Greg strides to the podium, sets the notebook down, and grips the sides of the podium tightly to stop his hands from shaking. He glances from side-to-side of the room and takes a mental roll call. They're all here. Son-of-a-gun. We're gonna do this.

"Ahem. AHEM," he says.

The talk dies down. Greg tries to approximate the tip-lipped half-smile that Bill Clinton used to give, the one that conveys gratitude, humility, commitment. He fights the urge to give a politician's thumbs-up. He pauses another moment to build anticipation, and begins.

"Gentlemen of Mossy Bottom..."

"What the fuck is that thing on your neck?" yells Adcock.

The crowd erupts in laughter.

Greg looks down at his shoes, squeezes his eyes tight, and exhales audibly through his nose. He feels the blood rush to his ears and pound in his head. He tugs off the tie and tosses it behind, popping his top button in the process. He looks back up and waits for everyone to quiet down.

"Fellas," he says, "I started out an insurance man, and that made me a very comfortable living. I've got a nice house and a big truck." He starts to add "and a great family," but he pushes that thought out as quickly as he can. "In fact, for most of you, I'm *your* insurance man. I'm grateful to every one of you. And I'm grateful you're part of the Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club family.

“I’ve got nothing to complain about. I’ve got a life a lot of people would kill to have, but, but, it’s doing nothing for my soul...Dammit. I’m getting off track already. This isn’t about me; this is about you.”

He glances up from his notes but can’t bring himself to make eye contact.

“What I’m talking about is...what I’m asking is, How are we going to be remembered?”

“Begging your pardon, Greg,” says Peters, “but I’m not following you. I thought you were going to try to sell us some housing lots again.”

“You always bring out the good booze when you’re trying to sell something,” says Adcock.

“HEAR, HEAR!”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, I’m not trying to sell you anything,” says Greg. “Well, that’s not strictly true. I’m trying to get you to invest in something bigger than any one of us. To help you share in a piece of immortality, if you will. I want to bring the world to Mossy Bottom, and I want you – I need you – to be a part of it.” He searches the room for a sympathetic face, but he gets mostly blank looks in return. Rick is scratching his neck and looking off to the corner. Jason is sneaking a drink from the Maker’s Mark bottle. It’s dead quiet for several long beats.

“Our apologies,” says Adcock. “Go on. Go on, Greg.”

Greg is struck dumb by Adcock’s reassuring words. After another long pause he overcomes his shock and gives a little nod.

“Thank you, Hank. As I was starting to say, we have a great golf course,” Greg continues. “We live in one of the most beautiful and unspoiled corners of the world. Our people are generous and kind. The outside world just doesn’t know it yet. That’s why we’re going to bring them here. And here’s what they’re going to find.”

Greg walks to the wall behind him and begins uncovering the four foam board posters flanking the podium. The one on the far left shows the eighteenth green surrounded on three sides by steep, towering grandstands, spectators gazing down on a faceless twosome preparing to putt out.

There’s murmuring from the crowd as Greg moves to the second poster and unveils an overhead view of Mossy Bottom. Gone are the skeet shooting range and the wetlands to the north of number eleven. In their place are acres of parking and a new cart shed done up to look like a stately home. Off the eighteenth, where the current cart shed resides, is a large H-shaped building.

Greg removes the drape from the third poster, and there’s the landscape view of the H-shaped building, an eight-story hotel and events center fronted in red brick and green awnings. The cursive script on the poster reads “Mossy Bottom Hall.”

The final foam board poster is of an attractive green, black, and gold logo:

U.S. OPEN

2015

Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club

A magnolia bloom envelops the year. Greg originally envisioned a rifle stock in its place, but couldn't make it work.

“Gentlemen, we are already gaining a reputation as the Augusta of the South,” says Greg. “But we have a chance to be more. We have the golden opportunity to be Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club, U.S. Open venue.”

