

The 4th Hole

By

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Playing alone was his passion. I against I. Nothing better. 3 bogeys in a row on his scorecard. Our golfer takes his hat off and scratches his head. Arriving at the 4th hole. It's early morning still. Dew is on the tips of the blades of grass. A light fog hovers over the green grass on the fairway. An elevated tee box stares over the 420 yard par four. Two black and white wingtip FootJoy golf shoes approach the tee box. A red tee is tucked behind the golfer's ear right below his hat line. He pulls it out from behind his ear and pushes it into the dirt. A Titleist ball balanced perfectly on top. From behind it is a perfect snapshot of the shot ahead. A slight dogleg right par-4.

His hand reaches up to his ear and pulls out his earbud headphone that is playing Paint it Black by the Rolling Stones. He takes a deep breath. Scans the surrounding area. He can smell the mulch in the woods just passed the tee box. The swoosh in the air of the golf club comes in and out of earshot as the pendulum action of his swing is executed. He takes three more practice swings. His gaze never leaving his objective. He stops swinging and approaches the ball. He takes his other earphone out. Places them gently inside of his shirt.

Looking at his hand, he checks his grip. His pinkie is interlaced with his thumb. Focused, he tilts the club a few degrees forward to counteract his slice. He is looking ahead to the fairway. The players in the foursome ahead, have just finished putting and replace the flag stick into the hole. The sound of a deep breath. An inhale and an exhale escape his mouth as he focuses on the ball. A slow back swing gently creeps until the head of the club reaches so far around his head he could see it in front of him, just comes into view. As his swing continues he exhales and twists his hips. Keeping his feet planted while generating power through his hips. The head of the club comes through and squarely hits the Titleist ball as it projects into the air.

You could almost hear the ball scream as it took off into flight. Soaring as fast as an eagle down the middle of the fairway. Cutting through the air like a missile as it begins its descent on to the soft dewy grass. A perfect shot 200 yards from the hole dead center fairway.

The golfer walks back to the rear of his golf cart, grinning. His golf clubs are strapped into the back, upright. He slides his driver into the bag and replaces the cover on its head. Making his way around the cart, he sits in the driver's seat. He looks and finds his water. He reaches down, grabs it and takes a sip. He replaces it in the cup holder and puts two hands on the steering wheel. He looks to his right in the woods and happens to see a pair of eyes staring back at him. Looking away real quick and then doing a double take, he catches the gaze of a young red fox.

"Pretty good shot huh buddy?" said the golfer. The fox tilts his head like a border collie listening to his master. The player hits the gas and the fox turns around and runs into the woods. The golf cart makes its way down the golf cart path. Cruising by the female tee box and a bench to the right. As the forest drapes the right side of the fairway, he hits the brakes. As the golf cart comes to a stop, he gazes at the woods once more. He sees nothing.

He gets out and walks around to the back of the cart and with his finger pokes through each club until he arrives at his 19 degree fairway rescue club. Unsheathing his club, the golfer walks over to his ball and analyzes his approach. Fidgeting with his shirt as he lines up his shot. He stands about 10 yards behind the ball. Taking a few practice swings with the head of the golf club barely touching the grass as it pendulums through. With firm intent he grips the club and approaches the ball. He sets the club on the ground about 3 in behind the ball wiggles his hips and gets his feet into perfect position.

Breathing rhythmically as he executes his swing, the club connects. Once again the ball elevated right down the middle of the fairway, approaching the green. There's a 3 ft elevation from the fairway to the green. A slight mound in front. To the right a bunker. The ball seemingly headed directly towards the back of the green. Descending on the green like a tossed rock, the ball rolls gently towards the hole. Resting comfortably 9 ft away from the hole. The player looks quickly over to the wood line where his friend the fox is sitting watching. "Enjoying the game?" He said to the fox. "Looks good to me." "Did you see that? Not bad." He said. The golfer catches himself talking out loud to the fox. Shakes his head laughing and walks over to his golf cart. The sun has fully risen now.

As the fog has lifted. The dew on the grass shines like sparkling sea water. A rustle in the leaves alerts the player as he looks over to where the fox was. The golfer notices that he is gone and there was no trace of him. The player shrugs his shoulders. A bend in the cart path loomed ahead. Obscuring his view, our golfer was unaware of what lies ahead. He looks at his card once more.

Oblivious, he looks up from his scorecard and a pale look comes upon his face. The blood rushes out of his cheeks and his eyes widen. Almost to the point of unnatural. The fear that has come over him from the site ahead grips him fully. Hitting reverse the sound from the cart hits the Black bears ears. The golfer throws the cart in reverse. BEEP BEEP. He shifts to kill the sound but it was too late. The Bear had him in his sights. Unimpressed, he looks away. On the edge of the tall grass coming out of the forest the Bear nonchalantly makes his way across the fringe and onto the green not really worried about what's around him. From a distance the bear looks quite friendly, almost playful. It was a male.

