

*No Time For  
Golf*

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# 1

## *Mendocino California*

Hacker stood on the edge of a seventy foot Mendocino County cliff almost in a trance - staring out over swells generated four thousand miles away. Looking into the early afternoon sun - he was almost blinded by a million bright white glints glancing off an azure ocean, "Aren't you worried about waves undercutting your cliffs?"

Golden looked up from his architect drawings, "Not a problem - I have a fifty yard buffer before the rough begins. And another thirty yards of rough. With a little luck - it'll be a century before waves undercut these cliffs."

Golden joined Hacker on the edge of the cliff. Finished with his survey - he shared a spectacular ocean view. They stood in awe of four foot waves crashing against the base of centuries old cliffs as kelp buds danced on top of swells like digitized messages listed at the bottom of a TGA tournament scoreboard.

Golden turned and motioned back up the hill toward Highway One, "We have a hundred yard buffer from the highway to the rough. When the cliffs collapse - we'll have room to carve out new fairways."

"You said when - not if.

"No way to stop it. Have to plan for it.

"I don't see any lots."

"Can't build homes on this side of route one."

"How about Beasty's stadium concept?"

"This is a resort course not an impact crater on the moon. As far as I'm concerned Beasty can suffer the same fate as the horse he rode in on."

"You're speaking of our Pope. The Director of the Tournament Golfer's Association. Heavens to Betsy - what sacrilege. You've built more a few golf courses for him."

"We were on the edge of bankruptcy. It was build a crater or - work for bankers. That's over now."

As they walked back up the hill from the cliffs to Golden's car, Hacker continued, "I agree, but sometimes the profit motive overrides my better judgment. Don't like to build a golf course where the players view of the trees is from the bottom of a gully."

"So true! Stadium courses are like viewing the world out of a triangular hole from the bottom of a beer can. Has Beasty approached you about stadium design?"

"Not since my mouth got in gear before my brain was engaged at the Masters. I'm lucky I wasn't exiled."

"Everyone has forgiven you."

"Like a fart in Church. It's hard to forget."

Golden opened the driver's side door, "Don't care for competition, but the course you designed in Tennessee isn't half bad. I'd add a few more left to right holes."

"That's because you fade the ball and I draw mine."

"Say hook before lightning strikes."

"Very funny. You run a business. I'd rather play golf with businessmen. Pays good and I don't have to worry about the bottom line. And the golf is free. Doesn't get any better. Why is the hotel going up on the other side of the road?"

"Coastal Commission won't let us build on the ocean side. Could have been worse. If I hadn't purchased land from one of the commissioners I would not have permission to build on the west side of Route One."

Hacker laughed, "Land - asphalt and concrete. The true

mother's milk of politics. "

"And nothing could be done because it was the mayor's son."

Golden drove his Navigator uphill on an old sheep trail - through grass and shrubs reminiscent of the western coast of Scotland. He turned south on Route One - driving on a winding coastal road through Albion. As he crossed the Navarro River - Hacker turned around and looked out the rear, "We should have continued east on 128 to Booneville."

"We will. I want to show you why we didn't build our course south of the Navarro." As they crested the hill - Golden asked, "Notice anything different?"

"No trees near the ocean. Shrubs look windblown."

"That's the reason. Get some real winter gales here. Look at the farm buildings."

"They're sheltered in hollows away from the ocean and have windbreaks of iron wood trees."

"Notice they're all bent to the east."

"I gotcha' - big winds."

"We're talking Force Nine gales."

"Where did you learn to talk Navy?"

"Had to take a Coast Guard exam to skipper my boat."

"Say Yacht quick before lightning strikes."

Golden pulled into a farm lane and turned around, "South of the Navarro there is a lot of open land. Only problems are elevation and wind. Have to build too far above the ocean and then there is the wind."

"Looks like it's has the highest and best use."

"What's that."

"Grazing sheep."

"Don't tell me - you took a real estate course."

"Had too out of self defense - I was getting screwed over by those folks."

"Can you spend an overnight with Brenda and me at Aberdeen? I want you to look at topography and pass on the lakes we

have planned. Might have to add a few more to trap runoff. If we do - I'll have a major redesign."

"Tree huggers after you?"

"They'd rather see erosion first - golf courses second. But they have a point on fertilizer runoff - though."

"With the recycled output from your sewage plant - you will be able to grow grass on concrete."

Golden turned east on 128 and followed the Navarro River uphill into the Coastal Range. He turned to Hacker, "You didn't answer my question. Can you stay overnight?"

"Marylin is going to be upset. I've been away for two weeks. And I was looking forward to a little breather. The West Coast tour has been a grind. I was looking forward to quiet evening in Sunbury."

"Tell me. We've spent more time on the practice tee than we have on the course. What time is it?"

"Noon plus thirty minutes."

"It's three thirty in Ohio. We'll fly out of the airport by five. Earliest we'll be home - nine-thirty. Tell you what. I'll have a limo pick her up and we'll have a late dinner at the Aberdeen Club."

"None of that fruit and fish you eat."

"Keep eating those steaks and your doctor will put you on a low fat diet."

"Live fast - die young and leave a beautiful corpse."

Golden drove into the blackness of a deep dark cathedral - second growth redwoods - glad he was heading east. The flashes of sunlight from a sun sinking lower in the west were like stepping out of a movie theater into a white hot sun. He started to say something to Hacker and stopped. Hacker was fast asleep. Golden laughed, "He even smiles in his sleep. Now there is one happy fellah. Wonder what his dreams are about? If it was me - I'd be dreaming about making a full turn and twenty-five putt rounds."

Golden eased back on the throttle and turned on his headlights after barely escaping a blinded driver of an oncoming car who had swerved into his lane. Hacker woke up when Golden hit the brakes and swerved right, "What was that? Another California driver?"

"Mule deer. Woods around here are full of them. Came right out of the redwoods and bounced off the highway."

The deer turned it's head and looked at the Navigator like, "What are you doing in my territory?"

Hacker laughed, "He's less concerned than you are. Like he had to dodge cars every day."

"Came out of the dark - hidden by those giant trees."

"Beautiful - like driving through an ancient cathedral at midnight with the candles out."

"Only one drawback."

"What's that?"

"Can't grow grass redwoods. Not enough sunlight."

Hacker checked the dash over, "Don't you ever get tired of driving Ford products?"

"Not when I own a dealership. Isn't this a brute?"

"If I didn't have a contract with Mega Motors - I'd let you give me one."

"Think about joining the team. Ford owns Jaguar now."

"Best thing that ever happened to both. Ford gets prestige and Jaguar gets a reliable drive train. What's the name of the crossroads up ahead?"

"Philo."

"Sounds like a Clint Eastwood movie character."

"You've got to read more books."

"My shirts cost half as much as yours."

"You get what you pay for."

"Not anymore. I lost that contract too."

"And the discount stores?"

"Gone with an ill timed and unintended comment."

"You're still lucky. They didn't hang you on a cross."

Golden slowed to thirty miles and hour - driving through the Anderson Valley metropolis of Booneville. He pulled over and stared at a phone booth in the middle of a town without one stop light. It was identified as *Buckey Walters*. He said to himself out loud, "What a strange name for a phone booth." Hacker didn't respond. He had returned to dreamville.

## *Sunbury*

Hacker drifted off into a recurring dream. He was napping in the back of a 1936 Cadillac limousine in the early morning sun. He felt a tug, "Wake up Hacker. Hooker wants you to carry for him. Keep your mouth shut and don't laugh at his swing and you'll get a big tip."

"The last time it was, 'Buy low and sell high.'"

The co-owner of Sunbury's nine hole golf course helped Hacker to his feet, "Keep a civil tongue in your head."

"It's too funny for words. A man named Hooker who hits a wild slice."

"Be gone with you and your smart tongue. You'll be lucky to get a quarter tip."

Hacker retrieved Hooker's bag from the trunk of his new Lincoln convertible - wondering, "If I had Hookers money - I'd join the Country Club instead of playing a pay for play privately owned course." The nine hole Sunbury Golf Course was built before the turn of the century for golfers who hit the ball from right to left. Holes numbers one - two - three - four - six and nine had out-of bounds to the right. Ad to the right was where Hooker cut his slice. Hacker stood at the practice area next to the first tee - as Hooker strolled up to the fist tee ahead of his foursome.

Hacker breathed a sigh of relief - Hooker was smiling. He asked, "Hand me my driver and keep a civil tongue in your head. I've heard about your ability to steer a golf ball

around this course. That's why I asked for you."

Hacker nodded, "What can I do for you?"

"I've had dozens of lessons from dozens of Pros and my slice hasn't improved. In fact - its gotten worse. I want you to stand behind me and see if you can find out what's wrong."

All Hacker could say was, "Yes Sir."

Hooker teed his ball and drove a banana to the right - over the trees and out-of bounds. He looked back at Hacker, "I've hit so many out-of-bounds - half the balls on the practice range belong to me."

Hacker asked, "Can I stop you before you take the club back?"

"Anything - if it will help."

"Take your stance and set-up for another drive - but don't take the club back."

Hacker knelt down five paces behind Hooker and asked, "What are you aiming at?"

"The left side of the range."

"Hold your stance until I place a club aligned with your feet." Hacker retrieved a three iron from Hooker's bag and laid it on the ground - aligned off the toes of Hooker's shoes, "See where your feet are aligned to?"

"My God - I'm aligned to the right side of the range."

"That's half the problem. When you start your swing down at the ball - you'll attempt to bring the club in alignment to the left side of the range."

"From the outside?"

"And at impact you attempt to bring it back to square. This makes you cut it - causing a slice to the right."

"So I move my feet and align them with a drive to the left side of the fairway?"

"Only if you're a Pro. I'm afraid if you do that you'll still hit a wild right slice."

"So what's the solution."

"Set up on the left side of the tee. Aim straight-a-way down

the left side. You'll still hit a fade, but you should wind up somewhere near the middle of the fairway."

Hooker tried it with another old ball and the results were just as Hacker described them - a power slice to the middle of the range. Hooker asked, "What about the pull to the left I get every once in a while?"

"That happens when you hit it square with your old set-up. With it you either cut across the ball and sliced it to the right or hit it square and pulled it to the left."

As Hooker's foursome approached he whispered to Hacker, "Keep quiet about your lesson. If I set up wrong - place my golf bag to the left of your feet. I feel a good round coming in my bones."

Hacker was going to say something about confidence being the other half of the game, but decided to stay quiet.

