

Chasing the Best Days by Philip Wyeth sample chapter

1. IN THE MONEY

Eight feet. Scooting left. You know this green, got to hit it a bit firm. All eyes on me now. Time to shut these guys up. Come on, lemme see that money... Yes!

Greg leaned over to pick his golf ball out of the hole, then high-fived Steve.

“Nice birdie, amigo!” Steve said. “Looks like drinks are on you.”

Greg did a silly dance and sang, “I’m in the money!”

Tommy and Jaime also shook hands and patted him on the back.

“Didn’t think you were gonna make that,” Tommy said with a grin.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” Greg said as the group stepped off the green. “It was just long enough to make me think, even though we’ve played this hole, what, a hundred times?”

“Definitely a lot! Come on, let’s head in...”

The clubhouse bar was buzzing. Groups of men wearing bright golf shirts sat around tables that were covered with glasses, scorecards, and appetizers.

Greg and his entourage leaned onto the bar.

“Afternoon, gentlemen,” the bartender said. “How'd we play today?”

“Armen, what's up?” Tommy called out.

“You know me, just keeping the waters of life flowing.”

“Good, good. Well, Mister Clutch here just birdied eighteen, so he's buying. I'll take a Bud Light. Oh, and pour me a shot of Jack too.”

“You got it. Guys?”

Greg said, “Same for me,” then looked over at the others. “Jaime, Steve? Order up.”

After they sat down, Greg leaned back and spread his legs wide. “Okay, boys. Cheers to a good round. Now pay up!”

“Cheers!”

One by one his playing partners opened their wallets and tossed cash onto the table. He lazily grabbed at the money, made a visual inspection, then tucked it under his sunglasses.

Soon they ordered another round of drinks and started mingling with other members of the club—players who had also finished their rounds, as well as married couples having dinner. Club staff who were making the rounds also came over to say hello.

Greg absorbed these warm vibes as the alcohol flowed through his body. He felt protected and far away from all of his daily stresses. Life was *good* up at the club—and today he was in the black.

His phone buzzed on the table in front of him. He set his drink down and tilted the screen up. A text message from Karla said, “I'm home. Thinking of u...”

Greg flipped the phone on its face and rejoined the conversation. Ten minutes later he felt it vibrate again, but this time ignored it. More drinks arrived, then slowly the dining room began to clear out. It was nearly eight o'clock.

One quick glance at his phone while he gathered his things showed that there were now five other texts from Karla. He typed “on my way,” but then paused before sending the reply.

How many drinks deep was he? Should he risk the drive? It was only a few miles to their apartment, but the mountain roads were curved and not well lit. He could ask Karla to come pick him up, or take an Uber. But neither of these options worked—he had an early client meeting in the morning and didn’t want to waste time picking up his car beforehand.

“The hell with it,” he muttered and sent the text.

When he got home he saw Karla lying on the couch in sweats watching TV. There was a bottle of red wine sitting on the coffee table in front of her, as well as her phone and some snacks. Her attention remained on the screen.

“Hey girl,” Greg said. “What’s going on?”

Her expression changed to a pout and she grabbed a handful of potato chips. “I don’t hear from you. I get worried!”

“Baby, I was celebrating. I won today! And I knew I was gonna be back soon.”

“But still, it is easy to type these few words.”

“Phones are supposed to make life easier—not be a leash!”

“Aw, sad doggie?” She sat up on her knees, playfully holding her hands out like paws.

Greg came nearer, saying, “Did you make any progress on that training video?”

“Noooo. I couldn’t focus. Maybe you can help me more?”

“Who’s applying to be a golf pro, you or me?” he said, laughing.

“Don’t be mean! Or you can’t have any wine.”

“But there's so much left. Here, let me help you with it...”

He sat down on the couch and began to caress her legs while they watched TV. She brought the wine glass to his lips and he drank, then she leaned in and kissed him.

Despite all the little dramas, Greg said a prayer to God every night that he got to sleep with this buxom Croatian woman who was half his age. Karla, the unexpected gift that had fallen into his lap after fifteen years of divorce hell. The forbidden romance between Corona Vista Country Club member and staff.

It was glorious taking possession of her body time and time again, and he tried not to think about how she was only a few years older than his son Peter.

But life so rarely went according to plan that Greg had learned to just enjoy the good things as they came along, because eventually the bottom always dropped out. Not that Greg did much to help his own cause.

How many crazy women had he dated before Karla? From the forty-something bleach blond who had more ex-husbands than kids, to the naive thirty-five-year-old with the mind of a child, he couldn't seem to hook up with anyone normal.

It had been a twenty-five-year streak of bad luck, ever since he first set foot in Los Angeles.

No one had ever warned Greg not to fall in love with the first woman he met in a new city. But even if they had, what young man was equipped to defend himself against the California Dream? His mind was filled with old-fashioned East Coast values, and he had not been prepared for Robin, the horse-riding sandy brunette who went down on him during their first date.

He still remembered it clearly. That magical night down in Redondo Beach, the harbor lights twinkling in

CHASING THE BEST DAYS

the distance, her whole body wiggling around in the front seat of his car. He with his hands clasped behind his head and feeling on top of the world—because he had officially arrived.

Greg didn't realize until many years later that this had been the pivotal fork in the road of his life. At the time it was impossible to see clearly through all the hormones, new city excitement, and the deep need for validation that Robin offered so willingly. He had just never been able to slow things down and really think before taking the plunge.

On the surface it had all looked so promising. Preparing to attend law school and married to a woman hotter than any of the girls he knew back home. It was not the worst place to be at age twenty-seven. Two years later Peter was born, and three years after that Nick came along. He was a real family man—until one day Robin said she wasn't happy, and the avalanche began.

Greg heard the alarm go off at five-thirty. Karla's hand was on his chest. He eased himself off the bed and gave her exposed foot a squeeze before stepping into the bathroom.

Head feels okay. Gotta get out of here before she wakes up, wants to talk. Maybe just grab a coffee in town. Then we'll see if these idiots are any closer to settling. Or not. Pay for my golf with your family feud, I don't give a shit.

We've all got our own boxes of paperwork. At least it isn't me sitting on the wrong side of the desk anymore.

END OF SAMPLE.