

Never Teach a Woogie to Play Golf

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Things just happen to me. This is something I have never been able to explain. My earliest memories are of disasters resulting from a moment's inattention. When I was maybe 2-1/2 years old, My parents were proud of my being fresher-trained so easily that I could attend to that business without being reminded. I was, in fact, so conscientious that I attempted to change the fresher tissue. I still remember that roll of soft paper jumping out of my hands and accomplishing a two-pointer into the fresher without touching the rim. In my attempts to retrieve the situation, I managed to trip the flush mechanism and thereby flood our apartment. And the apartment below us.

My disasters always seem to impact others. Like the time when I was six years old, my mother called me insistently to get cleaned up for bed and seemed unconcerned that I had left a menagerie of toys on the stairs leading down to the entrance to our second-floor flat. More amazingly, after taking that first step, Dad managed to navigate his way down the stairs without his feet so much as touching the treads. Mom told me he was lucky to get away with only a broken arm.

And let's not talk about my camping trip with the Boy Scouts when I was sixteen. In trying for a merit badge, I worked at rubbing two sticks together to create a campfire. I was delighted when the process actually worked. I did not receive the badge that day, but the troop learned a lot about firefighting.

Somewhere along the line, I had taken up golf. Despite all the little adventures involving errant golf balls, windows, vehicles, and peoples' heads, I actually became an accomplished golfer. Because I could usually get the ball into the hole with the number of strokes beating par, the course officials generally looked the other way when things would go irretrievably wrong for me – which they often did.

Though not a top-tier player, I carefully invested my modest winnings and was able to run a pro shop after retiring at age 35. Since I was moderately successful in bringing new business to the DeSalle County Golf Club, Mr. Ambrose overlooked my little accidents. I had gotten better at anticipating the results of any particular action and thus kept the mayhem to a minimum.

So... I was on my guard when a Woogie walked into the pro shop one lovely Tuesday afternoon. Woogies are natives of Woogaea, which orbited Cardiff-C in the Cardiff trinary system. Being in the same neck of the woods, so to speak, we tended to see quite a few Woogies on Caledon. And they were noticeable. A pink creature, maybe five feet tall with five arms and five legs arranged radially, the Woogie has a single large, blue, human-appearing eye. More distinguishing, the Woogies always move about in a nearly visible fog that smells strongly of stinkweed and menthol.

I believe this was the first time I had a visit from a Woogie to my pro shop. But Hoover was my friend. I had known him since we were in many of the same classes in high school. He was my partner in crime. And it was a true partnership. Hoover would engineer a masterpiece of a prank at school, and I would receive the punishment for it.

"Hey, Hoover," I yelled as he thrummed across the room on his five legs.

I carefully enunciated the three o's in his name. He would immediately correct anyone who called him *Hoover* with two o's. Woogies could be a little different at times.

"To be greeted, Human," Hoover responded.

Woogies have a single orifice they use for eating, drinking, excreting and communicating.

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Managing to articulate the human languages was an impossibility for them, so Hoover wore a vocoder strapped around his middle.

“Nice of you to stop by.”

“The Woogie wants to play golf,” Hoover said.

“Yeah, sure,” I replied.

We were both at a party the week previously, and the conversation turned to golf. The Woogie had commented that golf sounded like a lot of fun. I suggested he give it a try. Apparently, Hoover had taken the polite conversation more seriously than I.

“I can rent you some clubs if you want to try playing,” I continued.

“Friend Bradley to teach the Woogie,” Hoover replied.

“Oh. Um... Hoover that might not be too smart.”

“What you mean?”

“I have used up my quota of accidents here at the club. I’m afraid Mr. Ambrose will fire me if I get myself in trouble again so soon.”

“What you mean?” Hoover asked again as he sidled up to the counter. He was as much a sucker for a good story as anyone, and this one was a beaut.

“Mr. Ambrose had me taking care of the landscaping at his home. I just killed all his grass.”

The Woogie’s rumble of laughter sounded exactly like a stopped-up fresher. Believe me, I still remember what that sounds like.