Hacker placed Hooker's bag to the left of his feet twice on the first nine and three times on the back. As a result - for the first time in his life - Hooker spent most of the day in the middle of the fairway. When the round was over - Hooker pulled Hacker aside and slipped him a ten dollar tip. He was ecstatic, "I won every bet today. Why I even drew three balls to the right side of the fairway. I won't forget your lesson. And he didn't. When Hacker set out on the TGA tour - he did so with Hooker's financial backing. He had a friend for life and Hooker? Two course championships.

Hacker's days as a caddie came to an end when he entered high school. Electric golf carts replaced caddies and he had discovered girls. He found a bit of work on weekends running the refreshment stand under the trees behind the sixth tee. He learned to fetch - make change and most important - chip shots on hard ground. To while the time away he grooved his own golf swing and became an expert at chipping balls with a

table leg as a target. When that became boring - too - he read book after book and even did homework. If he missed out on a weekend social life - he was happily unaware.

"Hacker - can't you hear me? You're setting up too far to the right."

"I hear you - Coach. But - I must be doing something right. I'm four up with six to go."

He wanted to tell the Coach it wasn't proper to provide golf instructions during a match, but decided not to. He stepped back and began his pre shot routine again. Coach had broken his concentration and he had to regain it. He flexed his knees - placed the weight of his body evenly on his feet. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He stepped away - unable to block out his Coaches voice - now shouting at him to change his set-up.

Only five foot eight - Hacker had taught himself to hit a low running hook to add more distance to his drives. So - he had to set-up on the right side of the tee and aim to the right - drawing the ball back on his target line. Proper execution took all of his concentration. He backed off again and this time smiled and whispered under his breath, "Coach doesn't know much about golf. Everything he knows comes from two Phys Ed classes at Ohio State. And if he ever loses his class notes - he'll have to buy Hogan's book. His mind is on how to convert his football team from full house to a split T." Hacker spoke - out of respect, I'll set-up more to the left - Coach.

Hacker picked up his golf ball and moved two feet further to the left. He set-up again - let his breath out slowly and allowed his arms to swing freely. His mind still was not on executing the shot. Coach's interference had really unsettled him. He knew how to get back in the game. Hacker moved his golf ball to the far left side of the tee

and set-up for a Hooker fade. It worked. He belted a perfect left to right power fade into the middle of the fairway. He picked up his tee - gave Coach a smile and a wink and watched as his opponent hooked his drive into the left rough. Hacker whistled as he walked off the tee - chasing after his ball.

To Hacker - golf was a simple game. Hit it - chase after it and hit it again. Hacker nailed a four iron five feet to the left of the pin and tapped in for a birdie. He was now five up with five to go - dormie. The fourteenth hole was a short par three with a pond in front. The pin was ten paces on the front of the green. Hacker played safe - flying the flag with an eight iron - landing softly twenty feet past the pin. His opponent attempted to hit a hard nine to the front, but failed. The ball struck the far bank of the pond and rolled in. His opponent conceded the match. Hacker looked for his Coach but could not find him.

He came up out of his dream to, Hacker! Wake up. We're in a pull out outside of Booneville. It's your turn to drive." Happy stretched his arms over his head, "Thought I heard you say something about Buckey Walters. Is that the baseball player who played for the Reds?"

Golden opened the passenger door, "Get a move on - or dinner will become a midnight snack."

Hacker pulled himself up behind the wheel, "Who the dickens is Buckey Walters?"

"It's a phone booth in Booneville."

"I'm sorry I asked."

Hacker eased the Navigator back on the highway, "Hope no one sees me behind the wheel of this damned Lincoln. I'd lose my contract with Mega Motors for sure."

"You and Fox. I won't tell on you. There isn't a golf course within fifty miles. No one here knows us."

"And all the pickup trucks have gun racks. And the phone booths are called Buckey Walters. My kind of people."

"I'll wake you when we reach Cloverdale."

"Drive slow and sure. There are log trucks coming around every bend."

"I will."

"And watch out for mule deer."

"Do you want to take the wheel or sleep?"

"Drive on - Macbeth."

## *Columbus*

Hacker shifted into Drive - checked for traffic and reentered pathway 128 to Cloverdale. He glanced over at Golden, "Now there's a man who knows how to travel. He was sound asleep before our tires hit the pavement."

Golden slipped into a dream that was recurring with unnerving frequency - bits and pieces of a charity event at the Columbus Country Club - his first home town exposure to professional golf. All the great players were there. Sam Snead - Ben Hogan - Jimmy Demaret - Loyd Mangrum. Amateurs - Frank Stranahan - Perry Como and Ed Sullivan and the clown prince of golf - Paul Hahn. Como and Sullivan were good sticks - almost scratch golfers. But - the highlight of Golden's day were the trick shot exhibition by Paul Hahn and long drive demonstration by Jimmie Thompson.

Golden visualized Hahn hitting shot after shot with the precision of a concert violinist. And the garden hose driver that wrapped around his neck! And hitting a ball off a tee held in a ladies mouth! Later - on the course. Hahn hit a four wood from his knees on the ninth fairway. The ball stopped inches from the pin. Golden asked, "Why aren't you on tour?"

Hahn answered, "Putts don't count in an exhibition. There is no pressure to make a check here."

Putts don't count rolled over and over in Golden's mind. He usually woke up at this thought, but not today. He was running to the first tee to watch Jimmie Thompson give a driving exhibition. Thompson pointed toward the first green - three-hundred and sixty yards away, "I'm going to hit a hook with my driver."

His ball flew as if shot out of a cannon - hooking from right to left clearing the flag - green and trees on the left. Thompson teed up another ball, "I'm going to hit a slice." His ball flew from left to right - over the pin and into the trees. Thompson turned - bowed to the crowd and grinned, "Now I'm going to hit a straight low riser."

His golf ball hugged the ground for a hundred yards and then slowly began to rise. It climbed toward the sky - splitting the middle of the green and clearing the trees behind. He threw his driver on top his bag, "Sorry folks. That's all for today. When you hit three perfect shots like that - it's time to quit and play golf."

Putts don't count and it's time to quit rolled over and over in Golden's mind. He asked Thompson, "What would you do if you couldn't give exhibitions?"

"When you reach perfection it's time to quit."

"Time to quit?"

"It's time to quit."

"But - my business is golf."

"You can't play part time and compete on the TGA tour. If you do you'll lose your tournament nerves - your swing and putts don't count."

"Putts don't count?"

"Only in exhibitions."

"How often should I play?"

"At least twice a month."

"But - I don't have time - my business."

"It's time to quit."

"But I can't."

And then it began. No matter what he did - his putts were pushed to the right. He hooded his putter - his golf ball rolled right. He faced away from the hole. His golf ball still rolled right. He walked to the pin. The green was flat. It couldn't roll right, but it did. He grabbed the pin and pulled. It would not move. He looked down at where a hole should be. There was none.

## *Cloverdale*

"Wake up - oh wake up - oh great gift to the God's most favorite game."

"Where am I? I was on the putting green."

"Pushing everything to the right?"

"How did you know?"

"I have the same dream."

"It's your turn to drive," said Hacker.

"Why did you stop out here in the country?"

"Over the hill is the garden spot of the Russian River Valley - Pat Paulson's hometown - Cloverdale California."

"Great name. How long have I been asleep?"

"Since the British Open."

"You're closer to the truth than you know."

Golden closed the drivers side door, "You could have driven to Santa Rosa."

"And lose my contract with Mega Motors? We're back in the land of golf courses."

Golden eased his Navigator over the hill and into the outskirts of Cloverdale, "I'll stop for gas. Hate to turn this into the Lincoln Dealer with a half empty tank."

"Why didn't you buy gas in Mendocino?"

"It's sixty cents higher on the ocean."

Golden pulled up to the pump. He went inside to pay as Hacker filled the tank. He returned with two cups of coffee, "Hope you like it black."

"Fine with me. I thought you old folks drank Decaf."

"Wait till you're pushing sixty."

"I'm getting there. What happens when I reach the golden fifty mark? Do my scores escalate because of lost distance or yippie putting?"

"Neither - if you've got game. Losing distance and missing putts happens. They're the symptoms - not the disease."

"Remember what Sea Lion said when he was asked why he was using a new putter?"

"I missed it."

"The old one didn't float."

When Golden quit laughing - he returned to the subject of aging golfers, "Your game can go south for a number of reasons. We lose flexibility and strength and the grind wears us down. Most of us have chased the little white ball since we were old enough to carry a bag."

"Those were my two guesses. Don't I get three?"

"There is another facet of aging."

"I'm all ears."

"Didn't know you passed out straight lines. Another thing happens after forty-five."

"Whoa - I'm already past there. I thought we were talking about the golden age of fifty."

Golden eased his Navigator back onto the freeway - US 101, "After forty five we have too long an attention span."

"Too long? My guess would be too short."

"That was my initial guess, but experience has taught me it isn't short, but long."

"Doesn't a longer attention span improve our concentration?"

"It does in business. Not on the golf course. If I was going to build a perfect golfer from scratch - I'd start with a forty year old body and a fourteen year old brain."

"Never thought of it that way. You're onto something. When I was fourteen - I'd hit it - chase after it and hit it

again. The thrill was in the chase."

"And I hit it so far - I couldn't find it. That's why an older body is an advantage. Distance control and executing under pressure is the key to success."

## *Two Flew East*

Golden noticed a lull of silence and looked over at Hacker to see if he was alive. Hacker had slipped off to dreamland with a smile. Golden phoned ahead to his pilot, "We're thirty minutes outside of Santa Rosa. Have the Lincoln folks pick up the Navigator at the airplane. I want to depart as soon as we arrive."

The entry door was open and preflight complete as his Navigator drove up to the airplane. A valet from the local dealer was standing by for the giant RUV. Golden shook Hacker by the shoulder, "Wake up - we're here.

"How soon do we fly away?"

"As soon as you climb on board."

Happy smiled and whistled a happy tune as they climbed aboard Golden's private jet.

As Hacker strapped in - he was smiling on the outside and mulling over Golden's comments on the inside. Attention span on multiple subjects was Hacker's problem, "And most likely Golden's too. Whenever I'm close to the lead - I'm carrying too much baggage. Extraneous thoughts caromed around inside my skull like static electricity off a nylon carpet on a dry winter day."

Golden asked, "Did you say something?"

"I must be thinking out loud. Remember when we were young?"

