

Green Magie

Blue
Ribbon
Fiction

By Will Irwin

Of Course You've Heard of the Seagull Links and of Edgerley Moore. He's the Golfer Who—But That Would Be Revealing the Secret.

I CANNOT tell the story of Edgerley Moore without telling the story of our golf club, for one is complementary to the other. The Seagull links is only five years old, yet it has become, after a fashion, famous, as has also Edgerley Moore, and their sporting immortality goes together.

"Sporty little links—all natural hazards. Here's where Edgerley Moore was developed. You've heard of him. The golfer who—?" But I withhold the end of that quotation lest I betray my story.

Hitherto only four people have known the whole truth about Mr. Moore's career, however much the public thought it knew—Dr. Carrington, Mrs. Bavin, John B. Gillespie and I. And last week an inconspicuous item in the sporting page announced the death of "John B. Gillespie—the trainer who—" but here I must stop again. Edgerley Moore is already dead. And Mrs. Bavin and Dr. Carrington say there's no reason they know of why I should not make public the inside of this remarkable episode in amateur sport.

Edgerley Moore, when Mrs. Bavin called on him concerning the golf club, announced flatly that he'd never seen anything in the game and had never tried it. He started a dissertation to prove that a similar game had been played in ancient Egypt, which Mrs. Bavin had to interrupt to remind him that other people in Case Harbor wanted to play, and that he owed it to the community. Moved by that argument, Mr. Moore joined and even promised to look in on the links some day.

It was a different matter with John B. Gillespie. In a more choosy community I doubt whether he would have been asked to join at all. He had blown into that town about a year before, built a new house, bright and varnished, over on the hills beyond the Cowan place, and started immediately to get himself solid with the townspeople and with us. He was a bachelor—at least I never heard of any Mrs. Gillespie—and there arose scandalous whispers about some of his house parties.

Six months later his purpose was revealed. He had bought three old and nearly useless farms on the hills surrounding his new house and was marketing lots in Gillespie's addition—a high-class residence district—as his advertising expressed it. We even heard rumors that he intended to put up a modern country hotel. This proceeding did not tend to make him popular; we had always feared the day when Case Harbor would become semi-fashionable and you'd no longer feel like going over to the post-office in your sweater. Gillespie, I suppose, knew that, and it set him to work all the harder at the job of gathering popularity.

He was a tall man in his late 40s, with something theatrically distinguished in his general makeup.

If you looked his clothes over in detail, you realized they were as quiet as anyone's; yet he always gave somehow the effect of loud dressing. The women called him, in their confidential moments, a little vulgar—why, they could never explain. It was an effect as subtle and indefinable as that apparent loudness of his clothes.

As might have been expected, Mr. Gillespie leaped at the proposal for a country club. Everyone understood his motive—it was a great selling point for Gillespie's addition. He took up golf at once; was playing a moderately good duffers game before the links were much better than rough hill and meadow.

I was privileged to be present at a much more important event on our links, one of those little, unconsidered moments which one recognizes as the beginning of history. I saw Edgerley Moore make his first attempt. It was Billy Means, one of our golf fiends, who lured him away from his garden, tempted him, and put a driver into his hands. I was waiting at the first tee for a partner when, after a few minutes of instruction about not trying to hit it too hard and keeping his eye on the ball, he made his first swing.

I met him in the clubhouse afterward; more excited than I had ever seen him before.

"There's something in the game," he said. "Billy Means says—"

"Eighty-five for the nine holes—that's all!" put in Billy. "I ask you if that isn't good for the first time he ever touched a golf club?"

We congratulated Mr. Moore hypocritically—we'd all been through that stage of the triumphant initial round—and dodged away to escape a dissertation which he was beginning on the game of golf among the early kings of Scotland.

I noted him, a few days later, going round with Jock Ransome, our pro. That night Jock was wrapping my driver and indulging in shop talk, and he touched on Mr. Moore.