“Sounds like good story.”

“No,” I chuckled. “It was really sad. He wanted me to spray for weeds in his yard. Since he lives adjacent to the course, I hooked the big sprayer up to the tractor and gave his grass a good soaking.”

“Mix the weed killer too strong?” Hoover asked.

“No. I got the wrong stuff. We had a general-purpose herbicide in an unmarked barrel. About the only thing it can’t kill is thorn-berry.”

The sound of the stopped-up fresher rumbled around the room again. “No evil deed goes unrewarded.”

“Right,” I said. “And this stuff works fast. He was in here two days later screaming at me and pounding on the counter.”

“Reseed yard?”

“Can’t. That stuff is persistent. We’ve got to wait until next spring, then scrape off the whole yard. It’ll take new topsoil and sod. Meanwhile, his yard looks about as bad as you might guess.”

“You did this without any help from the Woogie,” Hoover said.

“All by myself. It’s a wonder I still have a job.”

“So you teach the Woogie to play golf? What could go wrong?”

“Don’t even ask,” I said.

“Friend Bradley is a friend?”

“Of course I am.”

“Friends teach friends to golf.” It was a statement, not a question.

This was the typical way Hoover and I interacted. He would want to do something I didn’t want to do. He would then push me into a corner with no way out. I could see the ending already, and it

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wouldn't be pretty.

"Hooover, I'd have to charge you for the lessons. Mr. Ambrose won't let me do the freebies."

A fragment of a tune came out of the vocoder, and the Woogie sang, "The Woogie got money."

There was a popular song floating around Beta, the capital of Caledon, entitled *The Lady Got Money*. I didn't know Hooover paid attention to things like that. And the Woogie clearly had not managed the art of using his vocoder to sing.

"All right, Hooover, when do you want to schedule a session?"

Another tune popped out of the vocoder. "Now is the very best time."

"Hey, Sherril?" I yelled into the office. "Can you cover the store? I gotta give a lesson."

Since I was a one-time professional golfer and outgoing, I had a lot of friends. Hooover was my best friend. But Sherril Thorne was my special friend. Perhaps ten years younger than I, she had come to work in the pro shop a year previously. She was as quiet and introspective as I was ebullient. As was typical, she said nothing when I called to her. She slid from the chair behind her desk and walked to the counter. As she walked out, she gave me a smile that caused me to melt inside.

Then she saw Hooover at the counter. "Uh oh." That was all she said. But for her, that spoke volumes.

She looked at me with one eyebrow raised. That was her *are you sure you want to do this* query.

"We'll be fine," I said.

She looked over at the Woogie.

"Everything will be fine," Hooover said. "What could possibly go wrong?"

Then Sherril looked at me again and rolled her eyes.

"Seriously," I said. "It will be fine. Hooover, I need a bank card."

The Woogie produced the card and handed it to me. I could never figure out where he stored the thing since all Woogies are as naked as the day they were hatched or born or something. I asked him about it one time, and he basically told me to mind my own business.

I handled the transaction and gave the card back to him. "Okay, let's find a set of clubs that will fit you and get going."

"Brad," Sherril said.

I turned to look at her.

"Please be careful."

Since she said so little, I treasured each time she spoke directly to me, even if it was a warning. And it was. She had come to know in the most direct way possible that Things Happen To Bradley Toulson. That was the reason we were not already married. She had legitimate concerns about her personal safety.

The first time we had gone out together was nearly the last. I had taken her to a nice upscale restaurant in downtown Beta. During the meal, she pointed out someone she knew who was entering the dining room. As I turned to look, I managed to trip the waiter. The poor waiter, who was the innocent bystander in this case, was carrying a tray with the entrées for the four people at the next table.

When he lost control of the tray, most of its contents landed on our table. And on Sherril. On her lap. In her face. And in her hair. The people at the surrounding tables all jumped up to assist. When I started to stand up to help, the waiter gently pushed me back into my chair. I didn't blame him. I had

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already accomplished plenty in one evening.