"Vaguely."

"Me too. When I teed it up as a youngster on tour - all I wanted to do was get rid of my hangover. And when I did - I felt so good I'd shoot lights out."

"Hawaiian Open Pro-Am 1978."

"That hangover was so bad it was in Technicolor.

"When I entered the locker room you were sitting on a bench - smoking a cigarette - trying to light one and had one burning on the bench - a Bloody Mary glass half empty at your side. When I asked you how you felt - you said, 'A whole lot worse than I did early this morning.'"

"And you remember - I won the Pro-Am."

"We were young once - weren't we?"

"I thought I was the second coming of Walter Hagen."

"I thought you were too."

After level off - Golden unbuckled his seat belt and went aft to the galley - with Hacker trailing behind. Hacker asked, "Who prepared lunch?"

"Brenda. Don't worry. She knows you like meat. We have chicken. Hot or Cold?"

"Cold. Are you still on a health food kick?"

"Lots of fruit and veggies. You ought to try it."

"How about a beer?"

"I'll stick with fruit juice."

"Don't tell me - the fruit of the prune."

"Aren't you on the wagon?"

"Only for Bloody Marys and overindulgence. These days I turn green when I see a tomato - or pass a glass of tomato juice. If I tried any of that nonsense today - I'd be lucky to break ninety and Marylin would have my head in her hands."

"What are you going to drink?"

"A cola."

After a light snack and policing up their own dishes - Golden asked Hacker, "What are your plans between now and January."

"I'll play in Mate's tournament. Maybe fill in at one of the other off season events."

"I have senior skins - senior champions and that's it."

"Not playing in Mate's affair?"

"It's a limited field. He asked, but it's time for our young limber backs to get exposure."

"You need tournament exposure for tournament nerves."

"There is a time. I'm getting my game ready for Augusta."

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

"Man never is, but always to be blessed."

"You didn't fall asleep in English Lit."

"And I'm surprised. You read poetry?

"Something to do on those lonely nights on the road. Mind you - I don't read any of the modern stuff."

"Me neither. Too abstract for my taste."

"Don't tell anyone?"

"If you won't."

Hacker went forward aft for coffee and returned, "How is Mate doing?"

"Healed his bottom and is swinging free again. He promised to give me a go at Hibiscus. Why don't you fly down and join us. You and Marilyn can stay at my guest house.

"Are the big fish running?"

"Only on the golf course."

"I'd like that. These Sunbury winters are killing my back."

"Don't forget to ask Marylin."

"Remind me - will you. I have the attention span of a two year old."

Hacker tilted his seat back and looked out over the snow capped Sierras. For the first time since last winter - he had time to think - other than about his deteriorating golf game. He moaned inwardly, "I haven't come close to winning - let alone make the cut. Some spurts of brilliance, but no consistency. And I used to live off my short game. Maybe Golden is right. I'm thinking when I should swing and swinging when I should be thinking. Have to try it. Think twice - swing once. I need to get back into the zone. I still have marquee value and the fire in my belly is not out

- it's just simmering." He tilted his seat further back and rolled on his side to protect his deteriorating discs. The snow capped Sierras were replaced by the brindle brown desert of Nevada. Hacker nodded off - drifting back in time.

Marylin had been an item since Hacker passed puberty. It would be hard to leave her. She squeezed his forearm, "Have you made up your mind?"  
"About what? The prom?"  
"No - which college you're going to."  
"Have you?"  
"We've covered this a dozen times. I can't go to Ohio State. My parents want me to attend a private liberal arts college."  
"And your father graduated from Ohio Wesleyan."  
"Have you evaluated their offer?"  
"I can get a small financial aid scholarship. I'd have to apply for a student loan."  
"Why don't you?"  
"Ohio State will give me a full athletic scholarship - room board and books."

Marylin held onto Hacker's forearm, "Tell me again the advantages of Ohio State over the southern schools."  
"I'll be less than an hour away from you. We can see each other on weekends."  
"And we'll have tickets to see The Ohio State football games. How soon do you have to decide?"  
"I already have. Mr. Golden sent me a letter praising the coach and encouraging me to accept. I love playing the Gray Golf Course. My game is slowly coming around - almost good enough to challenge Scarlet. But - if I could work - study and play golf I'd go with you to Wesleyan."  
"You could. You've worked all during high school."  
"College golf is different. And if I want my game to improve to Pro caliber - I'll be on the course over nine months out of the year."

Hacker strolled toward the Ohio State athletic dorm - whistling a happy tune. Marylin had agreed to marry him and he had received enough tournament exemptions to leave college and begin life on the tour. He made the twenty-three player cut on the TGA National Course that fall. Hacker had a tour card - a hot putter - a June wedding - a deep pocketed backer and a song in his heart. Then why was Golden talking to him? He wouldn't be a player until early next year.

"Wake up. We're descending enroute. We land in ten minutes."

"Will I have a car or limo to drive to Sunbury?"

"Won't need one. Marylin is picking us up at the airport."

"How did you do that?"

"I didn't. The elves called her while you and I were asleep. Why do you think I paid the big bucks for my communications system. Marylin wouldn't take a limo. She drove over from Sunbury."

"How did you convince her?"

"We have a new Chef at the Aberdeen Club."

Marilyn sprinted across the tarmac and hugged Hacker, "Two weeks is too long. How was California."

"The part we were in was cool and isolated. You might like the North Coast."

"To far away from our children."

"And grandchildren. You spoil them."

"That's what grandparents are for. Golden said the new Chef at Aberdeen is terrific."

"I take it you're ready to go out."

"You've been away for two weeks without me. And I've grown accustomed to dining out with you on tour. My skillet hand is rusty."

"I hope that's the only part."

Marilyn gave him a dig to the ribs.

"I hope that was a love tap"

Golden and Hacker placed their luggage in the trunk. Hacker asked. "How about our golf clubs?" "I'll have them delivered to Aberdeen. This Mega Motor iron has too small a trunk." "Aren't you afraid of being seen in my sedan?" "Windows are tinted and I'll hunch down in your back seat." "And notice how comfortable the ride is."

On their way to Dublin - Hacker asked Golden, "Think Marylin will like Hibiscus?" "She'll love it. Gets pretty warm between May and October. Nice this time of year." "What's the number one reason you moved to Florida?" "No State income tax." "Number two?" "Ohio has beaches, but no ocean." "Number three?" "It's the winter home for the circus." "Which one - the TGA or Barnum's." "Both. Where did you learn to ask so many questions?" "It couldn't have been our school - Ohio State. Neither one of us stayed around to graduate."

Marylin stopped at the gates to Aberdeen - Golden's development on the Scioto. The guard recognized Hacker and waved them through. Hacker turned around, "You can unhunch now. We're on your home turf." "I'm glad I rode in your Mega Motor sedan." "Smooth ride - isn't it." "I picked a winner in Lincoln." Hacker asked Marylin, "Did Brenda talk to you about spending a few weeks in Hibiscus?" "Last week." "You didn't say a word to me." "I blocked your schedule with your secretary." "And she didn't mention it to me - either."

Dinner at the Aberdeen Club was better than advertised, but Hacker still needled Golden, "Covered up the radiator imprint with the sauce."

"Are you saying we serve road kill chicken?"

"Did I mention the tire tracks?"

"Chicken here is the best anywhere. Tenderer than the Colonels."

"It must be the adrenaline."

"How so?"

"Just before impact."

*Finally his wit being extinguished -  
he was seized with one of the strangest  
whims that ever a madman stumbled  
on in this world - for it seemed to him  
right and necessary that he would become  
a Knight Errant and ride through the  
world in arms to seek adventures and  
practise in person all that he had read  
about the knights of old.*

## 2

### *Sunbury*

Marylin chattered on and on about looking for a condo on the ocean, "It will have to be large enough for three sets of visitors at the same time."

"That's a tall order. Cheaper to put them up in a hotel or in a guest house - same as Golden is doing with us."

Marylin patted his leg, "Not our family."

"Remember - my earning power is on a steady decline."

"Don't blame yourself. At this stage it would be anyway. You invested wisely."

"You're the one with the checkbook."

"We invested wisely for your dotage."

"Which begins at an early age for a TGA touring circus pro."

"We can afford a four bedroom condo."

As Marylin drove - Hacker's thoughts drifted back to where they always rested - on his golf swing. He wondered, "Do I need to make a more compact turn and weight shift. I might be swaying off the ball. That's it - I'm swaying into a lateral move with a hint of a reverse pivot."

Marylin laughed, "You're thinking out loud and you have more than a hint of a reverse pivot. More like falling off your right side."

"I'll have to improve before I can play the senior tour?"

"Before you lose our life savings to Golden. Don't think weight shift - think turn."

"Turn - like in a barrel?"

"That's how you told me to turn thirty years ago."

Hacker adjusted his car seat to relieve the pressure on his lower back, "It's more like old age creeping up on my golf swing. I'm losing distance so I swing harder."

"And you lose tempo - timing and your swing."

"It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing."

"Are we going to return to Sunbury for Christmas or do you want to stay in Florida?"

"Your call."

"Christmas here and we can return to Florida. How is your airplane?"

"It's scheduled to be down for maintenance the last of December. The way I'm playing - we may have to sell it."

"How about your corporate outings?"

"As long as they hold up - it'll still be cost efective."

"Can you delay maintenance?"

"Only at our peril."

Hacker flipped the electronic switch opening the gate to their driveway. Marylin asked, "If know you - you're heading for the practice tee."

"I need to work on my turn and release."

"Call if you're going to play eighteen. If not - I'll meet you at the Club Grille for lunch?"

"Hacker knew a direct order when he heard one, "Even if I decide to go out on the course - it won't be until after we have lunch."

"What time do you want to eat?"

"Eleven. After all of that fruit at Golden's - I need solid food - meat and potatoes."

Hacker unplugged the electric charger from his cart. Two oversized golf bags were strapped on the back. He sorted through both and breathed a sigh of relief, "Good - Mike had my tournament clubs cleaned and waxed." He pulled out his driver - a thirty year old persimmon, "You've been reshafted a dozen times. I wonder if it's time to change to graphite?"

I'll give you one more chance." His club designer attempted to duplicate it a half dozen times. Two new attempts were in the bag behind the passenger seat. Hacker shook his head. He knew before he pulled the head covers off, "These two will go the way of the others. Clones are for corporate outings and practice, but when money is on the line - I want old friends." No matter how hard manufacturers tried - like snowflakes - no two drivers were alike. He made a mental note to save them for a charity auction.