"Fitly he wasn't caught young," said Jock. "Course he can't do anything much now—started too old. But he's got natural form—I can't teach him anything about swinging. And he's a nut on the game." From his tone, Jock was mentioning this last fact not in the spirit of criticism but of warm approval. "But you, Mr. Langford, with that natural eye of yours—"

Edgerley Moore drifted out of my thoughts while I bathed in Jock's flattery.

However, this conversation did serve to make me notice thereafter the ways of Mr. Moore. Jock was perfectly right.



"But don't you see," said Mrs. Bavin, "what it was made for?"

The next day I lost a ball on our third hole and signaled Moore to go through.

"One above par!" he cackled, waving his putter, "and from the bunker at that!" His ruddy face above his white mustache was glowing like the sun on winter snows. It occurred to me then that a belated ambition is a terrible thing. Through all his calm, well-fed life he had entirely escaped the exciting and perturbing desire to excel. It had struck him at last; and all the harder because so long delayed.

We had assembled in the grill room, getting from soft drinks what conviviality one may in these days when the 18th amendment, has killed the 19th hole—Billy Means, John B. Gillespie, Dr. Carrington and I. The approach of Mr. Moore, the certainty that if we gave him half an opening we should have to listen to the detailed story of his solitary round, set us all to chattering. Dr. Carrington, apparently grabbing at the first idea which came into his head, remarked—as he had often remarked before:

"Golf's at least three-quarters mental, and less than a quarter physical."

"Don't believe it. That's theory," said Billy Means, grudgingly. "I've heard that stuff and tried it out. It doesn't work. I say, to myself, 'Now I will hit that ball—' and I top it and roll it about three feet or so into the next lot."

Jock would tell you that it's because you were gritting your teeth and pressing," said Dr. Carrington. "I prefer to put it in another way. It's as though you were trying to drive with your putter. You've taken the wrong club out of your intellectual bag—that's all. It isn't the mere conscious mind—the kind we're overworking just now in this little argument. It's the old subconscious mind—the master and the mystery."

"Is that the 'mind one uses in golf'?" asked John B. Gillespie suddenly.

"Certainly," began the doctor. And at this moment he was interrupted by the entrance of Jock Ransome, the pro, who had come in to get some tobacco.

"Jock," said Dr. Carrington, "isn't golf more mental than physical?"

"Su-sure!" said Jock. "That's what I've been telling you all summer, but you wouldn't listen."

"I suppose, then, that if you had a long thinking session with yourself just before you hit the ball you'd make a par stroke every time?" inquired the doctor.

"Nope," answered Jock, stepping right into the trap, "it ain't that kind of mind."

At these words—such a perfect, unconscious repetition of the doctor's—we laughed.

"If you would try to learn something instead of making golf a joke," snapped Jock, as he pocketed his tobacco and withdrew.

Mr. Moore had not laughed. He still stood, as he had at the beginning of the conversation, leaning morosely against our denatured bar, every line of his face drooping to match the droop of his white sealion mustache.

"Well, I'd come pretty near selling my soul to the devil to get that kind of mind," he said. "Why today—when I started to drive I said to myself—"

and promptly Billy Means' chair scraped on the floor. The doctor remembered that he was late to dinner; I followed without any excuse whatever, leaving Mr. Moore still standing at the bar drooping. Mr. Gillespie still sitting in the corner twirling his glass and seeming to make polite pretense of listening.

By the time we opened the summer greens next season that pair had become a fixture on our links. I remembered afterward that I never saw Moore playing with anyone except Gillespie, who was apparently taking the game as seriously as his seuffle partner.

John B. Gillespie attracted attention that spring in another way. Suddenly his addition to Case Harbor began to boom. A great signboard advertising the addition went up across from the station; one morning there was a half-page advertisement in all the city papers.

In this, as in the sign which now blotted the clean greenery of the forest patch across the railroad track, "sporty, picturesque and convenient golf links" blazed out in large letters. I didn't like it at all; it seemed to me—to name the most definite objection—scarcely clubby.