There is a smattering of applause from the back of the room. Rick stops when he realizes he's the only one clapping. An old man in a red windbreaker and high-waters stands up slowly. All eyes are on him.

“So, what you're saying,” says Tucker, one of the club's first members and a native of Mossy Bottom proper, “is you want to have a golf tournament here.”

“No, Mr. Tucker,” says Greg. “I want to have the golf tournament.”

“What's wrong with what we got now?”

“Well, nothing. And that's the point,” says Greg. “We've got something special here in Mossy Bottom. It's time to double-down and let the cat out of the bag and aim for the stars, if you catch my meaning.”

“And you gotta dig up the shooting range to do that?” asks Tucker.

“This is half a hunt club, remember?” comes a voice from the back. There are murmurs of assent.

“That's good duck land off eleven, Greg,” says Tucker. “You and me set up blinds in there together, or did you forget?”

“Men, Mr. Tucker, I know this is tough to imagine right now,” says Greg. “Change is hard, but this is a good deal I’m talking about.”

“Change is bullshit, Greg,” says Tucker. “I want to enjoy my course and my land without a bunch of pavement and fancy hotels and Yankees crowding me.”

“But imagine Phil and Tiger and Rory and all the rest of the guys on our course.” Greg’s talk gets faster, more fevered. He feels himself losing the crowd just as he’s getting started. “We’d get Jim Nantz up in the booth with Faldo, and maybe Feherty would knock back some beers with us. Can’t you see it? We could get matching sports jackets for members only. I’ll let you pick the color, Mr. Tucker. You want plaid? We could do plaid. I’m not talking Harbor Town plaid – we’d get our own plaid with the logo embossed and everything. Folks the world over would know Mossy Bottom plaid.”

“I don’t give a damn about a jacket,” says Tucker. “What I’m hearing is that you want to get rid of the shooting range. Well, I can’t stand for that.”

“Hold your horses there, Tucker,” says Adcock. “Let’s at least hear the man out. There might be some way around the issues you raise. Nobody’s saying you can’t shoot out over a parking lot when we’re not holding the Open, right Greg?”

“Well, I hadn’t really thought about that,” says Greg, “but you’re right, Hank. We could always build us a firing station in the new parking lot and have Merle and the boys sweep up the clay pigeons at the end of the day.”

“Maybe so,” says Tucker. “We still lose the duck blinds. And what about the cost? That’s a mighty big hotel you’ve got a picture of there. You aiming to raise our dues to pay for it?” He looks around the room and nods confidently at folks before sitting back down.

“No sir, Mr. Tucker, nothing like that. When I got the idea to build this club I did it with the understanding that this place was for my friends and family. I’m never going to do anything to price my friends out of Mossy Bottom. No, today I’m asking for partners, and I’m asking as someone who never asked another man for a single dime until I went to that damned bank last week.”

“You went to what bank, Goforth?” asks Buddy Moore, president of First National of Mossy Bottom. For many people in the room, this is the first thing they’ve heard Hal say that doesn’t involve golf.

“Buddy, my friend,” says Greg, looking down at his shoes, “I never thought it would come to this. I have been a prideful man, and I thought I could get this done without anyone in town any the wiser. So I drove up to Memphis, made my pitch, and got turned down cold. That’s why I’m up here now.”

“What makes you think my bank won’t loan you what you need?”

“Buddy...guys...we’re leaking money here. That Memphis banker told me I don’t have enough collateral. We been leaking money for years now, but I’ve always had State Farm to pay the bills. Now that’s drying up. Let’s face it, people aren’t moving to north Mississippi any more. Most of them pack up and leave as soon as they can because they don’t see what we do. They see poor folks and bad schools and a row of mansions that remind them how it used to be. I’m here

to tell you that things can be good again. Damned if we haven't made mistakes here, but things can be better than ever."