Mike - Mike Cash was Hacker's manager - best friend - personal pro and sometime caddie. Marylin and he had managed Hacker's portfolio so successfully he could retire and live the life of landed gentry - like Lord Byron. Hacker smiled, "Now there is one smart TGA Professional. While all of his friends died of stress related illness - he's enjoying the good life."

Marylin opened the door to the garage, "Mike called. He'll meet you at the Pro Shop. He wants to know if we're moving to Florida?"

"Did you tell him we're just going south for a visit with Golden at Hibiscus?"

"Yes, but he knows you're like Mr. Toad of Toad Hall in Wind and the Willows. Ready to take off on a moments notice to a new adventure."

"Do you think he and Joan would like to move south for the winter - too?"

"Ask him."

Happy whirred his electric golf cart out of the garage - into a brisk southwester wind - giving notice of an abrupt change of weather on the way. Mike had windshields installed for winter, but the wind still whistled around Hacker's ears. Mike waited for Hacker at the Pro Shop, "How was Mendocino?" "Like Scotland in summer and Bermuda in spring. Golden's

going to have quite a track there."

"Were you on fee or friendship?"

"Friendship. We didn't discuss fee."

Mike handed Hacker a giant bucket of new golf balls,  
"What's this rumor about you and Marylin moving to Hibiscus?"  
"You're a modern miracle - Mike. We talked with Golden and  
Brenda about their new golf course development last night and  
already the rumor mill has grist."

"Before you ask - Joan says yes."

"We haven't established conditions."

"Don't insult me with contract talk. We've operated on a  
handshake for how long?"

"Over twenty-five years."

"Enough said. Will Joan fly down with us to Orlando?"

"If we have time to look at real estate."

"Marylin and Joan will nest while we work."

Mike asked, "I already know the answer, but I have to  
ask - tournament clubs or clones?"

"A bag of each. I'll pick out the clones this morning.  
How's your game?"

"Good enough to beat you."

"After lunch?"

"You're on. What are you working on?"

"Turning in a barrel and timing."

"You need to work on your release."

"That too."

"Do you want video?"

"No. Have you finished next years schedule?"

"Finished, but if you move south - we'll have to make  
adjustments."

"How about the senior tour?"

"You won't be old enough until the last of the year."

"Timing is everything."

"You need to look it over."

Hacker beat out fifty shots with a five iron clone. He hadn't figured out a trigger. He tried a slight shift to his right foot, but that didn't work. He opened his stance and moved his weight to the balls of his feet on the next fifty shots. That worked - for now. He knew, "What works today - might not work tomorrow."

Hacker wiped off his five iron and selected a clone driver. He worked his way through woods and irons of two clone sets. After hitting well over a hundred balls he selected a mixed clone set to take south. Hacker noticed a glint from Mikes binoculars as he was working his way through the two sets. He smiled inwardly, "One of the benefits of owning this golf course is having my office close to the practice tee. One of the disadvantages of owning this golf course is having my office this close to the practice tee." He knew a swing critique from Mike would be today's first order of business.

Hacker stopped outside the front door - triggering the electric shoe cleaner to brush away dirt and dust from the bottoms and sides of his spikeless golf shoes. He looked at the pile of grass clippings and made a mental note, "Need to place a vacuum next to the shoe cleaner." The offices on the top floor of his two story brick were rented out to lawyers and accountants. All were members of Hacker's semi-private golf club. They didn't mind trails of grass on the carpet, but their secretaries did.

Mike was at Hacker's side as he walked down the corridor to his private office, "Your Secretary has a stack of mail and papers for you to look at."

"Come into my office and close the door."

"Said the spider to the fly."

"'Tis the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy."

"Mary Howitt."

"You've been reading poetry while I was away."  
"Only the masters. None of this modern crap."  
"What's wrong with today's poets?"  
"If they were artists - they'd paint by rolling tires of a pickup truck over canvas."  
"All splash and no puddle?"  
"You didn't lose your wit in California."

Mike sat down on Hacker's couch, "Do you want to talk business now - or later?"

"First things first. How was my turn?"  
"For an old man with a bad back - not bad."  
"How about my arc?"  
"You've discovered a way to lengthen it. I was impressed. Your hook has turned into a draw."

"While you were out west I calibrated a video-cam to it and attached a telescopic lens. Look behind you. It's on a tripod in the corner window."

"Your flying right elbow is grounded. Can't see how you increased arc - unless it's the turn. I'll have it edited and add tapes of your previous swings for a comparison."

"After you read your mail - stop by my office and we'll talk about next years schedule."

Mike was on his way out the door when Hacker called out, "Better give my newest clones to charity."

"I made up a mixed set to take south. The rest are okay - just not like my old friends."

"That's another reason I stick with you. You don't get rid of your old friends."

"How many have we given away this year?"

"Five or six sets."

Hacker looked over his tournament schedule and called Mike over intercom, "Only one tournament overseas?"

"You don't command the appearance fee you used to. And I've added more corporate outings. We're still popular with the corporate set."

"I notice it's 'you' when things are bad and 'we' when the outlook is good. Why the cutback on tournaments?"

"We're not as young as we used to be. I'm working under the philosophy that you only have so many good tournament swings left and we don't want to waste them."

"As long as we don't cut back on corporate outings."

"You really like them. Is it the money?"

"Meet a lot of nice people at corporate outings. I've made more than a few friends on the pay for play tour. Don't cut out anyone who has asked me to return. Fee doesn't matter where friends are concerned."

Mike asked, "Has Marylin found a golf course for us to call home?"

"Golden is the instigator and he lives on Hibiscus."

"Do we need an agent?"

"Lets wait until we fly down. Golden may have something up his sleeve."

"Joan wants to look for a condo on the beach."

"How about hurricanes?"

"You saw the size of the ones last summer?"

"One was bigger than the state."

"If we want to move south that's the risk we have to take."

"Don't mention storms to Marylin."

"See you at lunch?"

"We'll meet Marylin and Joan at eleven."

Hacker thumbed through the stack of paperwork on his desk and moaned, "Hope Mike put out the fires." He kicked back in his chair - placed his feet on the desk and went over his tournament schedule. Not eligible for the Tournament of Champions - Hacker's first stop was the Hawaiian Open at Wailai. The Bob Hope in Palm Springs was next - then the Los Angeles Open followed by Pebble Beach. In between were west coast corporate outings.

His Florida tour began with Miami - then Orlando and after that the TGA players championship in Jacksonville. Mike had built in a weeks practice at Augusta. Hacker laughed, "So I won't embarrass myself. Those greens are getting faster - bigger and the undulations. Why didn't I notice them when I was younger? Golden was right about a fourteen year old mind. Wish I had a forty year old body. Good - he scheduled Greensboro. Lost a contract, but not my friends. And Hilton Head. Doesn't look like Mike cut back on tournaments."

"Not bad - two weeks off before Lord Byron's tournament and a few more before Golden's tournament. Open is at Congressional again. Hope they have the greens straightened out and the rough bailed in time for us to tee it up. Oh-oh - this doesn't make sense."

He called Mike, "Why do we have a week off after the Open at Congressional?"

"Remember how you faded in the heat last summer. The Western in Chicago follows - another favorite."

"And a week of practice in Scotland before the British at Saint Andrews."

"And two weeks off before the TGA."

"No time off before the International?"

"I gave you a week before the Canadian."

"Are you sure this is a cut back in my schedule?"

"You're barely over the minimum."

"Where's the corporate outings?"

We lost a few because of the incident at Augusta. I'll have them firmed up by the end of January."

"Do you have the list of my promises?"

"Only twenty are firm."

"Do the best you can."

"How about a sponsor?"

"I'm working on it."

Hacker thumbed through the stack of paperwork and signed those that needed signing and passed on the rest, "I'll look at these after supper." He strolled across the hall to Mike's office, "Lets go to the video tape."

"How about your paperwork?"

"I signed everything that had an arrow pointing at the dotted line. I'll do the rest when the sun doesn't shine."

"After you approve your tournament schedule."

"No complaints. You do good work."

"And if a tournament sponsor complains about you being a no show at his pet?"

"I'll blame you."

Mike toggled a switch on his desk and the wall opened up revealing a thirty-six inch TV. Hacker whistled, "So that's what the switch is on the side of my desk."

"I superimposed today's swing with the one you used to win the Open."

"Must be of my putter. It was on fire."

"Not true. You stayed out of the tall grass."

"Yeah, but today under pressure I get the loops."

"Watch in slow motion. You're staying behind the ball without a reverse pivot. What's your trigger?"

"Didn't use one today. Just kept my weight distributed."

"Well you made a good turn and the arms follow."

"And no loops."

"How did the club head feel at impact?"

"Solid and square. Cold weather makes the ball crack off the club head."

"How do you know when to pull the trigger?"

"I don't think about it. I let my arms swing free and the release just happens. What do you think?"

"Your swing is sound. It must be old age hindering your ability to score."

"The key is to think twice and swing once."

"That only works if your thought process is sound."

Hacker ran the tape forward - in reverse and in slow motion, "Think I've stumbled into something. Have to get my swing into gear and my brain in neutral."

"Brain in neutral?"

"Golden says the ideal golfer has a fourteen year old mind and a forty year old body."

"You're halfway there - you have a fourteen year old mind."

"How are you going to control the flight of the ball?"

"A no brainer. Through mind control. I know how to execute the swing. All I have to do is visualize the result."

"And under pressure the result will be a low running hook."

"Pray for rain at the majors."

"I'll have to cut you out of the Adam's Family portrait."

"Because of my swing?"

"You've smoothed out your controlled lurch."

Marylin and Joan - deep in conversation at the grill - failed to notice Mike and Hacker as they approached their table. Hacker - smiling and exchanging jibes with members - grimaced at Marylin's table selection. Instead of a private room - she had selected a window table overlooking number nine green. Their lunch would be interrupted by friends and members stopping by to chat. Marylin looked up, "You two are late. We talked to Brenda earlier. They were planning on Mike and Joan coming with us. Now sit down."

As Hacker pulled out a chair, Marylin asked, "Do you and Mike have a game this afternoon?"

"At noon. Want to try out a few new ideas."

"Joan and I will use the time to talk about moving south"

"We're not going to sell our place here are we?"

"Of course not. We'll still live in Sunbury in the summer."