I talked it over freely round the clubhouse when Gillespie was not present, and found opinion divided and mixed. The proceeding was rather loud and presumptuous—agreed. But—and although no one went further, I could supplement that "but." Most of us owned our houses. While none had any idea of selling, it was still pleasant to realize that your bit of land had doubled in value. Which was probably what would

happen if Gillespie's addition became a success.

But Madge Bavin, whom I found just mounting the seat of her roadster, rendered a short and emphatic minority report.

"It's horrid," she said, "perfectly horrid! We couldn't be really fashionable here even if we wanted to. But to be semi-fashionable—a lot of profiteers and their stalled wives and their silly, expensive, flapper daughters—" Mrs. Bavin had been adjusting levers and keys preparatory to starting. Her blue eyes—determined without hardness, firm without coldness—looked directly into my eyes.

"How do you like him?" she asked.

"Oh, so-so!" I replied.

"Jimmy Langford, you know you don't like him! He gives me the crawls somehow, and he always has," said Mrs. Bavin. She dropped her foot onto the self-starter and, as the roadster slid away into the distance, I reflected that here, eventually, was the finish of John B. Gillespie. Mrs. Bavin had a way of getting things done. Also I wondered just how much of her motive was jealousy for her own leadership among us.

On my way back to the clubhouse I met Billy Means, carrying the notice of handicaps for the club tournament to post on the bulletin board. I was down for 15-10. But just below my name came Moore, Edgerley—and I whistled. He was down for 12-5, which means cards running about 90.

"What's this?" said I. "You don't mean to say that venerable goof is doing the 12 holes lower than I?"

"The handicap committee operates in dark secrecy," replied Billy. "But I'm telling you that we gave ourselves the benefit of the doubt. If we'd believed his cards, he'd have gone lower."

"Who scored for him?" I asked.

"Gillespie, of course. They always play together."

"That's the answer," I said. "I suppose Mr. Gillespie is somewhere near scratch."

"No," replied Billy, ignoring my sarcasm. "He isn't entered. He says he's going to caddy for the old sealion. And he's dropping hints that his boy champion is a wonder."

The next day we got the first thrill. I was only fair that day, even for me, and from the last hole I rushed over to the bulletin board to see whether I had qualified. I found a crowd. In its center stood Mr. Moore and John B. Gillespie. They were gesticulating and chattering. And through it I caught the one sentence—"Moore in 72—whadda you think of that!"

"Seventy-two net?" I asked.

"Net nothing—" snapped back the answer of John B. Gillespie, "72 gross—just par for the course! If you don't believe it, look at that!" He waved the card under my nose. I inspected it. There it was, signed by Gillespie and Dr. Carrington. It wasn't one of Gillespie's heavy-handed jokes, then. The precise, definite-minded Carrington was not that kind of a man.

"There ain't no such score," said I.

"That was Saturday. The Sunday newspapers reach Case Harbor at about 8 o'clock; if you want them for breakfast you drive over to the drugstore and get them yourself. As I entered that Sunday morning I met Mrs. Bavin coming out. Her face, between her smart sailor hat and her trim summer cape, was serious, but her eyes were snapping. And before I could speak she shoved a section of the Sunday Bulletin into my face. My eyes centered on a photograph of Edgerley Moore, two columns, front page, sporting section, before I took in the head:

"ELDERLY GOLFER SHOOTS IN PAR.

"Edgerley Moore, Aged 60, Who Took Up Golf a Year Ago, Performs Amazing Feat on Seagull Links."

"Do you see!" exclaimed Mrs. Bavin. "Did you ever read more than a four-inch item about any of our tournaments before? The city papers usually just telephone to the steward for the score. But now—and I passed John B. Gillespie when I was driving down from the city last night. I'll just bet—"

and here Mrs. Bavin resumed her tumbling of the newspapers. "Here it is—the real estate section—he hasn't been advertising lately and—yes! Look at that!"

Across a half page splashed an advertisement for Gillespie's addition to Case Harbor, with special mention of the prettiest, sportiest golf links on the Atlantic coast.

"We're done!" exclaimed Mrs. Bavin

morosely. "We might as well move away. Oh, why did I ever start that club?"

