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## Go

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# Go

by Steven J. McDermott

Mike Carter, fueled by anger and self-disgust, pushed up the dusty trail connecting the seventeenth green to the eighteenth tee. The path crested in a thick stand of hemlock and cedar and fed onto the tight mown turf. Carter took a deep breath and expelled it as a heavy sigh. He stood his clubs and looked down the fairway, hands on hips. Garth Gibbons and Tommy Oh, his main competition for the Boeing company championship, were only forty yards down the fairway and still walking toward their balls. He could see the next group ahead just on the other side of the lake. Looked like a long wait. That's fine, he thought. He needed to get himself together. Needed to stop thinking about Susan's job interview down in San Francisco and get his mind back on the golf.

His concentration had been wavering all afternoon, moving back and forth from the golf to his conversation with Susan that morning. They'd argued—and not for the first time—about her out-of-town job interview. Argued the entire 45-minute drive to the airport. They'd stood, not speaking, at gate D7 waiting for the departure of her flight to San Francisco. Finally, as the first-class passengers began boarding, Carter tried to make amends.

—You'll do great, he said, you always do.

—Yep, she said.

—Have you ever not gotten a job you went after?

—Look, Mike, I just need to know you're up for this.

—I am, I am.

—Because there's no point in me going all out for this job if you're not willing to move.

On his drive back to their North Seattle home, Carter detoured through the Green Lake neighborhood where he grew up. He parked on the street in front of his childhood home, surprised to see it still painted the same light blue. His parents didn't live there anymore, hadn't lived there for many years, but the neighborhood still tugged at him. Within walking distance were the places he played when he was a kid: The Woodland Park Zoo, the ball fields at Lower Woodlands, the pitch and putt golf course, and Green Lake itself. Susan was from San Francisco; nothing held her in this area except him. He wondered if she would visit her childhood haunts on her trip, if she'd end up parked across from her childhood home. He knew it wasn't just the great job opportunity that drew her to San Francisco; with Alex finally off to Washington State University to study veterinary science, she felt free to think about going back home. Being in the neighborhood where he'd grown up made him under-



*Photo courtesy Sugar Creek Golf Course, Hinton*



stand her desire. But where would that put him? He'd have to leave his hometown so she could return to hers. How do two people work that out? What was a fair result if they both couldn't live in their hometown?

—Jesus Christ! I hate that climb, Tompkins said as he walked onto the tee. He laid his clubs down, his breathing ragged. He took off his hat and extending his arm out, wiped his forehead with his shirtsleeve. He put his hat back on and then pulled out the scorecard. You made five, right? he asked.

—Do you have to remind me? Carter said.

Tompkins laughed. I had six, he said. Shit! This is no time for us to choke.

—You might be choking, Carter said, but I'm not.

—Yeah, right.

Carter wasn't choking. His three-putt on sixteen was the result of trying to ram in the long birdie putt. He wouldn't make medalist by lagging safe. The six-foot comebacker he'd hit a bit too hard and it dipped in before spinning out of the hole. He hadn't choked on seventeen either. Hit that four-iron great, straight at the pin. It just got held up in the gust. Only landed a yard short and rolled back down the bank into the water. Maybe three was the club. Didn't want to end up in the rear bunker, not with the pin on the front edge. That bunker shot back toward the lake was nasty. And with the green baked hard the three-iron never would have held. Another couple of feet and he'd have been tapping in for birdie. Bad break, that's all.

Tompkins sat on the end of his bag while Carter stared down the fairway. Tommy Oh—a summer intern—was headed to Arizona State on a golf scholarship in the fall. Gibbons had once had a great game, not that he couldn't still play on occasion. One of Carter's great satisfactions in life had come five years ago when he broke the course record that Gibbons had held for fifteen years. Gibbons' fabled 63. A record nobody had come close to. And when Carter finally broke it, he was pretty sure that all the rumors insinuating that Gibbons

hadn't *really* shot that 63 in the wind and rain were true. Carter was glad that Gibbons was playing with Tommy Oh; the young kid would keep Gibbons honest. If he and Susan ended up moving to San Francisco this might be Carter's one and only shot to win the championship. All he wanted was the chance to win the thing fair and square.

Carter was a second-generation Boeing employee. His father had started out as a wing installer building the first 747. Working as an engineer on the big jets was the only job Carter had ever wanted. He knew if they left Seattle they'd never come back. So if they went to San Francisco, what would he do? He couldn't imagine. He also couldn't imagine staying in Seattle and letting Susan go to San Francisco by herself, and she'd made it clear she was prepared to do that.

