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PLAYING OUT OF THE DEEP WOODS

By G.W. Hawkes

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While only a few of the stories in G. W. Hawkes' offbeat collection prove entirely successful, those few reveal a talent well worth noting. The best tales demonstrate masterful tension, wry wit and perceptive insight. In "Mutiny," a dying 70 year-old takes pride in a life of valor while grieving at his son's cowardice, only to learn that his own courage was built upon a false foundation and "that the dignity of death he'd taken for granted for nearly half a century was...a sham." Mr. Hawkes' humor is at its grim best in "The Practice Court-Martial of Private Peterson," where a Marine accused of killing a general's Doberman must undergo a mock court-martial. Excellent stories here use golf as a metaphor for life, as in the farcical "The Shortest Hole," which suggests the no-win trap of easy goals as a man's life shatters after a poor outing on a 59-yard hole whose ease itself "inspires pure terror." The surrealistic title story follows four people into the deep rough after errant tee shots; there each has a mini-adventure that will illuminate an entire life. Sometimes arch, sentimental or outright false, the prose also achieves frequent delightful turns of phrase, as when we see how "the sunlight skips across town like a thrown rock" or when a man finds an irritated woman's voice has "the professional feminine edge that slices words in half and leaves both sides bleeding." Such moments almost save even the thinnest of these stories.