Joan added, "And if we have a second home - we can eliminate hauling clothing back and forth."

Mike hit his forehead with his hand, "Two sets of everything? It will cost us a fortune."

Joan answered, "Comp samples for two instead of one."

Marylin asked, "When do we fly to Orlando?"

Mike answered, "A week from Tuesday."

Hacker asked, "Why don't you two call Brenda and see if you three can get together and make plans?" Before Marylin could answer - a waiter approached with a cell-phone, "Sorry to interrupt. Golden is on the line."

Hacker answered, "What's up?"

"You're pro shop said that you and Mike are teeing it up at one. Do you have room for another fish?"

"Depends on the size of the fish. Who is it?"

"Me - I haven't played your track since it was expanded to eighteen holes."

"We'll wait for you. Bring Brenda along. The wives want to talk about moving south."

"She's in the car with me. Marylin asked her to come over this afternoon. I'm driving Miss Brenda. We're on our way. Tell Mike I want strokes."

"Wait - I'll ask. Golden wants a stroke a-side."

"In a pigs eye."

"Did you hear his answer?"

"I'll take strokes anyway I can get them. A stroke a-side inside a pigs eye it is."

"Do you want to ride alone?"

"Roger that - we'll take three carts."

"See you at the shop."

Hacker looked over at Marylin, "You ladies are plotting against us again."

Then he smiled at Mike, "That's what you get for beating him the last time." On any given day - Mike could win a match from either one. He was a terrific golfer with every tool in the TGA trade except the emotional one. Under tournament pressure - his putting touch turned to stone. He had won his fair share of amateur tournaments. A trophy wasn't his problem - cash was. Mike as not cut out to be a TGA money player. As Hacker's teaching pro - money manager - agent and all around executive - Mike made well over half-a million - even in lean years. He caddied only when Hacker needed a coach on the course. With a deteriorating game - loss of sponsors and contracts and the senior tour on the horizon - Hacker needed Mike at his side more than ever. Their association went back to college days at Ohio State. Flogging golf balls together off the practice tee on cold - slate gray dawn days of spring sealed a bond that stood the test of tension - temperature and time.

Mike laughed, "Hacker you're staring out the window. Our waiter is waiting for your order."

"Eggs Benedict - no toast. Have the Chef cut up some fruit for Mr. and Mrs. Golden."

"Will they be dining with you?"

"Mrs. Golden will be joining the ladies. Not certain about Golden. Planning is prologue - execution is everything."

Mike shook his head, "Don't go intellectual on me."

"I've never been accused of that before."

"Maybe you need to let up - relax. You've been taking the game to seriously."

"And I've never been accused of that before - either."

"Nonchalant is your label, but you and I know it's all for show. Tension comes from the inner man."

Hacker filled their cups with coffee from the table carafe, "Not bad. Is it the best we can buy?" Mike laughed, "And they say you don't pay attention to details. I'll look into it." Hacker took Joan's hand, "Are you certain that you want to move south?" "In a New York minute. Mike and I are Southern Californians. We'll gladly miss your gray Ohio winters." "What about your children?" "Like yours - they no longer call collect." "Talk about being self centered. I'm becoming a caricature of myself. I keep thinking all of our kids are still in school. Let the air out of my balloon once in awhile." Mike turned serious, "The way the press treated you after Augusta - we understand." "I don't want to become a victim. I'm the one who had the lips in gear and brain out to lunch." Mike smiled, "The mother of all straight lines. Believe it was dinner - not lunch."

Four waiters brought their orders. The table waiter said, "Your Chef has prepared the Golden order. Let me know when you want it delivered." Hacker nodded, "Thank you." And to Mike, "Will you come along for the first three tournaments. I'm too old to win. I'd like to make a favorable appearance." "And we need to line up a few more sponsors." "How about the office? Should we move it south for the winter?" "Don't need to. While you were out playing golf - our Vice President invented the internet."

Golden and Brenda walked up - joining them at their table. Mike greeted Golden, "Even if you come in limping - you won't get strokes from me and neither will Hacker. Why are you gracing our turf?"

"I come in peace - bearing money for the wise one?"

"Hacker or me?"

"You - oh great teacher of golf."

Mike looked over at Hacker - a question mark in his glance.

Hacker laughed, "What you do in your free time is your business. And our business is in a decline. Maybe Golden will let us glean the fairways in his wake."

Golden laughed, "I want Mike to look over my swing while we play this afternoon."

"Good - I can concentrate on my turn without being bothered."

"Turn? I thought you were working on your attention span."

"What?"

Two waiters brought fruit plates to Brenda And Golden. Hacker shook his head, "We are getting old. All you can eat is fruit and we both forgot the Bengals and Browns are on TV this afternoon."

Mike said, "If I'm playing you two - I need to hit a few practice shots. I'll see you on the tee."

Hacker added, "I left my game on the practice tee - so be kind to me. I'm going to hit a few putts. Where are your clubs?"

Golden said, "One of your employees put them on a cart. I really like your course setup."

"Golden tried some fruit. "This is excellent. How do you run your bar and restaurant?"

"We're semiprivate - so they're open to the public. Mike and I made an extra effort to insure that our food is good and the prices are reasonable. Nothing fancy - just a grill and a simple menu."

"Profit or loss?"

"Cash cow as is the course. We give preference to members and keep outings down to four a month and none on weekends. We will only cater parties on an exception."

"I like the name, "The Club. Where did you come up with it?"

"Bus system in Hawaii. Remember? 'The Bus'. And from my Granddaughter. We asked her where she would like to eat one Sunday afternoon when she was three and she said, 'We can always eat at the club.'"

Hacker was sole owner of The Club. He designed it link style like the original Sunbury Golf Course. Low ball hitters could roll their ball on almost all of his greens. Traps were to the back sides and rear and he kept sand to a minimum. His design was reminiscent of Pinehurst - fast greens - easy play and low maintenance. Hacker insisted that his fairways and greens remain firm and playable and his rough - fair. A ball hit on line would roll true in rough or fairway. He wanted players rewarded with good shots - not penalized. On most newer courses - a one-hundred and seventy yard tee shot was rewarded with five yards of roll. At The Club - the same shot would roll fifty yards - as they did on TGA tournament courses.

Golden was loosening up as Hacker drove his cart to the first tee. Hacker pulled out a clone driver. Golden came over and looked at Hacker's clubs, "How many are you going to use today? Twenty - thirty. Looks like you have a pro shop on your cart."

"I'll stay with fourteen and clones."

"Send in the clones. Who are you working with?"

"They have sworn me to secrecy."

"They don't want the bad publicity of being associated with you. You didn't lose much - just a discount store."

"And I didn't gain anything. Have you seen my face on TV?"

"Have you seen mine?"

"Maybe we're getting old and unattractive to advertisers."

"How about Silver?"

"There is always an exception. Look at it this way - we won our majors before Tracks arrived on the scene."

"Right - we'd be road kill like the rest of the tour."

Hacker teed it up, "Watch the turn I've been working on this morning." Hacker balanced his weight on the balls of his feet - took a little waggle and drew his driver back in a smooth as silk take-away pausing ever so slightly at the top. His transition from back to forward was a smooth as his swing. His club followed the natural arc of his shoulders and hands through impact. His golf ball flew away low on a Jimmie Thompson trajectory - twenty feet above terra firma. One hundred yards out it began to rise toward the gathering clouds. It landed hard - bouncing forward with over-spin - coming to rest three-hundred and seventy-five yards from the tee - on the front edge of the green. Hacker laughed, "Take that Tracks!" pumping his fist in the air.

Golden pulled out his driver, "Are you going to play golf or screw around? If Tracks were here he'd have flown the green with a punch spoon."

Mike added, "Twenty knots of downwind and rock hard fairways didn't hurt."

Golden asked, "When did you drain your watering system."

Hacker was still grinning, "Last week."

"How about your attention span?"

"Think twice - swing once."

"And your turn?"

"Mental - feel not think."

Mike backed away and looked over at the chattering magpies, "I hope my swing doesn't interfere with your conversation. If you guys continue to talk while I'm trying to take the club back - I'm going to ask for a mulligan on each tee."

Hacker laughed, "With your swing and your concentration - a kindergarten picnic wouldn't bother you. Quit complaining and hit the damn ball."

Mike proceeded to fade his shot left to right - his ball coming to rest forty yards short of Hacker's. He walked to

his cart - spinning his driver, "Ground is hard. That's twenty yards past my best effort on this hole. Same bet?" Golden pulled out his three wood, "Fifty dollar Nassau - three carryovers no more than one press." He set his ball up on a tee, "Listen up. I'm going to eat your lunch." Hacker answered, "Mine - maybe. Not Mike's. He owns you." "That was before today."

Golden stood behind his tee shot - visualizing the flight of his golf ball. He walked forward - set up - took one waggle and struck his shot square. A power fade flew high and far down the fairway. He looked over at Hacker with a big grin, "I got my weight through at impact without coming over the top and pulling the ball left. Does it work in the fairway as well as it did on the tee?" Mike answered, "Hacker came up with this idea on the practice tee. Only time will tell if it's repeatable." Golden replaced his three wood in his bag, "If this keeps up - I might take this game up again."

Three carts pulled up to Mike's ball. He took a lob edge out of his bag, "Best shot I've hit in years with a driver and Golden hits bounces past me with a spoon." Mike aligned his feet with his shoulders and swung full. His lob wedge landed a quarter of the way on the right side of the green and bounced to within four feet of the hole. Golden said, "Great shot."

"I missed it. Landed ten yards short of my target."

Golden took out his sand wedge and struck a modified flop shot twenty feet short of the pin. It bounced into the air like a super ball off concrete - rolling twenty feet past the pin. He turned to Hacker, "Where's the windmill?" "Over to the east on the adjoining farm." "I mean on your greens. Got to be at least one on every concrete putt-putt."

"How many times have you won at Augusta?"

"Five more than you."

"Pretend you're on St. Andrews and hit the damn ball."

Hacker pulled his putter out of his bag. He lined up behind the ball thinking direction first and speed second. He stepped up to the ball - positioned his feet and struck an upward blow. His ball rolled fifty four feet - struck the pin dead center and fell into the cup. He looked over at Golden and Mike, "You're one down with seventeen to go." Golden rolled his putt in and conceded Mike's, "Good by me. Your greens are hard as a rock, but they put true. We both birdied this hole and were hitting last. Is there no justice in this world?"