All of this flashed through my mind, but on the other hand, I had a paying customer. That was the reason Harry Ambrose employed me. I brought him enough business that he could overlook my occasional disasters. I stepped around the counter and up to the Woogie.

“Right, Hoover. Let’s get out to the driving range and start your lesson.”

“What is this driving range?”

“It’s a place where you can practice hitting balls.”

“The Woogie did not come to drive the range. Woogie came to play golf. We will play golf, friend Bradley.”

“Ooookay,” I said. I thought quickly. Tuesday afternoon was the quietest time on the course. I guessed we could slip out and play a round. The crazy Woogie had paid me and expected to play golf.

“Let me change my shoes.” I looked over at Sherril. “Call the barn and ask them to bring a cart around front, please.”

She cocked her head as if to ask me if I had taken leave of my senses. Then she picked up the com and connected to the garage where we parked the golf carts. I grabbed my golf bag from the corner of the office and carried it out front. Hoover followed me out. I had gotten pretty good at reading the creature during the twenty or so years I had known him. The mood I was picking up was joyful anticipation. I had also gotten good at reading Sherril. Hers was terror.

“Come on, Hoover, let’s fit you out with a set of clubs. He followed me into the room we nicknamed *The Morgue*. This was where we stored all our rental clubs. Harry Ambrose was a businessman of some note in Beta – the golf course was a sideline. When the various businesses in Beta decided to treat guests to golf, they naturally called Harry. So we carried a large supply of rental clubs.

I studied Hoover briefly and tried to guess how his appendages would swing the club. Somewhere between a child’s and a small lady’s set, I thought. I pulled a three-iron from each set and stepped over to the Woogie.

“Take hold of this,” I said.

He used two of his tentacles to grab each end of the club.

“No, not that way. Do this.” I demonstrated a two-handed grip and eased the club head towards the floor. “Understand?”

“Not a nestling.”

“Don’t get your flooga in a wad, Hoover. You paid for a lesson. So, the lesson has started.”

“Not understand the reference. How does this look?”

I studied his stance and the club. It looked like the lady’s set would do the job for him. And somehow, he had adopted a decent grip.

“Not bad. There may be hope for you.”

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We pulled up to the first hole. I looked down the long hill to the beginning of the fairway and wondered if it wouldn’t just be smarter to head back to the clubhouse and give the Woogie his money back.

“Not have all day,” Hoover said as he clambered out of the cart.

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The DeSalle Country Club was about midway between an executive course and one of those monsters I had played tournaments on. But it was hilly and had notoriously narrow fairways. For the uninitiated, it provided the opportunity for dozens of lost balls and dangerously high blood pressure. I had played pro golf and yet had gotten myself into trouble on this course numerous times.

“Is this where we say *fore*?” Hoover asked.

“Only if the ball looks like it is getting close to another player.”

“What do we do first?”

I selected the driver from my bag. I pointed to the one in his bag. “Take that club. This is a driver. You use it on the tee box.”

“What is a tee box?”

“It’s where you take your first shot,” I said. “Now watch me as I tee off. Then you can try it.”

I carried my driver up to the tee box and placed the ball. I took care to get it at the right height. Hoover was studying me carefully.

“What that?”

“What’s what?”

“Under the ball.”

Ah, a reasonable question. “That is the golf tee,” I said. “It positions the ball so you can hit it squarely with the driver.”

“The big club is the driver?” Hoover asked.

“Right.”

“The little club is the passenger?”

“Hoover.”

He subsided and said nothing further. I stepped back and stretched, then stepped forward and studied the fairway. “The goal here is to strike the ball with the club and send it into the smooth patch of grass at the bottom of the hill. That is the fairway.”

Hoover watched me quietly.

“It’s a good idea to take a couple of practice swings. Under the rules of golf, if you strike the ball, it counts as one stroke. That’s even if you hit it poorly.”

“Is that why so many players swear?”

I laughed. “You got it. Even the best players have occasional poor strikes. One must realize that if you set your expectations low, you will always be rewarded.”

“Unworkable philosophy,” Hoover replied.

