

Love in Miniature

by martha clarkson

Hole #1 — Loop-de-Loop

A piece of metal curved into a loop like a curlicue off-ramp. Jake and I step up to the Golf-O-Rama mat like accidental twins. My ball is half blue and half orange, like a gas station freebie. The old man at the desk said I looked that way, half blue for my eyes, half orange for my shirt. Jake's ball is yellow and red. We're looped on each other, making crazy eyes and suggestive mouth movements, here in this seaside town trying to make it through off-season.

#2 — Two Holes

A long, plain rectangle of fake green grass. But not so simple. There are *two* holes on top, then a level-drop where the cup resides. This hole is all about pipes and guessing. One hole will give you a good shot at a hole-in-one. Going into the other hole will send the ball to the yellow wood corner. Big decision. Once we've decided, still no guarantee. We're operating on Astroturf instincts.

#3 — Wagon Wheel

Spins around and around, half in the ground, half above. We're just a modern couple trying to wedge our two-tone balls through the wheel of pioneers. Still tussling about the score on the last hole. The wheel creaks and the white paint is chipped. Sometimes we squeak when rubbed too close together. There must be a can of WD-40 in every home in America.

#4 — Church

Always white, the church has a red roof and a tiny door that opens and closes. Not only do we have to send the ball in the door, we have to come out the other side of the church, like a fire exit. Jake knocks out a window. The old man is busy counting the available blank score sheets. The church door shifts from side to side when it lowers. Taking our vows, we send our dizzy balls rolling through the door, broken bits of window plastic shimmering on the grass.

#5 — Windmill

The wings of the windmill are big, like a nun's sleeves. My ball comes back to me twice before I correctly gauge the opening. When first together, we dreamed of going to Holland for a vacation, but ended up in La Conner, a small town famous for two weeks of blooming tulips and massive sales of overpriced bulbs. Still, we bought the red, because red is for passion. Aren't we still all about passion? Kiss me, aren't we?

#6 — Lighthouse

No electric door this time but a narrow opening through the base. Beacon on top twirls around like a police light, streaks my breast red in its cycle. Please don't make us dizzy, we've got problems enough. Warning, shallow water. Warning, rocks. Do we really need lighthouses anymore to signal us?

#7 — Ponds

A narrow strip of Astroturf running through two pools of water. Plenty of signs posted to tell you the penalty for a ball in the water. Plenty more to caution you not to *hit* the ball out of the water, but *lift* it out. My ball teeters down the isthmus to the hole - happy tin-

can clunk of a hole-in-one. The old man claps. Jake's ball goes in the water. When he lifts the ball out and hits it towards the hole, the ball leaves a wet stripe, marking where he's been.

#8 — Oil Derrick

Metal rods erect this Texas totem. Jake strikes it rich with a par. Nothing's gushing for me. Do the rich play miniature golf? Do they require upscale putt-putt parlors, where the club heads are gold and the balls are monogrammed? Would it take their mind off their troubles, of which we know they have many?

#9 — All or Nothing

From Pensacola to Walla Walla, the last hole in miniature golf is never more than just a ramp with a cup in the middle. Mouth but no face. Overshoot and say good-bye. Be perfect in the cup and life goes on. The old man'll ask where we got our dead-eye aim. He'll shower us with free game passes. We both won't get one, though. Someone will have to pay to keep playing.