Torgesen rises from his chair. "Greg, you know that Peters and I have a great deal of respect for this golf course. We wouldn't have moved here if we didn't think it was one of the best darned tracks we've ever played. But I gotta tell you something I didn't have the heart to tell you when you were offering those lots – this town is a dump. Our wives let us golf here every day, but they're not living anyplace in Mississippi except Oxford. Maybe, respectfully speaking of course, you should set your sights a little lower." He quickly takes a seat.

"As much as our Minnesota friend's words sting me, I must agree," says Buddy. "You were right not to come to my bank, Greg. I wouldn't have loaned you the money, and from the looks of those posters, I don't have enough money anyway. It's your club. You do what you want and I wish you Godspeed, brother. But maybe you oughtta leave well enough alone. I don't think any of us will begrudge you a few extra bucks a month to keep this fine club up and running, but I think I speak for the group here when I say Phil Mickelson ain't coming to Mossy Bottom any time soon."

"Now hold on and let me tell you more about this hotel I've got planned," says Greg. "It'll be like the Peabody in her prime."

"I think we're done here, Greg," says Tucker. "You don't mind if we help ourselves to another drink?"

Taking that as a cue, the members begin rising from their seats and heading to the bar and the cooler Rick's manning. Greg stands watching, still gripping the sides of the podium so hard

his knuckles are stark white. When it's obvious no one's coming to talk to him, no one's staying put to hear him out, he heads upstairs to the members' room.

Greg remembers reading an article about relieving stress, back when he didn't have much stress in his life. The article said it helps to identify your problems and be honest and fair with yourself. Once you've identified the root of your stress honestly and without judgment, you can set about eliminating the source of the stress.

Greg tries this out. The presentation did not go well, he thinks. I do not like my chances of getting any of the members to invest. Without lodging – hell, without parking – the U.S. Open isn't coming to Mossy Bottom. I live in a dying town. I live in an RV. I haven't seen my wife and kids in two weeks. This is the bottom of the barrel. Sharon and Torgesen and the rest are right. I need to set my sights lower.

“Greg, let me tell you a story,” says a husky voice.

Greg jumps and turns around to find Hank Adcock staring back at him, his thumbs hooked in his waistband. It's the second time tonight Hank's surprised him.

“I appreciate that, Hank, but I'm a little busy right now,” says Greg, giving Adcock a half-hearted smile.

“You're busy having a nervous breakdown. Sit your ass down and let me tell you a story.”

“Right. Okay.” Greg takes a seat on the members' room couch.

“It all starts in the bayou of Louisiana,” says Adcock. “Little Boudreaux...”

“Hank, I don’t have time for a Little Boudreaux joke.”

“Everybody has time for a Little Boudreaux joke. Now shut up and let me talk.” Adcock squares his shoulders and pops his neck.

“Late November down in the bayou of Louisiana, Little Boudreaux noticed the rain and the cold were getting to him and his buddies. Their faces were long and glum, and laughter didn’t come so easy. Folks talked about the crappy things in life, like mortgages and gun control and ID chips for pet cats. Boudreaux found himself reading the obituaries to see how many names he recognized. This shit wasn’t right.

“Now Little Boudreaux knew from experience the best way to snap everybody out it was to throw a party. Of course, that was always his answer to a problem. More often than not, he was right. Folks just needed something to look forward to.

“Boudreaux sent the trucks and swamp boats out far and wide to cousins and friends and other assorted parishioners inviting them all to a costume ball Saturday night. Nothing like dressing up to snap us out of this funk, thought Little Boudreaux.

“Everybody in the bayou was talking about the party and what they were going to wear. Some folks went off special to New Orleans to pick out their costumes.” Adcock pauses and lets rip with a huge fart. “Sorry Greg, I may have to postpone the story and dump off. You got any magazines?”

“Finish the story, Adcock!”