I shrugged and took another practice swing. I then stepped up to address the ball. The key here was to relax and show the Woogie how to hit the ball, not to necessarily hit a long drive. So, keeping my eye on the ball, I wound up and hit it. It was a nice easy drive out to about two-hundred yards. Hoover swiveled so his large blue eye could follow the ball’s flight.

“Okay, did you see how I did it?”

“Complicated mechanics,” he commented.

“That’s what makes the game challenging,” I replied.

“So you say.”

“Why don’t you step up here and give it a try.”

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The Woogie moved to the tee box on his five legs(?). The only way I can describe his movement is to say he *thrummed*. He twirled the club in the air over his head(?).

“Hey, don’t do that,” I said. “You’ll hit somebody.”

Hooover didn’t say anything, but he dropped the club to his side.

“Since you are... articulated differently than me, there will be some things you will have to figure out on your own.”

“No problem.”

The Woogie deftly placed a tee into the ground and put the ball on the tee. Perhaps this might go better than I thought it would.

I had occasionally trained novice golfers who had managed an excellent first shot. The only thing that did was deceive the player into thinking there was nothing to it. Usually, their thinking was quickly rectified by subsequent attempts.

Hooover swung the driver experimentally. “Seems unusual,” he said.

“The club never feels quite normal in your grip. Now ease the club up behind the ball. Make sure the face of the club is perpendicular to the direction the ball will take.”

“What is this *perpendicular*?” I was once again amazed at the timbre the Woogie could manage from a monotone vocoder.

I stepped up to him and bent over. I straightened the club face. “Now, see how the club is aligned. When you contact the ball, it should fly in that direction.”

“Understood.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a cart with two players float up to the first tee box, with the soft sibilance of the ducted fans. There were some quizzical looks when they saw the Woogie in the tee box. I was going to have to let them play through. There was no telling how long I would have the Woogie on the first tee.

“Okay, Hooover, let’s give it a try.”

I stepped to the side and slightly back to give him room. He spun around to look out to the fairway and turned back to look at the ball. Then he suddenly just moved. He pulled the club back and swung at the ball so quickly that his limbs were a blur. With a crack, the ball shot forward at a low angle – it looked like a streak to me. The ball hit one of the red concrete tee box markers ahead of us and ricocheted back at us. I was just starting to think about throwing myself to the ground as the ball whizzed past me. With a loud explosive crack, it impacted the ceramaplast windshield of the golf cart behind ours. The cart’s two occupants were also behind the curve and started bailing out after the ball hit.

The ball, losing little momentum, was now headed away from its carom against the windshield. There may have been a slight arc, but its trajectory was almost flat as it streaked toward the ninth green. My wits started to return, and I screamed, “Fore!” at the top of my lungs.

Four little old ladies were just climbing onto the ninth green. I recognized one of them – it was Granny Thorne. If that ball hit anybody, it would kill them, and I had the brief mental image of explaining to Sherril how I had sent her grandmother on to heaven. Four white-haired heads turned to look in my direction in time for the ball to blaze between them and across the green.

The ball hit a tree on the other side of the ninth green. Anyone who plays golf is intimately familiar with the sound a golf ball makes when it strikes a tree. The *chock* sound is unmistakable. This

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time it sounded like a gunshot, and a dozen birds erupted from the surrounding trees in panic. I watched as a three-inch branch gradually sagged to the ground.

The old ladies decided there was nothing more to see and returned to their putting with the characteristic golfer's aplomb. Nothing so minor as a round white projectile moving at relativistic velocities would interrupt their game.

The two men behind us did not exhibit such *sang-froid*. They picked themselves up with several muttered swear words. One of them studied the dent in the ceramaplast windshield. This was the first time I had seen the material so much as scratched.

"You guys can play through if you want," I said.

One of them glanced at me, then stared at the Woogie. "I think we'll start on the back nine."

"How was that, Bradley?" Hoover asked.

Other than nearly killing a bunch of people and ending any hope of a relationship with Sherril, it was not bad, I thought. "Perhaps we need a little more finesse."