Hacker couldn't contain himself, "' One man's justice is another's injustice - one man's beauty another's ugliness - one man's wisdom another's folly.'"

Golden asked Mike, "Which poet is he quoting now?"

"Ralph Waldo Emerson."

"Why don't you two do crosswords like the rest of us?"

Mike answered, "We began reading poetry at Ohio State on a lark and it became a passion."

Golden marked down his score, "Whatever." He checked hole number two on his scorecard, "A par five. Any trouble?" Mike answered, "No. Hacker wanted the first two to be wide open to speed up play. This one is long though - almost six-hundred yards. He wanted a three shot hole."

"I notice you have grass traps on one. How about two?"

"The same. Helps set up a fast pace on the first two holes. If they start fast - they stay fast."

"Have you been watching my swing?"

"Looked good on the first tee and in the fairway. I'll make notes and we'll talk it over after the round."

"Give me a critique on my tournament rounds."

Mike felt a direct answer was the right thing to do,  
"Your putting is like Peking Duck."  
"Burnt duck?"  
"You've always had your eyes down the line. Now your head is coming up right after you strike the ball and you know what that causes."  
"Everything bad. Head position?"  
"On the ball - not on the line."  
"Correction?"  
"Keep your head still and don't cock it to far to the left. Go over the films of your last win at Augusta."  
"What do you think is causing my problem."  
"Not enough tournament golf - to much indecision and to many outside business distractions. You have to play to get into the zone and you haven't been playing."  
"A magical cure?"  
"When you were younger - you could force the ball into the hole by willpower. We're older. Remember what Hogan said. His putting wasn't bad. He wasn't hitting the ball close enough to the hole."  
"And I'm playing Army golf - left - right - left."  
"You've lost distance. Common error is attempting to regain it. And what does that cause?"  
"Over swinging. Left - right - left and short."  
"Hacker is waiting. I have a story about Titanic you may not have heard. Remind me after we finish."

The Golf Course's second hole has a fairway as wide as Augusta's. What little rough there was - was shorter than the first cut at Golden's Aberdeen. As Hacker stood over the ball - Golden needled, "Can't you reach it in two?" Hacker backed off, "Only if I have a chain saw. Is my swing still interfering with your conversation?" Golden laughed, "You had your eagle. Hit the damn ball." Hacker split the fairway with a three iron past the corner of the dogleg.

Mike chose a five wood and accomplished the same thing. Hacker took out his four iron. Mike stopped him, "We're not as young as we used to be. Try my five wood." Golden took the club from Mike and tested the flex, "Feels good. Do instructions come with it?" "You just received them." Golden understood, "Your lesson is to club me on this round?" "Only if you can swing in rhythm." "And that was my second lesson?" Hacker broke in, "Hit the damn ball. You're trying to talk it to death." Golden backed off and repeated his pre shot routine. His ball came to rest ten yards past Hacker's.

However - as is the case with doglegs the longest shot is often the farthest away. He asked Mike to, "Club me." "Four iron. Aim down the left side of the fairway and fade it to the center. You want to keep the tree on the right out of play."

Golden responded in his best W. C. Field's imitation, "I'm looking for windmills." His ball skirted the opening - ten yards past the giant walnut on the right corner, "I see what you mean. A little farther to the right would be the ideal location." Which is where Hacker and Mike positioned their second shots - one-hundred and twenty five yards from the pin.

Hacker hit a half-swing - knock down eight iron - landing on the front of another rock hard green and rolling his golf ball to within kick-in distance. Mike hit a full nine - landing on the front edge and bounding to the back of the green - twenty-five feet past and to the right of the pin. Golden followed with a wedge - landing in the same spot as Mike. However - his ball bit and stopped ten feet short - to the right of the hole. Golden - peeking at the ball missed his putt as did Mike. Hacker was two up.

Golden pulled Mike aside on the next tee, "I understand - you and Hacker are a team. I'm trying to get both of you interested in a new development for TGA circus performers in Hibiscus - to winter and retire."

"Don't tell me - it's in Sarasota with Barnum."

"Wrong coast."

"It will have to be staffed with orthopedic surgeons."

"We'll have a few. Would Hacker be upset if you spent some time on my game?"

"Not at all. As long as we're open - above board and on a professional courtesy basis. No fees. I don't need the money and I'd rather work with you as a fellow Buckeye. Not many players from Ohio State on tour."

"Will you accept my endorsement?"

"Only if you start playing better."

The third hole is a downhill postage stamp par three with a little over eighty feet of fall. Hacker hit a full nine iron into a stiff wind. It came up short of the green in the grass trap. Mike hit a punch seven - low into the wind. His ball came to rest two feet in front of the hole. Golden followed with a punch eight iron that landed short of the green on a sprinkler head. It bounded across the green and into the grass trap behind. Mike birdied while Golden and Hacker scrambled for pars.

The fourth hole was a rolling par four. Golden called over to Hacker, "No fairway traps?"

"On nine - twelve and sixteen. They slow down play."

"Really kept your maintenance costs down."

"The traps we have have the best sand in the State."

"Should - you put them where they're out of reach."

Mike hit a cannon shot off the tee. It landed on the downslope and rolled past the three hundred yard sprinkler head. Hacker followed with a hard - low running hook to the

left side of the fairway - nestling down in the first cut. Golden's tee shot boomed past both of theirs - catching the downhill and rolling eighty yards short of the green. He placed his arm around Mike's shoulders, "That reminds me of my youth."

"Hard fairways - downwind can do that. You're rhythm was almost perfect on that swing. Not a hint of a lurch."

"I'll never hit it as far and as straight as Tracks."

"Or Jimmie Thompson. Tracks is something else. He has that fire inside."

Hacker asked, "Do you think he'll maintain it?"

Golden thought while he entered his cart, "Three Amateurs and two majors? That's a career. As long as he stays focused and can putt there is no one around who can touch him. His natural talent is carrying him now. Later - it will have to be his putter."

Mike nodded, "Yes. If his putter was working - there'd be nothing but tire tracks and road kill on the tour. He's doing it with power and recovery shots now."

Hacker asked Golden, "You had it going early and kept it going. How did you do it?"

"Kept my brain out of gear when I swung the club and my putter. Let my body take over. When you get down to it - it's all feel and coordination. You can't force it."

"Mike and I have that."

"But - you can force willpower."

"How do you do it?"

"If I knew - I'd still be winning."

Hacker knew when to be quiet and show deference to the past master of golf. He could tell that Golden had something else on his mind. Golden pulled his cart next to Hacker's as Mike sized up his second shot, "I know you and Mike are a package. I asked him to stay with us in Florida."

"You saved me from asking."

"He's agreed to work with me on my game."

"As long as you don't wear him out. We work on a handshake and friendship."

"I'll respect that."

"Will you listen to Mike - or to your gas station attendant - plumber and everyone else you meet in the street."

"That's another one of my problems."

Mike punched a four iron twenty feet short of the hole and left a dead straight uphill putt. Hacker pulled a seven iron twenty feet to the left and Golden punched a half wedge six inches from the cup. After Hacker's putt missed and Mike's putt lipped out - they conceded Golden's birdie.

Hacker asked, "You haven't spoken about Mate. Are you both in on this development?"

"Yes and we'll cut you and Mike in for a piece of the action - if you're interested."

"Now I know what you're doing. You and Mate are looking for two new fish for your foursome."

"We have to have some entertainment as we grow old."

"You're beginning to sound like Marylin. She thinks golf is my mistress and a foursome is common law marriage with the same obligations."

"Brenda thinks the same way. Mate has an ulterior motive. Mike is Mate's great white whale. He's lost three friendly games in a row to Mike and it's eating our Aussie's craw."

"Glad to see I'm not the only one."

Golden asked Mike, "How about my swing?"

"Like playing golf with a pretty paranoid woman - always turning around - looking for approval."

"Don't get any ideas. Now about my swing."

"You look like you did when you were Track's age. Full turn - past parallel - the whole nine yards."

"Loop and all?"

"A lovely coordinated loop."

Hole number five was alive with giant walnut trees - a meandering creek and long - a self proclaimed monster - six-hundred and twenty five yards of downhill sloping fairways intersected by a creek designed to catch the long hitter, but not the average low to mid handicap golfer. Alum Creek intersected the fairway at three hundred yards on the right - crossing over the fairway to three hundred and fifty yards on the left - continuing through a tree line and exiting on the left side of the green.

Golden hit a hit a three iron to the middle of the fairway. It caught the down slope and rolled and rolled - stopping just short of the creek on the left side of the fairway. Golden shook his head, "A three-hundred yard three iron. Hacker - I love your course. I feel like I'm twenty-one again. What was your philosophy behind this layout?" "Challenge the golfer with length and finesse. Don't penalize a good to average shot. Don't over water the rough fairways and greens. And I built in a bailout on every hole with water or other obstacles.

Hacker hit a high four iron down the right side of the fairway. It came to rest in the middle - fifty yards short of the creek. Mike hit a five iron on Hacker's line - twenty yards short of Hacker's golf ball. After four holes - Hacker had two skins - Golden and Mike one each. All small talk ceased. The game was on. No one wanted to lose and Golden - being Golden had an opposite tact - he never thought lose. His thoughts were always - win.

Mike hit a three wood one hundred and twenty yards short and to the right. Hacker hit a four iron - drawing it right to left fifteen yards past Mike's ball. Golden chortled, "The golf gods are smiling on me today."

Hacker drove over to look at Golden's ball, "One of our gnomes must have set it up on a tuft of grass."

Golden pulled out his driver, "It's driver time." His second shot landed fifty yards short and rolled to the middle of the green - fifteen feet to the right of the pin." Hacker smiled, "After you mark your ball I'll have our greens keeper set up a windmill for you. You'll feel like you're playing Aberdeen."

"Only if the blades are turning."

Mike offered, "That was one hell-of-a shot. I can count on my fingers the times five has been reached in two."

Mike looked over at Hacker, "Hard as a rock on the front of the green. "I'm going to hit a punch seven twenty yards short and roll it on."

"Might hold straight grooves."

"My irons are more like smooth grooves." Mike's punch shot rolled two feet to the right of the pin. Hacker hit a high pitching wedge to the front of the green. It bounced with spin - five feet short of the pin.

Golden conceded both putts. He checked the cup, "Not much wear for a winter cup. Looks like she breaks right to left - about two cups." He lined it up from behind the ball and took two waggles to restore his feel for the putter shaft. He lined up two cups the right and nailed it to the back of the cup. Hacker whistled as he walked to his cart, "Five holes and by golly - five skins. Has to be a new record for this group."