“Damn, easy son. I’m going.” Adcock continues, “One by one, the guests arrived and curtsied or bowed to Little Boudreaux and took a glance at his costume. Let me tell you, they

snapped their eyes back forward right quick. No one had the heart to ask him what he was supposed to be dressed up as. They figured it might be rude to ask, and, after all, it was awful good of Boudreaux to have this party to take their minds off the big shitty world. Tonight there'd be beer and good music and gumbo and dancing.

“Now, the ladies looked real fine. They were done up proper as Southern belles and nuns and slutty nurses,” says Adcock.

“Hang on!” says Greg. “You left out what Boudreaux's dressed up like.”

“I'm getting there,” says Adcock. “Pipe down and let me tell my story the way I want to tell it.

“Now then, there were a lot of slut costumes. Nurses, like I said, and Wonder Woman and Bo Peep and French maids and slutty animals like bunnies and nutria.

“It did the men's hearts good to see their women looking so good. Talk came easy, good talk about hunting and sex and food. Folks hurried through the receiving line, careful to keep eye contact with Little Boudreaux. Boudreaux sure seemed at ease for somebody dressed the way he was. Some of the guests figured he must've gotten into the hard stuff early.

“Truth was, Boudreaux wasn't all that drunk yet. He was feeling pretty cocky all the same. Even though he had invited the whole parish, he'd challenged his very best buddies to a contest – who could come up with the best “feelings” costume. They'd show the rest of the party what kind of mood they were in. See, Boudreaux knew that any old so-and-so could go to Walmart and buy a costume, but it takes a rare breed to turn his feelings into art.”

“That seems like a pretty deep thought for Boudreaux,” says Greg.

“Boudreaux is a misunderstood figure,” says Adcock, “an old soul, if you will. That’s why we turn to him in times like these. As I was saying, he told his best friends to dress up like their feelings.

“He felt his heart gladden when Pierre came strolling up, covered in emerald green moss from head-to-toe. Pierre looked like a soft swamp monster.

“‘Pierre,’ said Boudreaux, ‘You sho’ look peculiar in dat moss suit. Whatchyou supposed to be?’

“‘Little Boudreaux, I am green with envy,’ said Pierre.

“‘How come? You got a fine wife off dere dancing in a tiny-ass skirt and a job that ain’t hard and some friends, right? Things ain’t so bad.’

“‘My friend, all dat might be true, but damned if Goober didn’t go and buy him a new F-150 with swamper tires and spotlights for the nutria and a gun rack hold five guns. I want one and I ain’t got that kind of money. I am green, brother. Green.’

“‘I hear you,’ said Boudreaux. ‘You done a fine job expressin’ your feelings tonight. Go get you a beer.’

“‘Ain’t you gonna tell me what you dressed up as?’ asked Pierre.

“‘Not yet. I’m waiting on the other fellas first.’

“As Pierre wandered off, Boudreaux spotted his old pal Thibodeaux sauntering his way kind of sideways-like and holding a brown paper bag. It looked like Thibodeaux had been drinking a long time already.

“Hey dere, Thibodeaux. Whatchyou wearing tonight?’

“As you can see, mon frère,’ said a slurring Thibodeaux, ‘I have come prepared to win a contest and the big trophy.’

“Ain’t no trophy, pards,’ said Boudreaux. ‘Besides, you ain’t wearing a costume.’

“Aw hell. Hang on.’ Thibodeaux pulled a horned Viking helmet from the bag and plopped it on his head. ‘I’M HORNY!’

“Thibs, dat ain’t a real feeling.’

“I FEEL HORNY!’

“Right. Go fix you a plate.’

“How come you ain’t wearing clothes, Little Boudreaux?’ asked Thibodeaux.

“Don’t you worry yourself. Go dance with da girls.’

“Boudreaux watched Thibodeaux wander off in the direction of the band and found himself hoping his buddy Leblanc had put more thought into his costume. Just then, Leblanc came walking up dressed in a dirty red union suit. His face was caked in red clay that was starting to crack and flake.

“Damn, you look like pure hell, Leblanc.’

