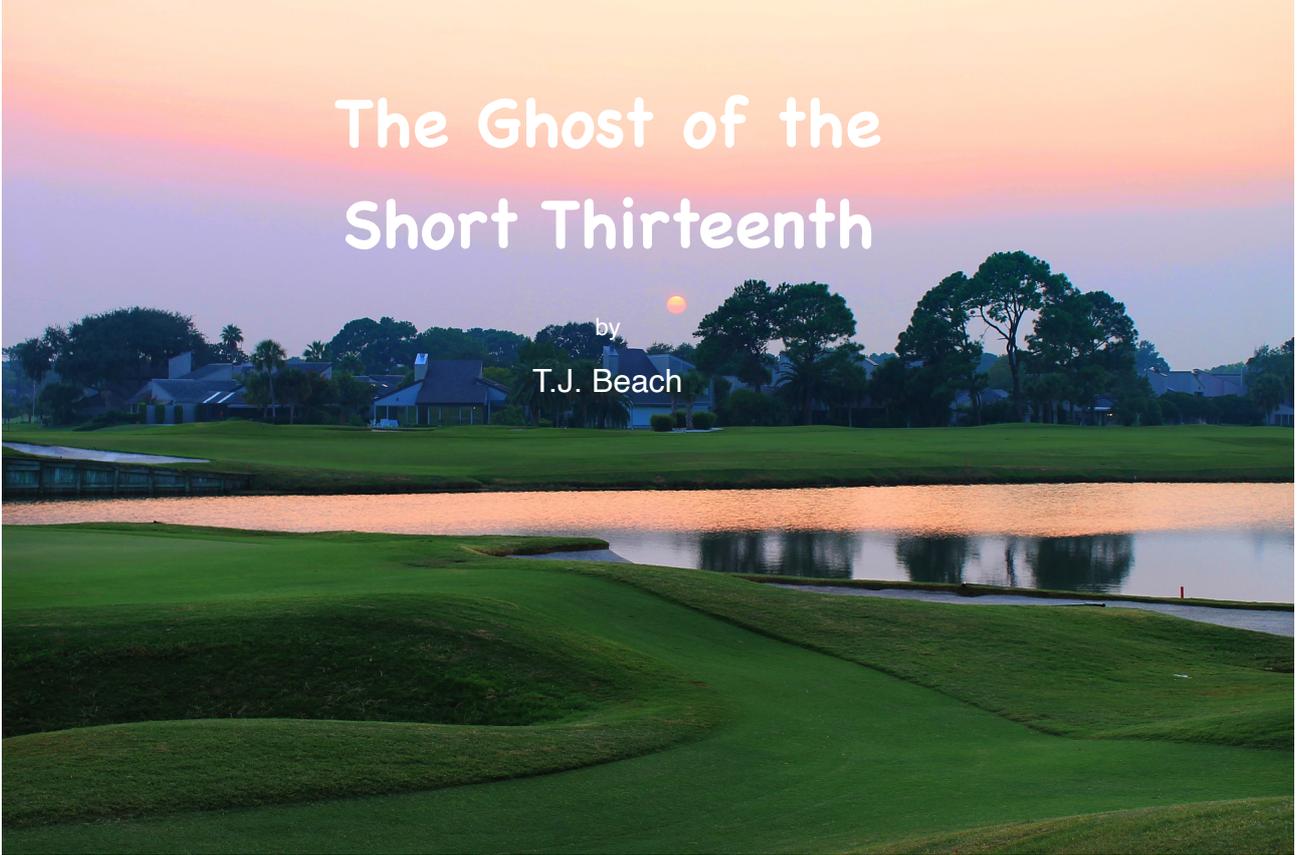


The Ghost of the Short Thirteenth

by
T.J. Beach



Barry scuffed fallen leaves off the practice green with his putter while Phil prattled on about his favourite subject, the real estate market.

“Autumn’s always low but I got a couple of new listings this week. With a reasonable guide price, I’ll sell them for sure.” He checked his watch. “Your nephew’s late, Barry.”

“Dave’s a teenager. He slept in for sure.” Barry waved to the course professional, Henry, who shuffled past grumbling under his breath. “Having a bad day, Henry?”

The pro turned, hands on his hips. “Those bloody kids were selling golf balls again by the fence on the third fairway.”

“Surely not,” Phil said. “Where do they get golf balls from for goodness sake?”

“I wish I knew,” Henry said, “I’d have the police on their parents if I could catch the buggers.”

“Quite right, they’re stealing from you,” Phil agreed.

They watched Henry stomp off into the pro shop.

“You don’t buy balls from the kids then, Phil?” Barry asked.