Golden replied, "Winter cups are round and friendly."

Mike smiled, "That was great golf."

A freshening northwest wind blew across the stalks of the neighboring cornfield. The rustle of brittle harvested stalks was a harbinger of an oncoming cold front. Six - seven and eight were halved with pars. On the ninth tee - they were greeted with a darkening sky to the west. Rain was on the way - so they hurried through their tee shots with

little conversation. Mostly a few nods and an occasional grunt as clubheads struck ball. Hacker felt a drop of cold rain strike his face as he entered his cart. Hate to say it, but it's going to rain on our parade."

Golden smiled. "And we're both one up on Mike."

All three balls landed on the putting surface. Golden missed a twenty foot left to right breaker. Hacker's ball lipped out and Mike dropped a seven footer. They made it to the barn as skies over Sunbury opened up. Golden asked, "Do you give rain checks?"

Hacker nodded, "If you pay green fees. Notice - we give courtesy to Aberdeen Pros."

Golden laughed, "That's more than one Columbus club does."

Hacker needled back, "You're members started it."

"While I was in Florida."

Mike asked, "Did you get it straightened out?"

"We modified it. Let's see. Hacker and me each owe you an even hundred. You did it to me again."

Mike said, "You can write it off as charity. We put all of our winnings in a cigar box and give it to the Salvation Army at Christmas. Buys a few turkeys."

Hacker asked, "A steam and a shower?"

Golden nodded yes, "My hip and back can use it."

Hacker added, "And our dunlaps."

"Dunlaps?"

"Done lap over our belts. We can watch the game in my private locker room. Our ladies are more than likely busy planning our future."

Steam rose off of rocks heated from a raised circular pit. Sweat poured off Golden's forehead, "Mike promised a Titanic Thompson story."

Mike answered, "It explains what happens to us when we lose our rhythm. Titanic would give the best player at any club

two shots off of every tee. And that player had to take both shots. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred - his opponent would swing too hard on one of those shots. By the time they were on the back nine - he had lost his rhythm and game."

"Hacker added, "Titanic would start with a dime bet and double it on each hole. By the time they turned nine it was over fifty-one dollars a hole and by eighteen over thirteen thousand. He wiped out more than a few deep pockets and destroyed a young flat belly or two."

Mike added, "And the moral to the story is?"

Golden answered, "There are two. Swing in rhythm and there is more to this game than talent."

*Therefore he resolved that he would make a name for himself by revenging the injuries of others and courting all manner of dangers and difficulties - until in the end he would be rewarded for his valor in arms by the crown of some mighty Empire.*

# 3

## *Hibiscus*

Golden gave Hacker and company the royal treatment. When they arrived in West Palm Beach - Mate's helicopter stood waiting to fly them to Hibiscus. After Sunbury's rain - snow - sleet and more rain - a balmy mid-eighty degree day was a welcome change. Marylin tugged on Hacker's sleeve, "Where are we going to land?"

"At Golden's estate."

"I shouldn't ask, but we'll need a car if we're going to look at real estate tomorrow."

Mike spoke up, "I have an agent stopping by at ten tomorrow morning. Is that too early?"

Hacker looked at Marylin. She said, "No. We'll be ready. Where is Mate?"

Mike answered, "Down Under visiting and playing in a few tournaments."

Joan asked, "Where is Hibiscus?"

Hacker looked over at Mike, "Sydney Smith?"

"He said, 'My living in Yorkshire was so far out of the way - that it was actually twelve miles from a lemon.'"

Marylin frowned, "When are you two going to stop your English literature nonsense and join the twenty-first century?"

Golden's estate came into view. It fronted the Native American River - known to Yankees as the Intercoastal Waterway. Heavily wooded for privacy - Hacker's party could only guess to its size. By Midwest standards it didn't appear to be much, but for Atlantic Coast waterfront property

it was a plantation. As they descended toward the helo-pad - Golden's driving range - putting green and Olympic size pool came into view. Marylin whispered to Hacker, "More than we can afford and we own a golf course."

"I thought you wanted an ocean view?"

"I do - and you want a golf course nearby."

"Within electric cart driving distance."

Mike thought before saying, "We may have to build one."

"Always wanted an oceanfront links course."

"Environmentalists would eat our lunch."

"We could handle nitrogen and phosphate runoff with holding ponds and controlled watering."

"You forgot about the scrub jay."

"Scrub who?"

"An endangered species."

"On a golf course? There'll be enough scrub for jays of any species to nest."

"I did a preliminary. Consultant fees - land - and permits on undeveloped ocean property can run us three to six million - depending on the area."

"Cheaper to join Golden's group."

Mate's helicopter hovered and landed on Golden Pad. An empty new Lincoln Navigator was parked nearby. Hacker looked around. There was no welcoming committee. On the seat of the Lincoln were keys and a note. Marylin read it while Mike and Hacker loaded their luggage and clubs in the back, "It gives directions to Golden's Guest house."

Hacker hopped in the driver's seat, "I'm checked out on this land yacht. Which way?"

"Follow the signs that read - *To Guest House.*"

"Left or right?"

"Right - of course" Mike smiled like a mouse that escaped a cat, "all of Golden's drives go to the right."

"Another straight line delivered."

Golden's housekeeper met them at the door, "Welcome to Mr. Golden's House. I'm Margaret - the Golden's estate manager."

Marylin asked, "Where are the Goldens?"

"They were called away on a minor family emergency. It will be quite late when they return. Your rooms are in the east wing. The kitchen is stocked with everything you need. And there is a barbecue grill on the patio."

Hacker asked, "Is the fridge full of fruit and veggies?"

"You'll find Tri Tip and New York steaks - and ground steak. He doesn't impose his diet on guests. There are local restaurant menus in the desk. I've marked the ones you may like with stars. Or - you can dine out at Mr. Golden's Golf Club. Menus and hours are also in the desk. You can cook in - dine out or have your meals delivered. Let me know if you choose the latter. The gates are electronic."

Marylin looked at Joan, "We'll dine in. Are we their only guests?"

"Laddy is visiting tomorrow. He'll be in the west wing."

"Any don'ts?" Joan asked.

"Stay on the paths. We are almost a nature preserve. We have an occasional snake and alligator visit us. They're well lit."

Joan asked, "Are they poisonous?"

"Mostly Florida Ebony. They are of the black snake family and some are over six feet. Don't worry - they are active in daylight and they aren't poisonous. They eat rats - rodent and the others."

Marylin asked, "Others?"

"Water Moccasons - coral snakes - pygmy rattlers."

Joan wondered, "You said alligators?"

"One or two visits now and then. Our Native American River is really a salt water sound. They don't like salt water, but they swim in it to visit a new pond. If you have any questions call over our intercom."

Hacker asked, "You said the gates were electronic. Is there a gate opener in the car?"

"On the dash. It's marked opener. After six - please call only if an ax murderer is on the loose or the Guest House is on fire."

After the estate manager departed they walked through the east wing. Marylin was impressed, "Four master suites a kitchen and a great room. I'm impressed - is this a Guest House or the Vanderbilt mansion? Joan and I are going to explore while you two unpack the car. How many wings are there in Golden's Guest House?"

Hacker answered, "Four - like the four corners of the earth." He opened the freezer compartment, "Golden knows his way around a steak." He took out four New York cuts and handed them to Mike, "I'll bring in the luggage while you defrost the meat."

"My meal ticket isn't going to injure his weak back while he is on vacation. You defrost in the microwave and marinate while I fetch and carry luggage."

Hacker walked out on the patio as their steaks thawed in the microwave. He uncovered the grill, "Hasn't been used much. Clean as a whistle." He looked out in the grass and watched a six foot Florida Ebony snake slither through the bushes after a squirrel. He whistled, "Margaret wasn't kidding. Better not mention this to the ladies. They'll never come outside." Mike opened the door to the patio, "I turned the steaks over in the microwave. Found Golden's wine cabinet. How about a nice little Medoc?"

"Is it time for wine?"

"'What though youth gave love and roses - Age still leaves us friends and wine.'"

"Thomas Moore."

"Thought I had you stumped with that one."

"You've got me reading poetry again. Out of desperation."

Mike carried a bottle of Medoc and two glasses out to the patio and handed them to Hacker, "You open and pour. Steaks should be thawed. The usual marinade?" "Worcestershire - ground pepper and tamari. Does Golden have a lavender-fennel mix." "Which one?" "Lavender-fennel first - ground pepper and garlic second." "Want to bet that he has neither?" "No - I'm tired of losing to you."

Mike came back outside carrying the dish, "You would have won. He has both and then some. I'll let you do the honors." "You forgot a fork?" "What for?" "Need to deep tine them so the marinade will go all the way through to the middle. Are our ladies back from their tour?" "Making salad as we speak. What's that coiled up at the end of the bushes?" "One of Golden's rodent controllers. He was chasing after a squirrel earlier. Don't see a bulge - so the squirrel must have gotten away." "He's a hummer. Has to be over six feet." "Don't tell the ladies. They'll never come outside." "He doesn't seem afraid of us. There he goes." "Which way?" "Across the lawn. Down toward the river." "Looks like he caught something. Talk about eating one's lunch. It's another snake." Mike took out his pocket binoculars, "Has a rattle on its tail. Looks bigger than a pygmy. Must have been a young Eastern Diamondback." "Hope he finishes before the ladies come outside." "No problem. He drug it into the palmetos." "Plenty of food around here for snakes. Look at all the lizards taking the afternoon sun."

"They're geckos."

"Like in Hawaii?"

"Roger that. Last of the dinosaurs."

"You forgot about crocodiles - alligators and birds."

Hacker cooked - Mike poured wine and the Florida Ebony snake slithered toward the lagoon - its insides full of Eastern Diamondback. Mike looked over Hacker's shoulder - kibitzing his cooking, "Don't turn them so often."

"Only searing them on both sides. Did you find a meat thermometer in one of the drawers?"

"It's behind you on the patio table."

"Not a bad view. Wonder why he didn't build on the ocean?"

"Needed dock space for his fleet."

"Where are his yachts?"

"Must be in dry-dock."

Mike sat down at the table, "First extended vacation you've had in quite awhile."

Hacker turned the steaks, "Not intentional. When I don't win we don't get asked. My corporate outings are sliming down."

