





THE  
PRESIDENT'S  
CADDY

*Also by Tony Rosa*

THE SCHOOLBOY

TWO FOR TEE

BIRDIE

# THE PRESIDENT'S CADDY

*A Golf Story*

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**Tony Rosa**



Jackpot PRESS

## **The President's Caddy**

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, places, organizations, and dialogue in this golf story are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

The character Ernie Banks and his career statistics in baseball are included in this story as a tribute. Any and all dialogue, mannerisms, incidents associated with Mr. Banks in this golf story are the product of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously.

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We wish to assert our existence, like dogs peeing on fire hydrants. We put on display our framed photographs, our parchment diplomas, our silver-plated cups; we monogram our linen, we carve our names on trees, we scrawl them on washroom walls. It's all the same impulse. What do we hope from it? Applause, envy, respect? Or simply attention, of any kind we can get?

-Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*



I sat there on the curb, forearms draped over knees, waiting for a ride home and wondering why I had bothered with any of it. Prickly heat stored from a day in the sun radiated from the gray slab. I rattled a couple of dusty pebbles in one hand then lobbed them in the air like a pair of dice. An ant hiked across the pavement into my shadow. Hoisted on its back was a salvaged crumb from a littered last bite of a hot dog bun. The load was twice the ant's size and weight. The rugged terrain of the asphalt gave it fits of stops and starts. Although the course it traveled was anything but straight, the ant finally found a familiar crack in the roadway and then disappeared.

Futile—that's the word I was looking for. That's what I was feeling. And yeah, I knew what the word meant. I looked it up. I could've used others like useless, pointless, or wasted. Any of those would've done just fine. But I settled on futile.

Once you find out how I arrived at this spot, you'll understand.

Trying to follow a few simple rules of being a caddy had turned out to be a total disaster. If the whole ordeal was some kind of test, I had probably made somewhere around a D-minus. If you had asked me when the day began, I would've said there was no

way I could sink so low. But any confidence, enthusiasm, or excitement I had at the start had been slowly drained like a busted engine leaking oil.

As I sat there waiting for my ride, I tried to recall a bright spot. I had plenty of time to think. The only thing I could come up with was that I had at least followed one rule of being a caddy; I had made it to the golf course on time. But the more I thought about it, my uncle had more to do with that accomplishment than I did.

And before anyone gets to thinking that flubbing up a few caddy rules shouldn't get a person feeling so low, there's more to it. Much more. Not to mention a mistake, an error, a blunder, a goof, so monumental, so boneheaded, so colossal, it would probably be retold around the world for months and years to come. The knucklehead move of the century was noteworthy enough for me to give it a name.

The Big Goof.

So, add humiliation and embarrassment to the list.

A Saturday filled with futility and shame. Sat-On-A-Turd-Day was more like it. The way things had gone, it wouldn't have surprised me if I had sat down in something sticky. I rocked forward and glanced behind me. The cracked slab was blank. To make sure, I rose and took a halfhearted swat at the seat of my pants.

A waft of burnt grease charcoal smoke reached my nose. A grill behind a nearby corporate tent was working overtime. Thumping live music drummed my ears.

Once on my feet, I had a better view down the street. I placed cupped hands to the visor bill as if looking through binoculars. It added very little improvement in my ability to see further. I looked over the hoods of parked cars, past the uniformed guard at the entrance, and down the tree-lined cobblestone sidewalk. As if the act of looking itself, not to mention the extra shading of the sun, would bring the station wagon any faster.

It seemed like I was always waiting for a ride home; after school, after baseball practice, after work. It felt like everyone else left the parking lot before me. It was always me stranded on a deserted island. And yeah, that's right, I had had a job over the

previous summer. I could get my driver's license under one condition; I could pay for the insurance. I turned sixteen last week. Needless to say, I was still short a driver's license.

I sank back to the curb and continued the wait. It was always the same lonely feeling.

Matthew seemed to never wait. Even today, he wasn't bothered with it. After the round, he was whisked away to cozy confines by a corporate bigwig where he was to fill his belly with all the ice cream floats he could handle. It seemed Matthew was always falling into good fortune. All day he had been the darling of the crowd with his charm and cuteness. He knew nothing about futile feelings. He had a splendid day. I wished him nothing more than a brain freeze that would cause temporary blindness and a stomachache that would keep him up all night.

And Renee. She never appeared too concerned about waiting either. As I walked to the parking lot, she basically ignored me. "Come and get me when Mom gets here," she said, never really looking in my direction. She was leaning against a tree trunk batting her eyes at some dopey dude. She twisted a looped finger in her necklace while snapping her gum and oozing goofy giggling noises. The dude had to be older than her, probably out of high school. Mister Moustache. I'd never seen him around. He was wearing the visor that Uncle Charlie had given to her.

Sat-On-A-Turd-Day.

Futile.

For some reason I thought about the bare patch in Mrs. Eckleburg's lawn. I've heard the saying that misery loves company. Well maybe, futile loves company too. Trying to make grass grow in that bare spot left me feeling futile. That's probably why I thought of it while waiting for my ride home. Since I have time, I should probably explain.

I must've been about twelve years old when I took on the job of mowing that lawn, close to Matthew's age right now. And he doesn't mow any lawns. Just last week I asked him to help me with the trimming at Mrs. Eckleburg's. But he didn't even consider it. And she lived just next door.

Outside of an occasional allowance, the money Mrs. Eckleburg paid me was the first income I ever earned. It took me

about an hour to push the mower over her yard and trim the places the mower couldn't reach. For the most part, I would lump the money with what slid from a birthday card or came my way over the holidays. I landed the job because Mrs. Eckleburg could no longer do the work herself. On the real sweltering days, I dreaded the work myself. Sweat-soaked, exhausted, and stinking of grass clippings, I couldn't wait for the glass of lemonade and the five dollar bill. She always had both of them waiting on the small table on her patio. To me, it signified the end of the job like a blowing steam whistle at the factory.