"Swing harder?"

"No, no. Let's tee up another ball." What was I doing? Every instinct I had was screaming for me to call it a day and head back to the pro shop. It would hurt Hoover's feelings, of course. But what was that measured against whoever was sure to be killed on the golf course today?

Hoover deftly stuck another tee into the ground and placed the ball on it. "Hit again?"

"Wait for a minute," I replied, moving over close to my friend.

"Now. Line your club up behind the ball again."

He eased the club down to where the face was next to the ball. I was surprised at how carefully he managed it.

"You need to manage your swing so that the low point of the club head occurs just past the ball. You need a little more altitude on the ball when you hit it. Now step back and take a couple of practice swings."

That quick blur of Woogie arms and then came the loud crack when he hit the ball. I looked wildly around me and couldn't see which direction the ball had taken. I thought it would not be exaggerating to say the ball was headed into the next county.

"Where did the ball go?" I asked.

"Not know."

I began to suspect we would, later in the afternoon, discover a dead golfer over on the fifteenth fairway with his head blown out by Hoover's missing golf ball.

"I told you to just take a practice swing."

"It was practice swing," Hoover said. "The Woogie practice hitting the ball."

Our conversation was interrupted by the crack as the golf ball bounced on the cart path next to us. The crazy Woogie had hit the ball almost vertically. A few feet to the left and the ball would have drilled through me, head to heel. I began sweating.

"When you take a practice swing, you don't hit the ball," I said. I could hear my voice taking on a slightly manic quality. This was not a good sign.

"Not understand," Hoover said.

"Practice swings are to check out the swing. Then you hit the ball."

"Woogie practice to hit ball. Woogie play golf."

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Hooover had his patient tone, which he used when he thought I was being dense.

“I think we’d better call it a day.”

The Woogie leaned back so he could direct his single eye upwards. “It a day.”

“No, I mean we should head back to the pro shop. I think we’ve had enough of the golf lesson for today.”

“Don’t be a blimp, human.”

“I think you meant *wimp*, Hooover.”

“Whatever. Woogie is going to play golf.”

I should have just grabbed the clubs away from Hooover and headed back to the pro shop. In fact, I *know* I should have. I recognized from dozens of previous experiences that this is where Hooover would convince me to proceed, and I would climb into the handbasket for that ride.

“Okay, Hooover, but you’ve got to listen to me.”

“Sure thing, golf boy.”

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I somehow convinced Hooover to dial back his nuclear detonation swing. He no longer accelerated the ball to such incredible velocities and was learning to control things better. It took eight or ten strokes, but we were finally close to the first green – and facing Hooover’s first true challenge as a golfer. The first green at the DeSalle County Golf Club was carefully situated on an artificial island in the middle of what was either a small lake or a large pond. The soil was approximately two feet above the water’s surface and held in place by pilings.

“Where to, Chief?” Hooover asked.

“You have to pitch the ball onto the green over there so you can putt the hole.”

“Throw the ball? This is a crazy game.”

“No, Hooover,” I said. You use the pitching wedge to drop the ball into the center of the green.”

“This is a crazy game.”

“No, this is just part of the charm and the challenge of playing golf. Let me show you how to do this.”

Two players were ahead of us and were just clearing the green. They were in no hurry and sauntered halfway across the footbridge from the island. They stopped in the middle and leaned on the railing to watch us. I guess Woogies didn’t play this course often.

I pulled the sand wedge out of my bag and dropped a ball onto the grass. “Now, watch as I do it.”

I didn’t tell the Woogie that these short-range shots are among the most difficult. It required a very relaxed hold on the club and a certain deftness. I hesitated for a moment to get into the zone, then used that loose-limbed swing that popped the ball into the air and dropped it vertically onto the green. Then in one of those moments of sheer perversity, the ball hopped twice on landing and bounced into the hole. I could probably count on the fingers of one hand how many times I had done something like that. And it amazed me each time. But this time, I couldn’t scream and throw my arms in the air in a victory dance. I turned to Hooover with a perfect poker face.

