

CROOKED CREEK

DAD GIVES ME A CALL. HE says, "Listen, I'm going to be in town. Next week. On Tuesday." He says, "It's the same deal as last year. For that golf deal." There's an annual old farts tournament. He's come down for the last four or five years. "We're out at this new club," he tells me. "Crooked Creek. Know where that is?"

I say, "No."

Then I think again, and I tell him, "Wait. Out east of town, isn't it?"

"Is it? I've got the address written down. Somewhere." Slips of paper are being shuffled. "Yeah, well...somewhere," he promises me.

I'm hoping to hell he's not the one driving.

And as if he's reading my mind, he says, "I'm riding with Bill Wannamaker. You remember Bill."

Not particularly.

"Anyway," he says, "Things start at seven. We'll be done one, one-thirty. They're feeding us up at the clubhouse. I guess. If you want, come out for a minute or two. If you're not too busy."

How do you explain busy to a retired man? But I tell him, "Maybe." Then I amend myself, adding, "Probably. Sure." And that's where we leave things.

I've been seeing the same woman for five, six months. And we've reached that point where I'm having trouble seeing the point to things. Where I can pretty well imagine us parting ways.

Not that there's anything wrong with Colleen. It's just that we have next to nothing in common. Not age, since she's a good eleven years younger than me. Not hobbies, except that we both like watching old movies. But even then, someone usually has to compromise his or her good tastes. Then there's the fact that Colleen is vegetarian where I'm an omnivore. And worst of all, there's a question about beliefs. I'm a staunch Rationalist, and Darwin is my patron saint. Colleen is a born Catholic who long ago discovered a fascination for the occult. Which isn't that far from being Catholic, if you want the truth.

Anyway, that weekend, hunched over a plate of beans and flee, I mention my father and his consuming interest in golf. And the tournament. And my intention to drive out and say, "Hi," to the old bum.

"Can I tag along?" asks Colleen.

I don't say anything.

She reads my aura. My face. Or maybe the silence. Then she shrugs and says, "If you don't want me to go "

"It's in the afternoon. Aren't you workings"

Colleen is a barber. Which is a story onto itself, honestly. She doesn't work Sundays and Mondays. I assumed that I'd be safe for Tuesday.

But she says, "I can take a long late lunch."

"Dad has this way," I begin. "Nothing ever happens on schedule."

She looks down at her plate, lips pursed.

I read the silence. Or her face. Or her aura, maybe. Then I tell her, "Just so you're warned. Sure, let's go watch some sweaty old men hitting tiny white balls."