As for the bare spot, I'm not even sure why I decided to do something about it. Maybe it was because billows of dust would fly every time I pushed the mower over it. Mrs. Eckleburg shook her head and said she didn't have the time or patience to improve the ragged patch between her sidewalk and house. She hinted the need for improvement. Maybe that was enough for me to take it on. For all I knew, it was probably because I had nothing better to do.

"I don't get it," Renee had criticized. "You're doing all this stuff in hopes to grow more grass? That makes no sense. You're the one doing the mowing. You're creating more work for yourself. That's just crazy."

But Renee never understood. I didn't mind the work. I got some satisfaction out of trying something new and keeping the lawn looking nice. Several times I had tried explaining stuff like that to Renee. But I gave up. I'd simply respond with, "It's not crazy." She couldn't lure me into an argument. There was nothing she could say that would change my mind. She couldn't make me angry either. I just handed her a simple reply, "It's not crazy."

Maybe I just liked the compliments that came with a job well done. If Mrs. Eckleburg or anyone else in the neighborhood happened to mention a noticeable improvement, well I figured that would be worth it. And if that didn't happen, well, I figured any noticeable improvement would give me a little self-satisfaction. And if that wasn't the reason, I guess my motivation wasn't all that important to begin with. I can't remember reasons for doing half the stuff I did.

I found half a bag of grass seed in our shed and asked if I could use it. I didn't even bother asking Mrs. Eckleburg for money. I wanted it to be a surprise. Maybe even a miracle. I figured once she noticed the new growth, she'd certainly appreciate the effort. I gathered around the proper tools. A rake. The hose. I dug. I hauled. I watered. I scraped my hands raw. It took me a week to get the dirt out of my fingernails. I kept an eye on that patch waiting for signs of new life. It was probably the first time I realized the importance of being patient. If I could do a little each day, I figured it would eventually add up to a green lawn. But before there were any signs of growth, I started having doubts.

Mrs. Eckleburg had paid little attention to my efforts. And since there wasn't a noticeable improvement in the lawn, she never had a chance to comment on any result. The miracle never happened. Maybe there just wasn't enough sun on that spot. Then again, maybe it was the seeds in that old bag I had found in the shed. Maybe they were no good to begin with. My own family offered some praise. They said it was nice that I had tried to make something out of nothing regardless of the result.

Don't let me get started down the wrong track; this really isn't a gardening story. Could there be a more boring story than one that involved watching grass grow? It's just how I was feeling, sitting on the sidewalk, waiting for my ride home. The lousy day of being a caddy reminded me of the previous failed effort. It reminded me that futile feelings were nothing new.

And I guess that's the main reason why what happened next made such a profound difference. It more than helped me shake those gloomy feelings.

What happened next changed everything.

In some ways, it made me forget about all that had happened. Most notably, it helped me get over the Big Goof.

Trying to compare myself to Chip Swanson was a big mistake. Maybe I aimed too high. Compared to me, his skills and knowledge of the golf course were far superior. The more I thought about it, Chip Swanson was probably a better caddy than almost everyone. His instructions were colorful and delivered with the confidence of a riverboat gambler. That set him apart. I paid the price for opening my mouth at the wrong time, but at least I

tried. I had learned one thing. I still had plenty of room for improvement. My caddying skills were still being honed. If nothing else, the comparison to Chip Swanson taught me that much.

And Teresa Bellissima. Could I have been a bigger fool? Come Monday, I will probably be the biggest laughingstock of the tenth grade. Probably the whole school. If I see her in the halls, should I act dumb, like nothing ever happened? Or, should I do my best to avoid her for the next three years? What a disaster. I wondered if she'll ever speak to me again. If she doesn't, no big loss. I had already figured that I couldn't really lose something I never had in the first place.

But what happened next helped me forget about her too.

When it came to Uncle Charlie, I only hoped I hadn't embarrassed him. That would be devastating. He stuck his neck out for me, and I didn't want him to ever regret it. I tried to be careful and cautious. But even that proved to be a mistake. I only hoped Uncle Charlie's reputation was spared.

I was looking for a bright spot in the day, and now I realized I had spent the last four hours in the company of one of baseball's greatest players. Meeting Ernie Banks was a highlight. He made the day fun. And although remembering that as a bright spot, it wasn't the thing that lifted me from the doldrums. It would take more than that.

And the President. Well, he might as well have been just about anybody. I doubt he ever thought much of me from the beginning. I'm not sure he even knew my name. I expended blood and sweat trying to do an extraordinary job. Sure, I made a few mistakes, but the effort was there. Whenever in the future he needed to fill some empty time waiting around on a tee, he could retell dignitaries around the world about the Big Goof. The implausible horror and unspeakable shock and bewilderment would entertain playing partners for years. At least I did that much for him. And yeah, that's right; I'm talking about the President of the United States.

Up to that point, Saturday had felt like a disaster. I sat there waiting for my ride and wondering if I should come up with some kind of excuse to get myself out of caddying the next day. I



wanted to abandon all possibilities of a repeat episode. I doubted my own ability. I wanted to never think of being a caddy again. I wanted to hide and forget.

But what happened next changed everything.

Quick as a light switch, what happened changed my outlook.

My spirits were lifted.

After it happened, I felt much better.

I started looking forward to the next day. Sunday. The sun would come out on Sunday.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I could tell you what happened next, but it would be meaningless without knowing the whole story. To understand what lifted my spirits, you would have to first know how I arrived at such a low spot.

So, let me get to the beginning of this story. It started with a call from the Secret Service.