

## GOLF BUDDIES

A short story by James H. Pyle

Hal died last week. Pity, but, as they say, "He led a good life".

At sixty-five, he left a wife, still young and attractive enough to find another husband, and two daughters, both married but still childless. They *lost* a devoted husband and father.

The government *won* because he'd only collected one Social Security payment and never had to use his Medicare card. The cause of death was a massive coronary, so he never suffered or even took up valuable hospital space.

All things considered, not a bad way to go.

We, however, lost a golf partner. Not just a partner, but one whose game was as bad as ours. If one of us breaks a hundred, it's cause for a party. Finding a replacement will be tough!

Our game is always on Thursday, at whatever public course has an opening; and in the winter, indoors at a miniature golf arcade where we putt for dimes.

We like to walk the course with a pull-cart. It's cheaper and we pretend we're getting some exercise. We snicker at younger players driving around in carts.

So here we are - at our usual Thursday outing, only now a threesome, to play a memorial round for Hal. I bought a sleeve of new balls and gave one to each of the others as a remembrance of the day. (They were Titleist ProV1's)

Our tee time is 10:12 a.m. but we're lined up at 9:55 hoping to sneak off early. No reason to do so, we have nowhere else to go, but Dan, an Alpha Male, thinks it's better to go sooner than on-time. Go figure.

We're at the ready, drivers unsheathed like the lethal weapons they are, when the group ahead of us arrives precisely on time at 10:00. Dan mutters, "We shoulda got here at 9:50."

While recovering from this minor delay and offering a silent prayer for Hal (we'd always let him lead off on the first tee) we drop a tee on the ground to see which of us it's pointing towards. That person will tee off first.

While the spinning tee is still in the air, the starter comes running over and asks, "Would you guys mind if another player joins your group?"

Wow, I think to myself, 'Could this be Hal sending us a replacement, and on our very first day without him?'

"Sure," we say in unison. "No problem."

"Great," says the starter. "I'll send her right over. Her name is Daphne."

Our heads snapped around to stare at each other so fast I thought I felt a little whiplash.

"Holy, shit," says Dan. "Daphne?"

Thirty seconds later this stunning five-foot-ten redhead in a tiny, pink golf skirt and tight blouse runs up and says, "Hi, guys, I'm Daphne. Thanks for letting me join you." Did I mention the top two buttons on the blouse were unbuttoned?

Now we're screwed. No off-color jokes, no jocular teasing, no peeing in the bushes at the eighth and fifteenth. It's going to be a loong round.

We still haven't determined the 'order of play' from the first tee. I say, in my most gallant style, "We assume you'll play from the ladies tee, so do you mind if we hit first?" We always play from the white, intermediate, tees.

"No, if you'd like, go right ahead," she says. "But I always play from the blue tees."

OMG! NOW WHAT?

"Oh no, no," says Dan. "Whoever hits from the back tees always goes first." He is, you'll learn in a bit, a stickler for the rules.

While Daphne walks to the rearmost tee we huddle to decide what to do about this ego-smashing development. Do we hit from blue also, or do we go about our usual game and admit we're a trio of wusses. "Holy shit," says Dan once again.

Daphne, meanwhile steps to the tee-box, takes one practice swing which winds that shapely torso into a tighter twist than my favorite brown sugar cruller and ends with her belly button pointed straight down the fairway. Our three mouths are now open wide.

She addresses the ball (also a Titleist ProV1, I notice) winds up again and sends that sucker 275 yards straight down the middle.

"Holy shit," says Dan. I fear that will not be the last time I hear the phrase today.

"I'll go next," says Scottie, marching to the blue tee. I look at Dan and shrug. Inwardly I curse Hal.

Scottie takes two practice swings, addresses the ball (my ProV1) and swings like he's trying to send it to Cleveland. Instead, it goes out of bounds and bounces off the asphalt in the

high school next to the course. His face turns a pink color, much like Daphne's skirt. "You guys hit, then I'll hit a provisional," he says in his Norwegian accent.

Now we're committed. It's gonna be a blue, blue day.

Dan's ball goes into the left rough; mine lands about 10 yards beyond the red ladies tees. Scottie hits his provisional into the right rough and we walk the interminable distance back to the white tees where we left our pull-carts. Daphne catches up and says, "Isn't it a gorgeous day?"

Dan muttered something under his breath that sounded like "Holy shit."