HE GOLF COURSE LIES on what most people already consider the wrong side of the river. For a while an armed robber worked the 16th tee. Play dwindled down to almost nothing. The Regulars began packing handguns in their golf bags. They are the best-armed golfers in America.

A pair of red-tailed hawks nests in a maple tree in the woods on the side of the ridge between number six and number seven. These are the woods in which the feral dogs live. The dogs—10, 12, who knows how many—are, amazingly, all black, lab mixes dropped off in the park.

Bill, the new pro, worries that the dogs are going to bite somebody. He worries that nobody will ever want to play golf on the wrong side of the river. He worries about selling beer to men with handguns. The golf course is the oldest in Nashville, its design classic, but Metro refuses to spend a dime on the greens. “What do you mean, you can’t find them?” he yells into the phone. “How can you not find a dozen black dogs?”

The Regulars hold their breath a moment, then shout with laughter, shout for Mark behind the counter to bring them more beer. Mark has a writing deal with EMI, but hasn’t had a song recorded yet. “Come over here and get it,” Mark says. “I gotta keep the tab straight.” Mark has been here three months and knows better than to distribute beer to the Regulars without keeping the tab straight. He is watching music videos on CMT, thinking of how much money he would make if Faith Hill cut one of his songs.

Mackie follows Jonesie outside. Tumorhead inches toward the peanut Jonesie offers. Only Jonesie knows that the squirrel is blind in one eye. “Hello, Darlin’,” he croons in his high, sweet voice. “Nice to see you.”

“How do you know that’s a girl squirrel? How do you know you ain’t feeding nuts and singing love songs to a boy squirrel?”

“’Cause Tumorhead loves me, that’s how. All the ladies love old Jonesie.”

Mackie shades his eyes, watches Big Hawk wheel above 13 and 14. Tumorhead twitches, cocks his head to one side, takes the peanut from Jonesie, sits up, holds it in its shriveled, old man’s hands, chews busily with its sharp, rodent teeth. The squirrel won’t let Mackie get anywhere near it. Mackie wonders if Big Hawk can see the squirrel from so far away, feels his face flush for no reason he can think of.

“The Regulars’ gonna eat that squirrel,” he says.

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Jonesie looks up quickly. “What did you say?”

Jonesie, like a lot of small men Mackie has known, has a bad temper. Mackie swallows. “You heard me,” he says. “Big Hawk’s gonna eat Tumorhead, and there ain’t a damn thing you can do about it.”

Jonesie straightens up. “Let me tell you something,” he says. “If I ever catch that damn hawk sitting on the ground, I’ll kill it dead-er’n hell.”

Mackie feels like he has climbed to the top of a tall tree, feels the great, dizzy height sway-er’n hell. “You know something, “ he says. “If I ever catch that damn Tumorhead, and there ain’t a damn thing you can do about it.”

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In the truck, Mark listens to Jonesie sing “Mother’s not dead, she’s only a-sleeping,” the old Bill Monroe song, and thinks boom box. He recorded it at home on a boom box.

Jonesie grew up on Ordway, less than a half mile away from the golf course. The first time Mackie laid eyes on him, Jonesie had run out of the woods bordering number 11 and, with a long stick, whacked into the pond the golf ball Mackie had just knocked onto the green. Jonesie was only five, maybe six, at the time. Mackie was already married, a father, his babies still babies and still safe at home. Mackie imagines Jonesie crouching in the woods, waiting for a golf ball to land close by, and shivers as a great sadness passes over him. The boy had only wanted to play golf. He taps the fingers on one hand several times with his thumb and says out loud, “Fifty-one years ago. Jesus. Lord Jesus, save us all.”

Jonesie punches a button and ejects the cassette. He puts the cassette into the case, puts the case back into the glove compartment. “I just thought,” he says, “since you had a record deal …”

“Dude, I work at a golf course. That ought to tell you about my position in the industry right there.”

“Listen,” Jonesie says. “Forget I said anything. Johnny ain’t much older than I am, and they won’t play his songs on the radio.” He fishes in his shirt pocket for a cigarette. “You know that squirrel? Tumorhead? It can only see out of one eye. That’s why I feed it.”

Mark nods, lost. He tries to pinch shut the song lyric he hears opening inside his head, the one about a divorced guy feeding a one-eyed squirrel and singing a Bill Monroe song into a boom box in a little house near the airport. Little Squarehead cups his hand against the front window and says, to no one in particular, “Whatta ya think they’re talking about?” “They’re in love,” says Fatty. “They’re in love,” says Fatty.

“Please don’t say that to Jonesie when they come back in here,” Bill says. “Go say that at Harpeth Hills or somewhere, but don’t say it here.”

“I still can’t believe,” says Big Squarehead, “that one of you sonsabitches drank my beer.”

Bill has a quiz tonight, and still hasn’t cracked a book. He decides to take a cart and look for Mackie as soon as Mark comes back inside.