“Boudreaux, I am ashamed,’ said Leblanc. ‘I done sinned against my wife and family by making sweet talk with that Candy-girl from over in Houma. I am red with shame.’

“You made it with little Candy?’

“Naw, don’t be a fool, Boudreaux. I saw that fine little apple ass in those shorts she wear even ‘do it’s cold as hell out here and I whistled and said “Damn, Candy, you as sweet as yo’ name” and she said “You a sweeter talker by half Leblanc” and I didn’t say nothin’ to that and she said “Why don’t you come over here and talk to me some more” and I got scared and drove off and I am sore ashamed.’

“You dress up like dat ‘cuz you told Candy her ass is sweet? Ain’t no sin in telling the truth, Leblanc.’

“All the same, brother, I done sinned. I know it in my bones.’

“Go get you a drink and forget about it. And tell your wife you dressed up like the devil or something.’

“Just then, Leblanc took a step back and looked at his friend Boudreaux. He opened and shut his mouth a few times like he was trying to say something.

“Don’t ask. I’m headed up to party to announce who won our little contest,’ said Boudreaux.

“The crowds parted to let Boudreaux through, on account of this being his party and the fact that he was buck naked with nothing but something glistening and white duck-taped to the end of his pecker. He walked to the clearing where the band was playing, and the singer stopped his singing and handed Little Boudreaux the mike.

“Friends and kin and folks I ain’t never seen before,’ he said. ‘I hope y’all are having a good time dis evenin’. I’ma let you get back to the party in just a minute here, but first I gotta say how foxy all y’all ladies look tonight. Fellas, don’t your girls look sexy?’

“There was much hooting and hollering in agreement.

“Y’all love them girls, ‘cuz I got no idea what they see in our ugly asses. One last thing ‘fore I let you go. I don’t know about y’all, but this winter feel like it’s been going on forever, and damn if it ain’t only November. The cold gets to you and gets you mighty down. If figured I’d throw this party and have some other fun along the way, too. My good buddies and me had ourselves a little costume contest where got all dressed up like we was feeling and I wanted to let y’all know that Pierre’s our winner. Look at him over dere, green with envy. Guess he don’t know that moss got the red bugs in it, but he’s the champ now. Let’s hear it for Pierre!”

“Folks sent up cheers for old Pierre and patted him the back and dumped their beers on his head.

“Okay, y’all get back to your dancin’ and carryin’ on now,” said Boudreaux. “Danks for comin’.”

“Just then, Thibodeaux came stumbling forward and grabbed the mike out of Boudreaux’s hand. His Viking helmet was tilted on his head and his eyes were damn-near shut.

“Now hold on, hold on a minute there buddy boy!” he said. “You ain’t told us what you supposed to be yet. I’m horny!”

“Boudreaux cocked his head to the side and stood himself up straight, letting everyone get a good look. He was scrawny, no doubt, and had a little mange of hair on his chest. But that wasn’t what folks were eyeballing. They were looking at the hunk of wet fruit on the end of his tallywacker.

“Little Boudreaux leaned into the mike and said, ‘Friends, I am fuckin’ dis pear. But y’all don’t worry about me, I’m feelin’ better just watchin’ y’all have a good time.’

Adcock looks expectantly at Greg. “Well?”

“What?” asks Greg.

“He’s fucking despair.”

“Oh, now I get it. Good one, Hank.”

“Jesus, were you even paying attention, Greg?”

“How you mean?”

“What I mean is, did you catch the lesson Boudreaux’s teaching us?”

“You mean, I feel like a failure and I should throw a party?”

“No,” says Adcock, “but throwing a party’s not a bad idea.”

“I’m not following you, Hank.”

“Don’t despair. You’ve got friends and a beautiful wife and good booze and a hell of a golf course. I’ll send my building crew tomorrow. We need to get started PDQ if we want the Open in 2015.”

“Come again?”