"Well, it's apparently hatched a champion anyway," I said.

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Mrs. Bavin. I had a sense that she was leaving volumes unsaid. Then, as though only the back-fin of her thought was coming to the surface, she added:

"Did you know that Mr. Gillespie has closed his house for the summer and gone to live with Mr. Moore?"

"Well, I must say that this Damon-and-Pythias act is the best thing I know about Gillespie," I replied. "Anyone who has the patience to endure that ghastly old bore—"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bavin, drawing out the word in a manner which registered again a world of thought in reserve.

When, at the end of that week, we played off the matches, Edgerley Moore proved that he was no accident. He ran through all opposition like water through a filter. I was struck by my one and only spasm of real golf, and stayed to the semi-finals, when I blew up. So I didn't see him at work until the finals, where I helped police the course—for we had drawn a crowd. Not only had our links been for the first time invaded by the press, but enthusiasts motored from links 25 miles away to see if it could be true—and found that it was. Mr. Moore was up against Harry Babson, our best golfer, who is handicapped at six in match play. Babson was in form that day and played his head off—a birdie on the second hole, mostly par on all the first round—but what could he do against a handicap of 12 and mechanical perfection? Mr. Moore won, two up, one to play.

"He's the greatest thing ever uncovered in golf," said John B. Gillespie when the match was over. "The amateur champion at 60—standing right here in these shoes."

"Going to enter in the county tournament?" asked someone. That event was coming off a fortnight hence at Goreham; it always brings out a large entry of high quality, for there are two or three famous courses to our north.

"I've already entered him," said John B. Gillespie, "and in the state tournament, too. Maybe the national can wait this year." Half of the gallery laughed at that, and half, like me, didn't.

When I emerged from the clubhouse, after talking over this nine-day wonder from 40 different angles, I met Mrs. Bavin standing by the corner of the parking place.

"Look!" she said, and gave a wide, impatient gesture of one of her long arms toward the door of the pro's quarters. There, entirely surrounded by golf writers and news photographers, stood John G. Gillespie talking genially and with theatrical gestures.

"You can see the papers tomorrow, can't you?" said Mrs. Bavin. "The quaint Seagull links and the beauty of the harbor at the head of every item!"

I opened the newspapers next morning to realize that Mrs. Bavin had called the turn. Somehow, the beauty of the coast view from the Seagull links and the story of how the course had been made from a rough farm in a year, figured in every account. So, in two of them, did the amazing friendship between Mr. Moore and his caddy, coach and manager, John B. Gillespie.

I must hurry through the next stage of this extraordinary career. Mr. Moore went up to Goreham and won quite handsily the county championship. By tradition that is a handicap affair. The Goreham committee, like ours, couldn't really believe it, and handicapped him at 9 and 6. At these figures he raced through the tournament, defeating on the way Maurice Naylor, who has twice been runner-up in the national amateur championship.

He is a picturesque figure in golf, this Naylor. His defeat in the semi-finals by the 50-year-old unknown brought Mr. Moore to the attention of the New York newspapers. It was, I understood, the dull and silly season of the year when journalism is looking for a sensation. Newspapers, magazines, syndicates—all turned toward Case Harbor. Every train seemed to bring spruce young men with roving eyes who carried canes slung over their forearms, and less spruce young men with big black cameras. Daily Mr. Moore was interviewed, photographed, filmed.

One thing about this interviewing process struck me as curious. Evidently he refused to talk about golf. True, he was quoted extensively by one yellow syndicate on the method by which a middle-aged man could improve his game, but this bore the earmarks of a fake;

and Dr. Carrington recognized it as a re-writing of some articles by a famous Scotch professional which had been printed ten years before. But apparently he chattered genially, diffusely and quite in his old manner of things in general. When the second wave of interviewers came over the top, Mr. Moore had been reading a book on the cave dwellings of the Dordogne. This newly acquired knowledge he droned out while the reporters employed every dodge to make him talk golf. On the way back to the station, some genius among them conceived a brilliant idea to dress up his interview, which he indiscreetly imparted to the rest. And next Sunday's papers had a new tag for Edgerley Moore—"The Distinguished Anthropologist Who Became a Champion Golfer."