Tommy Oh had found his ball in the rough bordering the trees and was experimenting with restricted backswings. Okay, Carter thought, let's see how the young hotshot handles this one. Gibbons was still searching the reeds for his ball. Carter was pleased that someone else was having problems. Despite playing the last two holes in three over par, he was still one under for the round and four under for the 36-hole qualifier. He'd had a two-shot lead over Tompkins after yesterday's first round. Tompkins faded fast—three over on the front nine. He's out of it now after triple-bogeying seventeen. Both Tommy Oh and Gibbons had been three shots back at the start of the round. He supposed somebody else could have got hot out there. Even so, four or five under would get him medalist honors and number one seed for match play. Carter wanted that number one seeding. Partly it was ego talk. For most of the last twenty years he'd had the lowest handicap. On paper he'd always been one of the best golfers in the company but he had never proved it in the championship. Not that he'd tried and failed; he'd just never played in the event. He didn't play in the golf leagues and he rarely played in any of the company-wide events. The first few years back in Seattle after getting his engi-



neering degree at Utah State he hadn't played because his job had kept him off the course in the summer. Later, though, it was deliberate avoidance. The handicap events were dominated by the sandbaggers; and Carter wouldn't play with them. And if he didn't play the handicap events, he couldn't play in the championship. This year was different; given the direction Susan's career was heading he'd decided to play while he still had the chance.

Up the fairway, Gibbons had found his ball. He was bent over contemplating his lie, then peered across the fairway at Tommy Oh, who was still experimenting with ways to extricate himself from the woods. Carter could see the wheels turning. Go ahead, use the hand mashie, you bastard. Gibbons glanced back at the tee and saw Carter watching him. Got you! Gibbons picked up the ball and went through the process of taking a legal drop. He laid down his driver and then faced the hole as he dropped the ball from his outstretched hand. When he was done, he looked back at the tee and flipped Carter the bird. He got the clasped forearm in return.

—I wouldn't piss him off too much, if I were you, Tompkins said. That UAL plane coming down the line is having interior fit-up problems.

Carter managed a Payloads engineering team that designed stow bins for all 767 aircraft models. Tompkins was the manufacturing engineer in charge of planning the lavatory and the galley installations. When those units changed, Carter's stowbin designs had to change too. Gibbons was the lead quality assurance inspector for stowbin final assembly, and he made the determination whether a part, assembly, or installation was tagged for rejection. Carter and Gibbons got along okay, although they locked horns every time certain installations came down the line. The mechanics had low tolerance for chronic design problems. When Gibbons' work load increased he made sure Carter's did too.

—Like that's a surprise, Carter said. I hate it when you shift that galley back into the 43 sec-

tion.

—That's the customer, not me. Besides, you could always redesign it.

—Don't even get me started on that one.

The green ahead was clear and Gibbons and Tommy Oh prepared to hit their shots. Carter took out his driver. Gibbons played a weak iron shot that appeared to come up short of the green. Carter tried to push negative thoughts out of the way. Five times before he'd stood on the eighteenth tee needing just a par to tie Gibbons' course record, birdies to break it. He'd hit into the bunker, the woods, the lake—he'd blown it every way imaginable. Choked. Choked big time. Even when he finally broke the record he'd choked on this hole. A par would have given him sixty-one and beaten the record by two. He'd gone from rough to rough and made bogey.

Just then Tommy Oh hit an amazing shot from the edge of the trees. Somehow he'd managed, with a restricted backswing, to hit a low sweeping hook. Carter watched the ball run up the hill onto the green, an awesome shot.

—You're up, Tompkins said.

Teeing his ball, Carter made another run at negative thoughts. He couldn't seem to get comfortably aligned. Felt like he was aimed too far right, out into the lake. So he fidgeted around, and then he felt like he was aiming too far left, into the trees. It took him about ten seconds over the ball to fidget himself into a pretzel, no longer knowing how to set up to hit the shot, let alone take the club back. He stepped away, went behind the ball and tried to visualize the shot. Come on, Michael, quit choking! Dig deep!

And then he had the picture in his mind. Not pretty, but a shot he knew he could hit. The image became stronger and he held it, the ball starting towards the trees and then hanging there, riding the tree line, before fading back over the bunkers and catching the left side of the fairway. Carter stepped up to the ball and aimed over the bunkers. He swung quickly while the image was still vivid, tightened up his left hand on the way down so the



clubface wouldn't square up. The ball screamed away. Carter held his follow through and watched as the ball got closer to the trees.