“You’ve got yourself a partner. We’re gonna get that hotel and cart shed and parking lot built for you. And since you mentioned it, you probably oughtta go ahead and throw a party to celebrate.”

Adcock turns and heads to the stairs.

“Hank,” Greg shouts after him.

“Yeah?”

“Thanks so much.”

“Don’t mention it. Plan that party.”

## The Turn

Most of the members of the Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club are in attendance. The weather is cold and damp, but nothing short of an ice storm would keep them away. The players quiet down and wait for Greg to continue.

“Now, there are other speed tournaments out there that claim to do things ‘The Right Way.’ Heck, our very own club pro Rick – say hi Rick – has been lobbying for me to fancy up our day of fun. Stagger the starting times, send a chaperone with each twosome – that kind of thing. I don’t know. I just don’t know. What do you fellas think of Rick’s ideas?”

Several men throw their beer cans at Rick, and all of them boo.

“Thanks, boss,” says a beer-soaked Rick.

“That’s what I think, too, boys. We may not do things like everybody else, but by God we have us a good time.”

“WOOOOOOO!!!”

“That’s right,” continues Greg. “That’s right. Now listen up you rocket surgeons! We gotta run down the rules.

“Rule number one: Two players to a team – two players to a cart.

“Rule number two: Both driver and golfer shall participate ‘Beer-in-Hand.’ Y’all like that ‘shall?’ That was Rick’s idea.”

Another volley of beer cans issued forth, headed Rick's way.

“Rule number two, continued: Beer-in-Hand shall be defined as any intoxicating beverage, including but not limited to beer, whiskey, gin, wine, scotch, rum, or vodka, which shall be contained in a receptacle which – shit, just be holding your drink the whole time.

“Rule number three: Both players must take a number of drinks greater than or equal to the number of strokes needed to make par on each hole.”

“What?” asks one of the town dentists.

“If you're on a par four, drink four times,” says Greg.

“Or more!” yells Adcock.

“Big gulps – no Nancy-boy sips,” says Greg. “Like this...” He tips his Miller Lite back and takes several long swallows.

He coughs and continues, “Rule number four: Don't keep score. Not that you'll be able to after a few holes.

“Rule number five: You still have to hit the ball with your clubs. No picking it up and throwing it.

“Rule number six: Carts can and must be driven to every shot, except on the greens. We aren't savages after all. Strike that – I just don't want you all fucking up my greens.

“Rule number seven: In the event that your ball travels to someplace inaccessible by cart, like the woods or the pond, you must drive back to the start of the hole and re-tee.

“Rule number eight: Taunting other players is acceptable, even encouraged, but hurting others is not. Please do not run over your opponents. Don’t aim your shots at them. Do not smack them in the head with your club – and yes, I’m looking at you Hank.”

“He was asking for it,” replies Adcock.

“Finally, rule number nine: Go like hell. The first team to play and finish every hole wins. Rick, you take it from here.”

Rick grabs the bullhorn. “Gentlemen,” he said, “to your carts and let’s get lined up on number one. Beer-in-hand over there!”

The men scamper to their carts and ATVs and peel out, one-by-one, in their hurry to get to the starting gate. Adcock narrowly misses a small man coming the wrong direction, on foot, clutching a leather briefcase to his chest and looking horrified. Adcock slows down and puts his cart in reverse. He stops beside the little man, a stranger, and looks over his blue blazer with gold buttons, his pressed khakis, and spotless loafers.

“Sir,” says Adcock.

“Y-yes,” says the stranger.

“I believe you’re in the wrong place. The Sissy Convention is down the road.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Never mind.”

“Are you Mr. Goforth?”

“Nope, I’m Hank. You’re looking for that cross-eyed fucker up on the porch,” he says, gesturing up to the clubhouse.

“Thank you,” says the stranger.

“Have a beer, little man,” says Adcock. “You look like you could use it.”

“No, thank you.”