"The Senior Tour will give you another shot at the brass ring. Wouldn't it be fun to win just one more before we fade into the sunset?"

"On the flat belly tour?"

"One more time."

"Hardly anyone wins against the limberbacks at my age."

"You're in the best physical condition you've been in since your college days."

"I'm sleeping without pain killers."

"You need to strengthen your legs."

"What do you recommend - running or jogging?"

"Neither - a walking program."

"I do that on the golf course."

"Not continuous. What about fixing your putting?"

"Run them in from everywhere in a friendly game, but only

half drop under pressure. Do you have a fix?"

"An eight year old mind on top of your almost fifty year old body. You need to get rid of distractions."

"I can't find the line."

"Not true. Believing what you see is your problem."

"That's the difference between a young player and an older one. I have the doubts. I'm full of indecision."

"That's called - I see - therefore I'm not sure.

Marylin and Joan came out to the patio carrying a bowl of prepared salad. Joan asked, "Are the steaks ready?"

Hacker checked, "Be another twenty minutes. They're an inch and a half thick. Takes longer."

"Marylin and I will have a glass of wine. Mike?"

"Right away. Just salad and steak?"

"A low carb diet for you and Hacker. And Marylin and I have to watch our girlish figures."

Mike poured wine while Hacker checked the meat temperature, "They're ready." He forked them onto a platter

Marylin savored her first bite and then pointed her fork at her husband - smiling, "You haven't lost your touch!"

"Cooking lasts - kissing doesn't."

"That's why I stay with you."

"Give Golden the credit. His steaks are prime. Tell us about your trek through Golden's Guest house."

"Joan and I counted twelve bedrooms and four kitchens - just like the one in this suite."

Joan nodded, "They have children and grandchildren."

Mike asked, "What type of property are we going to look at while were here."

Marylin answered, "Brenda said condos and building lots if we're interested in a custom home."

Hacker popped in, "A condo might be interesting."

Marylin dropped her fork, "Hacker - shame on you. You never mentioned condos before."

"Wouldn't it be nice to turn the key - you know - come and go as we please. "

"We'll need room for our children when they visit. And it must be on the ocean - and have a fireplace. And Mike and Joan will have to agree."

Joan answered, "I'm willing to look. We'll need more than three bedrooms for our children - too."

They ate the rest of their steaks in silence.

Marylin got up from the table, "Who else wants coffee?"  
Hacker stood up, "I'll help with the dishes."

Mike followed, "I'll carry the cups."

Joan asked, "Have you thought about hurricanes?"

Hacker answered, "Most of the Atlantic ones either go into the gulf or follow the Gulf Stream to Georgia and the Carolinas."

Mike answered, "And so says our Rocket Scientist."

"Hey - I took a year of Meteorology at Ohio State."

Mike poured and Hacker carried coffee to the patio table.

Mike asked, "What about storm surge?"

"If you build behind the dune - shouldn't be a problem. In the midwest we have tornadoes and ice storms. In the west - volcanoes - earthquakes and forest fires."

Mike nodded, "Risk is everywhere. How about beach erosion?"

"Global warming and rising oceans?"

"They say it's coming."

"It is, but when. At an inch a year - it will take sixty years to rise five feet."

"And we'll be gone."

"The barrier island is twenty-seven feet above sea level."

"That gives us three-hundred years."

"What time do you have a Realtor dropping by?"

"Nine in the morning."

"Better hit the sack early."

"Remember your exercise program."

"I'll be up and at it before seven."

Hacker was up before daybreak. After plugging in the coffee pot and drinking a glass of orange juice - he began his daily regime. First - stretching well worn back muscles. Then a series of sit-ups mixed in with yogi leg movements. After a series of scissors leg movements on his stomach and thirty-three pushups from his knees - Hacker went outside for a walk. An hour later he was back inside Golden's guest house - the Golden estate fully explored.

Mike joined him at the kitchen bar, "You're serious about this exercise program."

"Every since Tracks came on tour."

"Did you see our friend on your walk?"

"He's holed up - devouring last night's meal."

"Is your program working?"

"I'm feeling muscles that haven't been used in quite awhile."

"I know it doesn't, but wouldn't you think walking the golf course would keep you fit?"

"Not when we're playing five hour rounds."

"Keeps me trim."

"You're carrying a forty pound pack. We've got to start penalizing the rookies."

"They give new meaning to that old Scottish saying."

"Miss it quick?"

"Right - except our new TGA saying is - 'Miss it slow'."

"Breakfast?"

"I'll cook the eggs and fry the bacon."

"I'll take coffee to our ladies."

Mike knocked on Marylin's door, "Coffee?"

"I'm dressed," she said as she opened the door. "What's Hacker doing?"

"Cooking breakfast."

"High protein?"

"Eggs - bacon and cheese - no toast."

"That's my boy."

"I hope you like your eggs scrambled with a salsa and cheese garnish."

"Knowing Hacker - it will be more like salsa and cheese with an egg garnish. What's got into Hacker? Our appointment isn't until nine and he's up at the crack of dawn."

Joan walked into Marylin's room, "Our lads are suffering from a golfer's version of mid-life crisis. Preparing to leave the regular tour for the senior tour."

"Then this is a senior moment?"

"More like a senior year. What is Hacker cooking? The aroma from the kitchen - it's strange."

"Salsa and cheese with eggs. How are you feeling?"

"On pins and needles. I'm excited."

"Me too. I'm ready to build a new nest."

"I am too, if Mike remembers it's my job to purchase and arrange the straw. Are you adjusting to the idea of living in a condo?"

"You and I have been living in and out of hotel suites for the last twenty-five years. We can learn to accommodate."

"Don't know if I want to share an elevator."

"We'll have to be on a golf course."

"And on the ocean."

"Might be an impossible dream."

Marylin - still brushing her hair as she and Joan walked into the kitchen - took one look, "Who made this mess?"

Hacker looked around - sheepishly, "But Benjamin's mess was five times as much as any of theirs."

Mike poured orange juice for their ladies, "You stumped me. Who was the poet?"

"Unknown. I wasn't playing fair. That was from Exodus. Just before they came into the land of Goshen."

"Goshen?"

"I don't name 'em - I just read 'em."

Marylin shooed them out with, "Set the table."

Mike handed Hacker silverware, "When did you take up reading the Bible?"

In hotel rooms when I couldn't get to sleep. Calmed my nerves and took my mind away from next day's round. Always a Gideon in the bedside table."

"Ah - that early Hebrew warrior who was victorious."

"True - him, but not me."

"You won your fair share."

"Look out on the path. Isn't that our Ebony snake soaking up the sun?"

"It is - digesting last night's meal."

Two cardinals whistled wolf like whistles from the live oak shading the lanai. A brown squirrel with a snow white chest jumped from tree limb to tree limb - chattering at Mike and Hacker - below. Mike turned away from the view and laughed, "Fork on the left - knife and spoon on the right. Our snake is resting in the sun and the squirrel won't leave him alone."

"Must know he isn't hungry."

"Look at that forked tongue. Who does he remind you of?"

"Beasty. Tongue gave him away."

"Talking about our TGA. Have you changed your mind?"

"About playing more tournaments?"

"Yes. Will you fill in for Golden in the carry-over game?"

"Golden isn't playing?"

"He's stepping aside. He'll play in the senior event."

"Won't be the same without him, but I'll do it. Might even win a few carry-overs. Is Golden okay?"

"Nothing that playing more tournaments won't cure."

"I'm getting there myself. At our age - we can't afford to play the tour part time and expect to win. We lose our legs and tournament nerves."

"And in both of your games - a repeatable putting stroke.

And you're right about competing part time."

"We have two choices. Play often - or out of the rough."

Hacker got up from the table, "Lets help our ladies carry breakfast to the patio."

"Too late - they're on their way out. I'll get the door."  
"And I'll hold their chairs."

Marylin smiled, "Have you two solved most of the Tour's problems?"

Mike held the door for Joan, "We can't even solve our own."  
Hacker added, "Not true. We discovered the solution for ending world hunger."

Marylin laughed, "I know - everyone will go on a diet."  
Joan ordered, "Sit down - we'll dine family style. What were you two really talking about?"

"Hacker is filling in for Golden on one of his TV contests."

Marylin asked, "The carry-over game?"

Hacker answered, "That's the one."

"You'll get good exposure."

"Only if I play well."

Joan asked, "Is Track's playing?"

Mike looked at Hacker and they both shrugged their shoulders.

Hacker put his fork down, "Not bad - not bad at all. I haven't lost my touch."

Joan asked, "Why were you quiet after I mentioned Tracks. Is the Masters still a problem?"

Mike answered, "Good and bad. Yes we're still alive and no we lost most of our endorsement renewals."

Hacker added, "It hasn't hurt our corporate outings. Look - I like the kid. He can get it up and down out of quicksand. He's got charisma - raw talent and brains. We get along. If we were the same age - we'd be friends."

Marylin couldn't resist, "If you wanted to be the same mental age - he'd have to spot you three years."

Hacker laughed, "If you're talking about me popping off when I should have been quiet - you're right. I'm glad I'm twenty-five years older than Tracks. It was tough enough being out there when Golden was in his prime."

Hacker picked up the intercom. Golden was on the other end, "Sorry we weren't here to meet you. A minor family crisis. Are you looking at real estate this morning?"

"Mike has a saleslady stopping by in an hour."

"Call and cancel. Stop by the main house. I want you and Mike to see our new development. Golf course is growing in as we speak."

"Is it on the ocean?"

"And all by itself. Surrounded by conservation land. You won't see it advertised. It's invitation only."

"How about the course."

"British links style with six ocean holes."

"House lots - or condos?"

"Both. What are you interested in?"

"Condo with an ocean view."

"Penthouses have 4500 square feet and you're wife can design to her pleasure."

"How large a membership?"

"Three-hundred houses and one-hundred condos. Course and club memberships come with your unit. Club will control the beach and condos and houses will have their own pools - tennis courts. Club house is up. I have lockers waiting for you and Mike."

"Do memberships convey with the units?"

"They are deeded."

"Won't four-hundred members make a crowd?"

"Quite a few of our members will be from the tour. The rest have multiple memberships around the country. We won't have a tee time problem."

"How many units have you sold?"

"We're going slow - fifty lots - not sure about the condos."

"Are there architectural restrictions?"

"Can't block a view channel. Other than that - we have to approve. Club is full service."

"Fees?"

"Split the costs at the end of the year. Initial year fee."