

## 2<sup>nd</sup> TEE

*Colin Campbell, the former pro at Lone Oak, had died two months ago. Or at least, that was the assumption.*

He could have just as easily been abducted by aliens and was now the subject of anal probing with the head of an oversized driver, a thought that would have pleased much of the Lone Oak membership.

He had parlayed a decent golf game, a Scots accent and a bad case of Short Man's Disease into the head pro position at Lone Oak. He had been there for ages and had perfected the art of sucking up to the wealthier members, vicariously enjoying the little cuts and digs that come with denying the *üntermensch* preferred tee times and favorable pairings at the Memorial Day Four Ball.

His talent for fomenting petty injustice was severely crimped with the chartering of Rattlesnake Run Club of Golf & Spa and its (Trent) Jones course with Life Enhancement Facility that included three masseuses, a hot mud bath, and a sauna finished in Finnish birch with a

chest of heated meditation stones imported from the headwaters of the Ganges. It opened five years ago and steadily skimmed off the higher net-worth members of Lone Oak and several other clubs in the area. The resulting departures opened up spaces on the board that were now filled with some of the people to which Campbell had been less than accommodating over the past couple of years. He knew his days were numbered.

Eight Saturdays ago, a foursome had shown up at 7:30 and discovered the pro shop still locked and the golf carts still garaged. That Campbell disappeared came as no surprise, nor was the amazing amount of nude photography that resided on the hard drive of his computer, including several photos of Tiffany Helms, the most recent wife of Jeff Helms, Sr., sunbathing in what she imagined was the privacy of her pool just off the 7th fairway. Evidently, Campbell's trips up the water tower behind the 7th tee were for reasons other than checking its level.

No, the shocking part was that, except for Colin and his notable bag of clubs in the distinctive Campbell tartan, nothing was gone. Shirts, shoes, bags, and balls were all accounted for. The cash in the drawer untouched. Even the demo clubs (which by eminent domain belong to the head pro) were still there.

There was enough casual concern to eventually call a relative who then called the police to check Campbell's apartment. His car was gone, but the apartment, while somewhat messy, showed no sign of a struggle or of hasty packing. Clothes were in drawers and closets. A half-empty bottle of flat beer sat next to most of a pizza on the coffee table. The bed sheet was rumped into the outline of a prone body, the wrinkles showing the shape as clearly as a murder scene chalk line. It was as if the Rapture had happened, only God didn't seem to be as picky as the Baptists thought He was.

The search committee formed with the speed of a frontier posse. Ads were written and placed, confidential phone calls made, contacts milked, resumes studied. Clandestine meetings held in the dark corners of watering holes. Lists were drawn up, parsed, pared, and shortened. In the meantime, everyone on the golf staff moved up a notch.

*\*GOLF PRO NAMES: I don't know why, but there is always someone on the golf staff at a club with a nickname like Scooter, or Rusty, or Skipper, nicknames that are normally the property of a child of six or the neighborhood mutt. I strongly suspect that on the backside of the original copy of the Rules of Golf, written in 1754 and enshrined on the wall of the R&A headquarters at St. Andrew's, there is a smudged appendage that reads, "Ye shall nae have a Clube of Golf that has not at least one yeoman with a name like that of a wee bairn or of a mongrel dog."*

Scooter, the assistant pro\*, took over lessons and schmoozing. Kyle the cart boy exchanged his overalls for a golf shirt. Ramon, the assistant greenskeeper, was pressed into duty taking tee times, although he had to be coached a bit as English was not his primary language.

Everything ran pretty smoothly, actually. Scooter knocked back his hours from 65 to 40 as he relied more on Kyle, who took to his promotion especially since the girls on their way to the pool had to walk past the pro shop window. If anything, it cured his slouch and caused him to pick up on his grooming. Frank Farquart even forgave Ramon for phonetically spelling his name on the time sheet as F-U-K-W-A-D. There was some talk of suspending the search. Until last Sunday.

That was the day a pearlescent '65 Cadillac convertible pulled up to the bag drop. She was immaculate. Her chrome grill with its Maidenform 18-hour-bra parking lights glinted coolly in the dappled light. Her tail fins rose like thunderheads. You could almost see the newer SUVs and sport coupes in the parking lot lower their headlights in awe and respect.

The Silverbacks, a bunch of the older members who gathered for an impromptu tournament every Sunday after church, were sitting at the tables outside of the card room, comparing scorecards and settling bets. (Silverbacks is what they called themselves – the younger members referred to them as the Old Farts.) As the Caddy glided in, they drank their Jack-on-the-rocks and lit up cigarettes, re-telling the same stories they had told for decades.

Hap Davidson, the alpha male of the Silverbacks and president of Lone Oak, was the first to spot the car. All the other heads swiveled to

see what had broken off Hap's recounting Jeff Helms, Sr. running over his own ball on the last hole of the 1973 Member/Guest and attempting to gouge it out of the red clay of the fairway. They all let out a collective sigh of appreciation in the form of a white cloud of tobacco smoke. It looked like a pope had just been elected.

The Cadillac's door, a door that was longer than a standard sofa, swung silently outward. You could actually smell the red leather of the upholstery on the breeze. And come out of her, my people, stepped a man in white, a white so pure that even snow would have squinted in jealousy. His back was to the clubhouse as he surveyed the course with his hands on his hips. When he shut the door of the car, it closed with a solid thump that you felt in the belly.

The man turned and stepped around the car. His shoes were out-of-the-box white. His slacks were white, with pleats and creases so sharp that they glowed like a knife's edge. He was wearing a white golf shirt, unbuttoned to show a tanned chest curly with silver hair. Impossibly, the buttons of the crew neck were even whiter than the shirt.

He strode toward the gathering of the old guys. His tanned face was framed with salt-and-pepper hair, blue eyes glinting under silver brows. His stride was slow but long as he walked not toward the front door of the clubhouse, but directly to the tribe of silverbacks that had watched him pull up.

He stopped two club lengths from the group. All you could hear were the birds twittering. And even they shut up when he smiled.

His smile was the sun coming out from behind a cloud. He didn't so much smile as beam. You could actually see the faces of the old guys light up as the light from the smile hit them. Some of their rheumy eyes actually had to water from the glory of that smile.

The focus of the smile was then narrowed and pointed at a tallish Silverback in a peach golf shirt bearing the Lone Oak crest. The man in white took a confident three paces toward him and extended a tanned hand. The man in the peach shirt rose as if by command.

"Mr. Davidson," he said in a voice that resonated like a church organ. "Good afternoon, sir. I understand you're looking for a head golf professional."