“Take the fucking beer,” says Adcock, and he stuffs a Budweiser in the stranger’s jacket.

The stranger tosses the beer can onto the ground and walks to the clubhouse’s front porch. He peers up through the carved wooden slates, the top of his head barely clearing the five-foot floor.

“Mr. Greg Goforth?”

Greg looks around for the source of the unfamiliar voice.

“Who’s that there? Where you at?”

“Down here, sir,” says the stranger.

Greg tries to look the small man over, but it’s tough to make out anything but the top of his head.

“You’re late for the tournament,” Greg says. “And I guess nobody warned you --you’re gonna ruin those nice clothes tear-assing around the course today.”

“On the contrary,” says the stranger.

“Beg your pardon?”

“On the contrary...I’m unannounced, therefore I cannot be late.”

“You’re not here for the Speed Golf?”

“No, Mr. Goforth, I am here to gauge the suitability of Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club as a venue for the one hundred and twenty-first United States Open.”

Greg takes a sharp breath and pursed his lips. He feels a gut-punch warmth spread from his stomach to his extremities. Then he chuckles to himself, nods his head once, and takes his walkie-talkie from his belt.

“Rick, get Merle to gas and load up my ATV with a case of Lites and my sticks. Hold off on the shotgun till I get down there.”

“Roger that, boss.”

Greg turns back to the stranger. “I didn’t catch your name, sir.”

“David Fay, at your service,” says the man, with a quick bow. “I seem to have caught you at an inopportune moment.”

“Not at all, not at all,” says Greg. “You couldn’t have picked a better time. C’mon up here and let me get you some gear.”

“I’m sorry?”

“We need to get you some golf clothes – a wind shirt, maybe some nice Dry Joys,” says Greg.

“I’m afraid I am not following you, Mr. Goforth,” says David.

“David, call me Greg. You’re fixing to experience one of the reasons why Mossy Bottom Golf and Hunt Club is the ideal venue for the one hundred and twenty-first United States Open.”

“Most candidates begin with a tour of the facilities,” says David.

“Oh, we’ll get to that,” says Greg with a dismissive wave of his hand. “How come you don’t have a beer yet?”

“Well, a rather rotund man did try to press one upon me earlier. I discarded it by that bush.”

“Completely understandable, my friend,” says Greg. “We have some traditions we like to follow for the tournament you’re lucky enough to be a part of today. One of them is ‘Beer-in-Hand.’ What that means is you...”

“Oh, Mr. Goforth – Greg – I did go to Dartmouth,” says David with a mischievous grin.

“Well then, ok...so you...”

“Probably ought to have a beer.”

“There you go, boy!” exclaims Greg. “Let’s hit the pro shop. Merle’s carrying us a case of Lites.”

As the two men walk into the clubhouse, Greg claps his arm around David’s shoulders. David cowers a bit, but seems to take it well. They wander around the pro shop, Greg pausing from time to time to point out the custom cabinetry and new carpeting. David selects a hunter green Ashcroft wind shirt, white golf shirt, and Polo Sport khakis, the smallest clothes Greg is

able to find in the shop. As if by divine providence, the only size-sevens on the premises are chocolate brown Dry Joys with detailed broguing.

After David changes into his new clothes they head back outside, only to hear “HEY ASSHOLE, LET’S GET A MOVE ON!” from Adcock, who is waiting for them in the parking lot.

“Now, Hank,” says Greg with a forced smile, “let’s try to be a little more cordial around our guest.”

“Where’s your beer, little man?” asks Adcock.

Greg feels himself getting riled up, but it is at that moment that Merle pulls up in the golf cart. Merle has outdone himself on the detail job. As much as it’s possible for a matte camo paint job to sparkle, this one does. The swamp tires are polished to an otherworldly black. The chrome step-sides gleam in the pale November sun. The built-in cooler is overflowing with cans of beer and ice.

“David,” Greg says. “Climb in and hang on tight. This is gonna be a hell of a ride.”