Next Saturday Tommie Crowder, twice national amateur champion, came over for a special 18-hole match. John B. Gillespie arranged it—he seemed by now to be arranging everything for our club. With the ex-champion arrived not only the gentlemen of the press but certain other strangers in loud, tight-fitting clothes and with hard jowls. All during the match this element squirmed through the enormous gallery. I did not classify them until I saw the flash of a green-back, heard a whispered phrase about odds. Then I saw that we were drawing the professional gamblers. How they laid their money I had no idea; if they were backing Tommie Crowder, they were lost. He played perfect golf that day—with one slip. On both rounds at the dog's leg fourth he tried to drive over the rough instead of going around—a dangerous thing, for the carry is too long for anything but a freak drive. He succeeded the first time; but the second time he got into difficulties and had to pick up. That was the turning point; he was against a golf machine, running perfectly. On that hole Mr. Moore went one up and stayed there to the end. His card was 70, breaking the record for the course, held by himself.

On the morning before that match I was practicing approach shots on the ninth green—for, like all the rest of us, I had been filled with inordinate ambition by the rise of Mr. Moore and felt in my heart that if the old dodo could do it I could. I had already reduced my card to 90. I looked up across the fairway and saw Mrs. Bavin was approaching with her quick, striding walk.

"Jimmie," she said, "don't you really think this thing has gone far enough?"

"I suppose it has. I suppose we must have a clean-up after he has played in the state championship," I said, temporizing.

"Jimmie Langford," announced Madge Bavin, definitely, "we're going to have a clean-up today!"

I looked her square in the eyes. They showed that she meant it. Now, her tone changed. It became serious, almost angry.

"Jimmie," she said, "I've had John B. Gillespie looked up—he'd already been looked up by the information department of Bob's firm. He applied for a loan when he started Gillespie's addition. And they turned him down. He got his loan later from the Speche outfit—you know about them—regular banking bucket shop—a pawnbrokers' interest and long chances. But Bob's people refused him mainly because he wasn't a good moral risk."

"What was the matter with him?" I asked.

"Well, Gillespie isn't his name, to begin with. That's almost enough. Before that he was known as Professor Hansen—and that probably wasn't his real name, either. It's simply irritating the way those bank reports leave out the most interesting and important things. All they had to say about his past was that he'd left vaudeville because of the curious death of an assistant on the stage."

"Vaudeville!" said I.

"Wait," she said. "Bob saw the firm's detectives for me, and they did some more work. He was—" Mrs. Bavin's voice grew now almost choked—"he was a stage hypnotist! Half fake and half real!"

"Is there, such a thing?" I asked lightly.

"There is, indeed," replied Mrs. Bavin, still serious. "I've looked that up, too. He used to show in the west. One night down in Texas he picked some hick out of the audience and put him through all kinds of fancy gymnastic stunts. The poor fellow never came out of the trance—he had a weak heart and the performance finished him. That's the best construction of the story. But there are hints of a worse construction—at any rate, Professor Hansen was tried for

manslaughter. He crawled out of it somehow—but he quit the stage. It appears that stage hypnotism has gone out of fashion, anyway. Then he showed up in Minnesota under this name—boom real estate business, always with a crooked slant. And now he's among us. Do you begin to see, Jimmie?"

A little breath of the truth blew across my mind; for a second I felt a drawing sensation in the roots of my hair. Mrs. Bavin was studying my expression; it seemed to satisfy her, for she went on:

"Jimmie, it isn't ladylike to listen to servants' gossip, but it isn't ladylike to get into a fight, either. And when a woman's in a fight up to her ears—she's no lady. Moose, the colored boy who takes care of Mr. Moore—he's in love with my Cordelia. Of course, he tells her everything. I've pumped Cordelia. Do you know that since those two men went to live together Mr. Moore has lain on the sofa for hours seeming to be asleep, and that Mr. Gillespie has sat by his side talking to him?"