He had a waddle to his walk. On all fours he was an imposing figure. Even from 175 yards away. The Bear walks gently onto the putting surface. He sees the golf ball. Nosing up to it, smelling it for food. He then turns his attention elsewhere, uninterested in the ball. Eyeballing the cart up ahead, then looking away the bear decides to lay down right there on the green on top of the players golfball.

"Just going to take a nap right there are you?" The golfer muttered under his breath. The bear pops only his head up. Periscopes around as far as he can, then lays his head back down onto the green. Laying flat on his belly with his chin upon the green, he seems to be enjoying himself. He rolls over, flailing his arms and his rear legs. It's almost like he's scratching himself. Or playing on his back. Gives out a big growl.

The player seeing this continues to remain ever so silent. Hoping not to catch the bears attention once more. Having a dry mouth he slowly reaches down to the cup holder area to grab his bottle of water. His finger accidentally hits a golf ball that he has sitting on the console. It was just in case he loses his ball in the woods. The extra ball rolls sideways and falls down hitting the floor of the golf cart, bouncing out of the cart onto the cart path. The ball is now in full forward motion down the cart path towards the playful Bear. The tick of the ball hitting the pavement only alerts the playful Bear as he catches the ball with his eye and watches it bounce down the hill towards him. Bobbing his head up and down with the ball in unison.

The player remains ever silent still. Keeping his eye on the Bear in case it decides to charge him. Looking around for something to defend himself with, but his golf clubs are behind him strapped to the rear of the cart. Just then the bear rolls over and gets up standing on its hind legs almost 9 ft tall. He reaches for the sky with both giant muscular arms. "Is that bear stretching?" He asked himself. As the golfer whispers this out loud, the Bear locks eyes with him.

Plopping down with his front paws on to the putting surface. Giving an even louder growl, the Bear seems to almost smile as he gives a final look to the player, then makes his way back into the woods. Crushing the 4 ft tall grass in its wake. Not moving yet out of caution, the player hears some leaves rustling next to him. It's his friend the fox again. Looking him in the eye as if to say, is he gone? "I think he's gone buddy. Man, that was something wasn't it? You didn't want no part of it did you? I don't blame you." The player gathering his wits fixes his hat, adjusts his glasses wipes the sweat off his brow and makes his way down the cart path.

He parks next to the green, cautiously looking for the Bear. He does not see him. He gets out and goes to the back of the cart to retrieve his putter. He sees a path of crushed tall grass that leads into the forest. The golfer tips his hat to the bear out of respect. Turns and faces the putting surface. He takes one look and bows his head.

Putting his fingers to the bridge of his nose in disbelief. "Really? You couldn't have worn your slippers?" he said. Inspecting the green, he sees his ball depressed almost halfway into the grass. He also sees claw marks from the 800 lb bear who was walking on the putting surface. One paw mark was directly in between his ball and the hole. The golfer reaches in his pocket and pulls out his green tool. Walks over to his ball and picks it up. Brushes his ball off which has dirt on one side of it.

He then takes his green tool and pulls the green up as flat as he possibly can to the surface. Pressing down with his putter making it even. Putting the ball back on the putting green in a crouch. He is looking at the hole following his line back to his ball that goes directly over the four claw marks. He stands up and faces the woods. He takes off his hat and says, "Thanks a lot pal."

Just then, coming out of the woods. The red fox walks slowly over toward the green. The golfer is standing still. He sees this and pretends to inspect his ball. Keeping his eye on the red fox all the while. The red fox is looking left and right as it walks delicately ahead. He comes up on the putting surface and walks directly over to the other side of the hole and lays down with his chin on the ground looking at the golfer. Right on the green. "Got a good seat?" he says.

The red fox lifts his head up, points his ears straight up looking our golfer directly in the eye. The fox tilts his head again then puts his chin back on the green. The golfer walks over and places his putter directly behind the ball. Ready to shoot. Then a thought comes over his face. Rethinking, our player then picks his putter back up walks back 10 ft. He squats again, double checks his line and addresses the ball once again.

Taking two practice putt swings with his putter next to the ball. Taking a 6 inch step forward, he spreads his feet and places his putter directly behind the ball. He takes a deep breath as he eyes the hole and takes his putt.

The sound of the putter connecting on the ball bounces off of the blade. The fox pops his head up, watching the ball come towards him. Following it with his head. The ball rolls smoothly until it hits the first claw mark. Popping it in the air over the second claw mark, landing in between the second and third mark. Hitting the third and bouncing over the fourth, continuing its role directly into the cup. The fox pops up on all four feet and looks at the golfer. The golfer says, "Well, that's one way to get a birdie now isn't it?"

Looking the golfer in the eye and with the quickness of a rabbit he runs into the woods through the crust grass that The Bear trampled.

The golfer walks over to the whole, picks his ball up and turns and stares into the woods where the two animals left. Takes off his hat and leans on his putter.

"Thanks fellas."

The end