



## FALLING IN LOVE

By Monroe S. Miller

The kid popped into the shop, on time, dressed like he was headed for a spell at the beach. It was, obviously, his first day at work on a golf course.

I looked at him with disbelief, and quickly asked him “what the hell do you think this is, a health spa?”

He was taken aback. Although I know his older brother, I didn’t know this kid at all. He looked down to see what I was staring at—black high-topped basketball shoes (no socks), skinny white legs, skin-tight bicycle shorts (also black), and a XXXL tee shirt that had the word UMBRO or something like that emblazoned across the front.

“You look terrible,” I said to him in a harsh tone of voice. “Can’t you hear? I told you two weeks ago to wear socks and work boots with a smooth sole, jeans, and a respectable shirt that fits.”

The kid was crestfallen. I added to it when I sent him home to change. “You’ve got 45 minutes,” I told him in my best drill sergeant voice.

Call it clairvoyance or instinct, but there was something about this kid I liked. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but it was present from the time he returned that first day.

He wasn’t anything special. Oh, he was plenty bright. But he didn’t say much. He was loosely built, awkward and kind of clumsy, a typical sixteen year old. Add in the youthful complexion, the naivete and an almost dangerous curiosity, and you have a picture of him.

Maybe what appealed to me was the innocence of a youngster who was being raised like I had been. His parents were devoted to their family and clearly the kid was well nurtured. He had values, pride, a strong work ethic and a clear sense of right and wrong. It didn’t seem to bother him to tell the other guys on the crew that he went to church on those Sundays he didn’t have to work.

At first some of the guys on the crew picked on him. Sometimes they

showed him practically no mercy. There was the time, for example, when they had him convinced he had to stand on a chair in the lunchroom in his BVDs and read the comic pages from the daily paper. I stopped that in short order.

But he would have. The kid not only was innocent, he was deeply good natured.

It was a fun summer, watching him grow and mature.

He started like all rookies before him, with the low prestige, mundane jobs. Funny thing about him—he didn’t mind. There was a bounce to his step and a smile on his face almost always. His work assignment didn’t seem to matter at all.

He listened carefully, after that first day. He did his best to follow instructions without any argument, and he took his medicine when he ignored those orders and had the sin pointed out.

Regardless of the job, from the esoteric to the predictable, he did it the best he could. There was a need in this teenager to do his best and to be the best. And fastest. And straightest. And so on.

He would sit on the end of the picnic table or hang out in a corner during the lunch hour, listening to the college guys talk about sports and cars and their work for the day. He strained to hear every word of braggadocio about their evening conquests, and actually believed the tales of beer drinking they told.

He was in a new world—of work, of young adults, of machines and golf and grass. It was interesting today and he knew it would be more interesting tomorrow. He liked the shop, the outdoors and even the early morning rigor of a golf course operation.

He told me the first morning he was required to be at work at 5:00 a.m. that “this is the earliest I have ever been up in my life.” Most of the others were growling and griping about it.

The kid liked the framework and structure he lived in while on our time,

I could tell. The enthusiasm he felt was also felt by some of the others on the crew, and the kid was bonded to them by it. There was purpose and meaning to what he did.

There was even prestige in his summer work. He told me in a round about way. His buddies were hanging out or scratching about for part-time work, frying for Mickey D or sweeping grocery store aisles on a split shift. The kid had more money, more fun and more stature, and he loved it. At times he strutted about like a young rooster.

Slowly, our shop became his home away from home. He felt needed and even important, which he was. He pined to do and know everything—“save one for me” he’d holler as equipment he’d never driven on the golf course was put away at day’s end. If we needed a volunteer to clean machinery after work or pick up flags and sticks at dusk, he was always first in line to raise his hand. He couldn’t get enough of a place he treasured more each day.

I knew what was happening to him because I’d seen it so many times before. Day by day, week by week, the kid was falling in love.

With a golf course and every thing that went along with it.

I knew what was happening for another reason—the same exact thing had happened to me. The only difference was that I was older when it happened, and I fell faster than he did. I knew at the end of my first day that I was born to manage a golf course.

I was one of the lucky ones who followed through and stayed with it. It has been a wonderful love affair that goes on yet today, and it gets even stronger with each passing year.

Nearly as pleasurable has been seeing so many young people who have worked at my course walk the same path, falling more and more in love with each step. So many have experienced professional and personal happiness as a result of these love affairs with golf courses that it is even more exciting to see new kids start and know full well how some will experience the same emotions.

There will always be those for whom “it’s only a summer job.” But for all time I know there will also be those, like the kid, who come to work and unknowingly have the love affair of a lifetime. ♣