"But how—" I managed to falter.

"Yes," said Mrs. Bavin, "I thought of that. It's why I've been going to Dr. King in the city—you know—the great authority on hypnotism. He said at first that it was just possible—now he admits it must be so."

"What's the end of this game?" I asked finally.

"The end," Mrs. Bavin said, "will come when he's sold off Gillespie's addition and cleaned up with his gamblers. That's where he went too far—dragging in the gamblers—crooks always do go too far."

"But how can he get rid of Mr. Moore—without giving the whole thing away?" I persisted.

Mrs. Bavin grew serious again.

"Well, suicide could be suggested to him, couldn't it? Suicide when Mr. Gillespie was a hundred miles away with a perfect alibi—the man is capable of anything—don't you see that I'm probably saving the life of poor, foolish old Mr. Moore."

"Madge Bavin, what is it you are going to do?"

"Jimmie," she said, "I've worked hard lashing myself up to what I'm going to do. If anyone interposed a single objection I'd get scared, probably, and back out at the last moment—I'm just that much of a poor, weak woman. Keep me to the front of the crowd—keep close to me—and stand by even if it means a real fight."

John B. Gillespie, caddying, teed the ball, handed Mr. Moore his driver, straightened up, spoke in a quiet, even tone, such as an expert horse trainer uses to command his animal.

As we followed up, I watched Moore and Gillespie and called myself an ass not to have suspected before. The caddy was hanging as close to the champion as a policeman to a captured thief. Moore walked mechanically; his eyes fixed on the distant ball; the roving and piercing eye of Gillespie, now grown sinister, searched fairway, bunkers and distant green as though he were playing the game—as indeed he was. Arrived at the ball, he took out a brassie spoon, handed it to his man, and, "Full length over that little bunker," he said. He had scarcely finished speaking before Mr. Moore addressed the ball and sent it fair and true, first soaring and then running over the low, untrapped bunker. He lay some 75 yards from the green with a nasty, tricky approach if he elected—or Gillespie elected—to pitch and run.

As I look over my copy of the card to that immortal match I realize that I must have come out of the haze which fogs my memory at the 16th hole. Still perfect mechanical golf was standing off strength and genius. They were all square. The card shows that ten holes had already been halved. Here a streak of genius blazed from the Englishman. He made his longest drive of the day; holed his iron approach not for a birdie but for an eagle. Our champion barely laid his second shot to the edge of the green. Instead of picking up—Moore—I might almost say Gillespie—approached and ran down in a four. Watching Gillespie intently, I could see that he was disturbed. His eyes glanced hesitantly from right to left. The score occurred to me. If they halved the remaining two holes the Briton had won. I spoke to Mrs. Bavin then—I believe it was the first word I had addressed to her that afternoon.

"It's Moore he's betting on," I whispered.

"Yes—I saw—" she whispered back, almost impatiently.

"Keep me close and listen to what Gillespie says," she whispered. "If he tells Mr. Moore to try to hole out—"

The Briton's chip shot from that tricky lie went wild. It stopped just at the edge of the long, undulating green, at least 50 feet from the hole, and with two ridges to carry. He was shooting five, and Moore three; in all probability only by a miracle putt could the visitor even get a half and carry the match to extra holes.

Mrs. Bavin and I, ducking through the ropes, as was our right, crowded close to where Gillespie stood studying the terrain with his light, intent eyes. He drew out an approaching club and spoke at last in that even, almost monotonous tone:

"Run it up there; a yard or so below the hole." I heard a long breath escape Mrs. Bavin.

Mechanically, Moore laid the ball as specified. A premature cheer, rudely checked by the ushers, escaped from the crowd as William Carr, the Briton, daring a superb chance, tried to make it and ran his approach shot eight feet beyond the hole. Mr. Moore had only a three-foot putt to win.

And then, as Gillespie drew the putter from the bag, handed it to Mr. Moore, Mrs. Bavin stepped forward and touched Gillespie on the arm; he started so vio-

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