—Turn! Turn! He shouted and leaned hard to the right.

The ball started slowly fading away from the trees as it ran out of momentum. Landed in the rough and stayed there.

—At least it's dry, Tompkins said.

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When the UAL plane hit final assembly Carter spent the whole day in the factory sketching out design changes and signing off the mechanics' workarounds. Gibbons was tagging everything that didn't fit perfectly. Carter was pissed. He suspected that Gibbons was trying to rile him on the eve of their semi-final match. The mechanics were flipping shit, too, taunting him with hands clenched to their throats, followed by gagging sounds. On the other hand, he knew that particular stowbin design was botched. Had been from the beginning, and it was particularly annoying because United had ordered 38 airplanes with that configuration. Every ninth plane down the line and Carter and Gibbons and the mechanics were redesigning it by rejection tag.

When the last of the tags were signed off, Carter headed back to his office determined to confront his boss about a redesign. He felt he no longer had anything to lose. Susan's interview in San Francisco had gone great. She was just waiting for the offer letter. That gave him a fall back.

Peavey was in his office answering his email when Carter walked in and sat down. Peavey swiveled around, saw Carter's demeanor, and said: Let me guess, UAL.

—This is ridiculous, Carter said. Everyone knows it's a bullshit design and they keep expecting me to fix it. And when I don't it makes me look like an idiot. Why won't you just let me fix the damn thing once and for all?

—You know what I like about you, Carter? You've got passion. That tells me I made the right



*Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall*

decision.

—What? By not approving the design change?

—The design will change all right. Just not on the scale you're thinking, Peavey said with a slight smirk. United wants to add a crew rest.

—Oh, Christ, that means a complete interior redesign.

—It gets better, Peavey said. Manufacturing will only sign-off on it if we use a design/build team.

—Great. Design by committee.

—It gets better, Peavey said. They want co-location.

— Meaning?

—We're going to move a design team out to the factory, make you all sit together.

Carter was stunned. A half-assed suggestion of his had come home to roost.

—The good news, Peavey said, is that engineering still has clout. We—you, Carter—are going to manage the team.

—When is this happening?

—A couple of weeks, Peavey said. It's not announced yet. I'm just giving you a heads up.

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When Carter got home, Susan wasn't there yet, so he fixed himself a double scotch rocks and plopped down on the couch and put his feet up on the ottoman. Their routine since Alex had gone away to college was that whoever got home first would start something for dinner. He was more in the mood to de-combust than cook. He'd gone to



Peavey half expecting to quit or get fired. Instead he was getting his dream job. Just when he thought things would simplify, that his job would blow-up, leaving them free to move to San Francisco for Susan's career, he was being promoted. Now what? She could pursue her career—although not with the company she'd interviewed with—just as well in Seattle as in San Francisco. He had no such options. Boeing designed airplanes in two places: at the Renton and Everett factories on the outskirts of Seattle. Narrow bodies to the south, wide bodies to the north. That was it. Well, maybe she wouldn't get an offer and the problem would go away. She'd come home from the interview excited but cautious. She didn't want to get her hopes up until she had the offer in writing. One thing he knew, he wasn't telling her about his promotion. The last thing he wanted was Susan thinking he was putting up a roadblock to her career.

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Carter and Gibbons had a four o'clock tee time and it was still in the upper 80's with no breeze when they were clear to hit off. Carter flipped a tee for honors and it went to Gibbons.

—Luck, Carter said and extended his hand for Gibbons to shake.

—I'm gonna humiliate you, Gibbons said as he walked over to tee his ball.

The first hole went downhill, dropping about thirty yards, with the green sitting in a depression at the bottom of the hill. Not a long hole, about 400 yards from the back tee, but the only flat lie in the fairway was a stretch 75 yards or so in front of the green. The rest of the fairway sloped either left or right and ran steeply to the rough on either side. Anything going hot would bounce off the slope into the trees. There were two plays: one safe, one risky. Hit a long iron to keep it in the fairway, playing the next shot with a 7-iron from the light rough on whichever side of the fairway the ball rolled. Or go bombs away with the driver and try to reach the flat spot in front of the green.

Gibbons stung a perfect one-iron down the left

center that faded back into the crown and then rolled slowly over to the left edge of the fairway. He walked over to Carter and said: Hu-mil-i-ate.