“Of course I do. Dollar a ball. Derek charges five bucks in the pro shop. At last, here’s Dave.”

The youngster arrived with his carry bag across his shoulders, wiping his long fringe out of his eyes with his fingers. "Come on, then," he said. "What are ya' waiting for? It's five minutes after our tee time, Henry's already had a go at me."

"Cheeky bugger," Barry replied.

Dave just grinned. "Hey, you'll never believe what happened."

"What?" Phil asked. "Did you get the job? Your CV has much more impact with the photo."

"No, I had this amazing dream."

"I don't think I want to hear about the sort of dreams blokes your age have in their sticky sheets," Barry said.

"No, nothing like that. It was incredible. I was on the thirteenth, the short hole over the pond."

"The haunted hole?" Phil asked.

"Haunted is it?"

Barry filled his nephew in. "Yeah. In the 1930s an ethereal being appeared over the pond on misty days. The locals said it was the daughter of the farmer who owned the place in the 1850s. She drowned in the pond, you see."

"Okay," Dave conceded the point with a shrug. "So, it was all dark and misty."

"Ghostly," Phil said.

"Yeah, I suppose, anyway, I took out my eight iron, had a swish, no practice or anything, and got it straight in, hole in one."

Barry shook his head. "What a load of bollocks, you'd never get over the pond with an eight iron!"

Phil grabbed his arm. "No, Barry, no, it's the power of positive thinking. If you really believe you're going to hole it, you will."

"Let's go there right now then," Barry said. "And Dave can have his shot."

"Okay," Dave said.

"Twenty bucks he holes it." Phil reached for his pocket.

Which gave Barry pause. "No, it's too late."

The others stopped to stare at him.

“It was all misty and ghostly in the dream, the mist’s all burned off now. We need to come back tomorrow morning, at dawn.”

Dave scrunched up his eyebrows and studied his uncle. “What are you planning, Barry?”

That became clear the next morning at six am as they gathered on the thirteenth tee, waiting for enough light to see the green. Half the club had come out, with Barry keeping track of their bets in a little notebook. A couple of brandy flasks were being passed around.

“What’s the money on?” Dave asked.

“Never you mind,” Barry said. “You just have your swing, mate. You’ve got the eight iron right?”

Dave held up the club.

Phil grabbed the youngster’s shoulders. “I’ve got fifty bucks on you, Dave. You can do it! You believe, right?”

Dave laughed. “Sure. This is fun. It’s just like the dream.”

They all stared down the fairway, shrouded in autumn mist that glowed in the first rays of the sun.

“Are you ready?” Henry the professional asked. “We need to get the weekend comp’ started.”

“Don’t distract him, Henry,” Phil said, then to Dave, “he’s got money on you to miss the grumpy old bastard.”

Dave straightened. “Okay, this is about the right light.”

Hush fell over the members grouped around the tee as Dave addressed his ball. He took a casual glance towards the flag, a hundred and forty metres away, and let rip. With awesome, perfect timing.

The members watched open-mouthed as Dave’s ball went like a tracer bullet, straight at the pin.

Then a gurgle and a splash at the side of the pond drew everyone's attention. A black, terrifying shape emerged covered in reeds and dirty water. It set off across the green in a rapid waddle. One huge goggling eye, a single thin horn and huge webbed feet.

"Get him!" Henry charged off around the pond. "It's that bloody kid nicking balls!"

The members charged after him whooping and hollering, but they were too slow for the teenager in a wet suit and snorkel, who got away over the fence despite the impediment of his flippers. The old pro fell over the the top wire trying to follow him. A couple of members had to help him up.

"Wait, wait!" Barry yelled. "Look!"

A single fresh pitch mark stood out among the foot and flipper prints decorating the morning dew, a metre from the pin. But no ball.

Phil grabbed Dave in a mighty hug. "You did it! It's in the hole!"

Much later, Barry gave Dave a lift home. The kid had been bought so many drinks at the bar that he could barely stand. He rubbed his hands, bruised from shaking. "So, Bazza, how much did you make?"

"I did alright."

"You had money on me, didn't you?"

"Sure did. A hundred. But if you missed I'd still at least have broken even."

Dave nodded. "I thought it'd be something like that. I saw you in the all that confusion. You kicked it in the hole, didn't you?"

Barry looked over, grinned. "I had to. Mate! It was so bloody close. Inches. With an eight iron! Phil would never have recovered if you missed. The loss of faith in all that 'believe in yourself' crap might have destroyed his real estate career."

"So, we'll go halves then?"

Barry laughed. "Fair enough. That was some shot, mate."

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