“See, there’s really nothing to it.”

The two players on the bridge cheered and whistled.

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Behind me, I heard a whoop. “That was amazing, man!”

Another couple of golfers had eased up behind us. The counter-grav carts were notoriously quiet, and I hadn’t heard them coming.

“You gents can play through,” I said to them.

“Oh, no,” one of them replied. “After a shot like that, we’ll wait for your friend to play.”

I wasn’t sure how Hooover would respond to the audience, but there was nothing for it but to continue.

“You saw how I did it. Go ahead, give it a try.”

The Woogie studied the green and the flag sticking out of the hole. He then swung around and looked at the two golfers watching him. Following that, he looked at the two on the bridge. Then he bent over to study the ball. It was kind of interesting in a slightly nauseating way how his pink skin wrinkled when he leaned over.

He had gotten the swing of the practice strokes... so to speak. He swung the club several times, and the club head brushed the grass. I thought maybe he was starting to catch on a little bit. He had been watching me closely. He took kind of a... loose-tentacled swing. The ball popped about three feet into the air and dropped into the water, followed by the club.

The Woogie swung around, so his big blue eye was gazing at me. “Oops.”

Behind me, I heard an explosive snort of laughter. I turned apologetically to the men. “First golf lesson.”

“Hey, don’t worry about it,” he called to Hooover. “These things happen.”

“To rescue the club,” Hooover said.

“Nah, don’t worry about it,” I said. “I’ll get one of the groundskeepers to retrieve it later.”

“The Woogie insists.”

When Hooover got that way, events were going to take their course. It mattered little what I said at that point. He thrummed over to the edge of the pond and eased in. The edge was slippery, of course, and after a brief exhibition of ten flailing tentacles, Hooover went completely under the water. The Woogie’s vocoder uttered an indignant squawk during its immersion. And the two players behind me burst into full-throated laughter. The two on the bridge looked as if they would fall over.

A huge bubble erupted from the water a moment later, and the area around the Woogie turned ochre. Then Hooover emerged from the water holding the club high with one tentacle. He bobbed like a buoy as he energetically paddled toward the shore. Having more arms and legs definitely helped his water-borne propulsion.

Of course, in trying to climb the bank, he lost traction and slooped out to sea again. The golfers behind me had staggered back to their cart and sat down, laughing helplessly. To tell the truth, it was a struggle for me to maintain poise. I had never seen Hooover so overtaken by events.

As he paddled madly back to shore, he leaned back far enough to get the vocoder out of the water. “Friend Bradley to assist the Woogie?”

If I got close to the edge, I would probably have gone into the water, so I extended my club so he could grab it. When I finally got him out of the water, his normal odor of menthol and stinkweed was now overpowered by the smell of pond scum and butterscotch. Hooover usually emitted the butterscotch smell when he was deeply embarrassed.

“Let’s just go over to the island and putt the ball?” I asked.

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“The Woogie will pitch the ball.”

“There’s no real need to,” I said.

“The Woogie will pitch the ball.”

“Okay,” I said. “Just try to relax, but hit it a bit harder.”

He dropped another ball on the grass and took careful aim. This time the ball sailed over the green and landed in the water on the other side. Hoover then said a bad word. It was a human bad word. I wouldn’t have recognized a Woogie bad word. This indicated that I was now dealing with a seriously irritated Woogie.

“Just relax for a minute, Hoover,” I said. “This game can get frustrating at times.”

“This game can...,” and he proceeded to say what the game could do. I didn’t totally understand what he said, but whatever it was seemed anatomically impossible.

“Maybe we ought to go back to the clubhouse and take a break.”

“The Woogie will pitch the ball!”

There was clear emphasis on the words coming from the dripping vocoder. I was surprised the thing still worked. And Hoover had worked up a good head of steam – or whatever. He didn’t get angry often. But Woogies were more susceptible to frustration than malice. And it was making me very nervous.