Carter pulled out his driver and made several full throttle practice swings. He teed his ball and glanced over at Gibbons, who was smiling as if he'd already won the hole. I'll show you humiliation, Carter thought. He settled into his stance and made a slow, wide backswing, keeping the clubhead out in front of his body as he turned. He parked the club on plane and in the slot at the top, shifted his left knee towards the target and snapped his hips around as hard and fast as he could. He felt the clubhead lagging behind and then the crack at impact and the club was extending and chasing after the ball and wrapping around behind him and slapping into his shoulder blades. The ball took off low, a line drive to straight away center. Shit! He crushed that one. The ball hit on the down slope, took a couple of big bounces, and rolled onto the flat where it stopped about sixty yards short of the green. Carter picked up his tee, looked at Gibbons and said: Hu-mil-i-ate that.

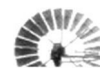
The match see-sawed, changing momentum on made or missed putts. Carter took an early one up lead, and then Gibbons moved to one up. They were back to all-square when they reached the par three eleventh and had to wait awhile for the group in front to finish. Gibbons paced, while Carter sat in the shade at the back of the tee. Mind free to wander, Carter started thinking about his promotion and wondered what Gibbons knew. So he went fishing. By the way, Carter said, I didn't appreciate all the rejection tags yesterday.

Garth laughed. You think that was all on your account?

—Hey. I've spent whole days in the factory signing off your tags, the majority of which required minimal changes. I kept your line moving. I didn't have to do that.

Garth stopped pacing and said: So when are you going to redesign the thing and fix the problem?

Carter realized that Gibbons didn't know about



the crew rest project, so he said: It's cheaper to stay with the existing design.

—That's bullshit and you know it. I've checked out the microfiche too, you know. I saw your initials. This design flaw has been around for years and we're sick of working around it.

—It's not my call.

—Yeah, right. When are you going to get some balls and buck your weasel of a boss?

They glared at each other, then Carter said: The green's clear. Just hit your goddamned shot.

They both hit lousy 6 irons. Gibbons' pull hooked left of the green. Carter's was hot and low, hit the green hard and jumped over the back into the deep rough. Gibbons hit a great chip to two feet and then tapped in for par while Carter figured out how to play his pitch. He had a decent lie and knew he could get the club on it clean. As he studied the green trying to read how fast the ball would run, he saw Gibbons standing there smirking. The bastard. He was going to hole it just to wipe that smirk off Gibbons' face. Carter settled over the shot, softened his hands and flipped the ball out just over the fringe, where it bounced and started rolling, a little fast at first, then it slowed, curled around toward the hole, hit the flag, and dropped in for a birdie.

—Bastard, Gibbons said.

The match was over at that point and they both knew it. Over the remaining holes Carter played flawlessly, with a controlled fury. When he rolled in a long birdie putt on 15, it ended the match 4 and 3.

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Carter watched as Susan opened the Fed-Ex envelope. Her hands shook as she read the offer letter.

—So? he asked.

—Six figures, she said, plus options.

He whistled. That's nearly double what you're making now.

—Check out the title, she said, pointing to the letter so he could read it too. Vice President of Product Development.

He hugged her, wrapped her tight in his arms,

partly to share her joy and partly to hide his conflicted feelings.

— I want this job, she said.

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In the championship match Carter played Tommy Oh. When they reached the seventeenth, the long par three over the water, Carter, thanks to a hot putter, and almost in spite of himself, was two-up. He didn't even need to take the hole for the win, a halve would be good enough. As they waited on the tee, Carter wondered what his son, Alex, would think if his parents moved from Seattle to San Francisco. How would he feel not having his childhood home—the only home he'd ever known, at least until he moved into the dorm room—to go back to? Would he still want to visit if visiting meant not going *home*? And what about the stuff in Alex's room? The posters, books, CDs, the closet full of clothes, all the belongings he hadn't taken with him to college. What to do with them? Box them tip and ship them to Pullman? Or would Carter and Susan, when house hunting, need to seek a place with a spare room, a room Alex might or might not ever use?

Tommy Oh played his shot safely to the back of the green, but left himself at least a sixty-foot putt down the slope. Not a threat. Carter teed his ball and took his stance. Just what had he been trying to prove by taking these guys on now? Prove to them that he could win? That he was the best? What did that mean anyway? He wagged, swung the club back. Winning wasn't going to change a damn thing. A slight pause at the top as he focused on the back of the ball. He dropped his right shoulder and pulled the club down hard into the ground, just laid the sod over it. The divot was so deep it stayed attached, curled over like a wood shaving. A reddish-brown clump of dirt stuck to the club face. Go, he said weakly, just before the ball plopped into the middle of the pond.

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