I looked to my left to see Harry Ambrose riding a golf cart along the path. He sometimes would grab a cart and take a circuit of the course just to see how it looked. And he drove the things as fast as they would go. I was always afraid he would run over a golfer or hit a cart or something. When I suggested he go a little lighter on the throttle, he told me he owned the golf course and the carts; *ergo*, he would do as he pleased. My heart went into my throat when I saw his passenger. Sherril held on to the side rail of the cart with one hand, the other clamped to her head the white beret she always wore.

I turned to Hoover to tell him to hold up for a minute, and that was when time seemed to slow down. He had dropped another ball on the grass, and before I had time to react, he wound up and swung with that supersonic blur of a swing. I didn’t have time to throw out my arms and tell him to stop. I think he caught the ball with the edge of the club head because the crack of the contact was immediately followed by the solid report of the ball striking the pilings at the edge of the island.

The ball flew past me, and it was way too close. It hit the front of the cart where the two players sat, leaving a sizable dent. The ball seemed to have retained most of its momentum as it whizzed past behind me. With a resounding crack, it hit the windshield of Harry’s golf cart.

Harry did what anyone would do when coming under fire. He slammed the tiller over, and the cart dove off the path. And he still had his foot on the accelerator. The cart hit the corner of the footbridge with a tremendous crash, dumping the bridge and the two spectators into the water.

Sherril catapulted out of the cart with her beret still on her head. The beret, her streaming brown hair, her blue and yellow striped shirt, and her white slacks flew past me on the way to the pond. She did straighten up and made a clean entry into the water. And there was the white beret, now floating on the surface.

“My God, I’ve killed Sherril!” I yelled.

I took three running steps and dove into the water. With her flying start, she had gone clear to the bottom, so when I jumped in, I met her coming up. We conked heads hard enough that I saw stars. I got my arms under hers, pulled her to the surface, and then dragged her to shore.

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“To rescue the humans,” Hoover shouted as he bounced back and forth along the shore. As we got close, I almost choked on the distinct and overpowering smell of ammonia. The Woogie was really upset. He reached down with one of his appendages to help us out of the water. And I thought, *why not?* I gave his tentacle a good yank, and the Woogie toppled like a log into the water.

“Bradley!” Sherril scolded.

I looked quickly over at my special friend. She looked bedraggled and... amused. At least she was alive. I pushed her out of the water onto the shore, then staggered up myself. I turned to face her. I

“Oh gosh, I thought I had killed you,” I said. “Oh man, I don’t know what I would’ve done.”

She stood there and looked into my eyes, and the world stopped. I thought I was going to fall into her eyes and lose myself. She threw her arms around me and favored me with a huge kiss. It was our first kiss. It tasted like mint and... pond water.

I don’t know how long we stood there, but we were interrupted by a long buzzing raspberry.

“The humans coming up for air?”

Hoover had managed to somehow drag himself out of the water, and I snapped back into awareness of the surroundings. The two players who had been behind me had run over to help the spectators out of the water. Mr. Ambrose was extricating himself from the ruins of the bridge and golf cart. It looked like he had a massive goose egg on his forehead.

“Toulson!” he screamed. Then he stood there and looked at the ground, then back and forth. He was one of those people who never cursed or swore and was clearly at a loss for words.

Hoover raised his five tentacles, one still holding the golf club. “The Woogie’s fault. No harm, no foul. Want to be a good customer.”

Ambrose subsided pretty quickly. He never yelled at me in front of the customers. And even the two spectators on the bridge seemed to think the entire experience was uproariously funny. Of course, I had completely destroyed a bridge and a golf cart, so I had no idea how that would play out.

I took Sherril by the hand and walked over to my friend, the frustrated Woogie. His pink skin was marred by moss and pond scum. I took the iron from his unresisting tentacle.

“Come on, Hoover, let’s get back to the pro shop and get ourselves cleaned up.” I looked at the chrono on my wrist. “Besides, the golf lesson is over for today.”

“Need another golf lesson.”

“Come back next week,” I said. With any luck, it would be my day off, and the other club pro could give him the lesson. I was simply thankful Sherril was still alive.