

THE GOLF BALL

A Story that on First Reading Interests Everybody but Golfers, and the Second Time Over Gets the Golfers Also

By N. de BERTRAND LUGRIN

N OBODY needs to shy at this story because of its title. I don't know anything more about golf than you do. I might have been a rattling good player by this time if it had not been for my sisters, because Cora and I are as alike as twin peas, except that she has got her hair up and puts nail paste on her lips. And I could have gone down to the links as well as not and played in her place in bad weather, and only old Colonel Appleby and the secretary out, and the secretary, Mr. Brownlee, is near-sighted. I told Cora and Eileen and Martha (Martha is my married sister) that I would keep well away out of sight, and they'd never recognize me if they would only let me try my fist at it on rainy days, and nobody would be a cent out of pocket, either. But do you believe they would? Not one of them took my part. It wasn't the money so much, and dad was perfectly willing. But mother and the girls said I couldn't join until Eileen is married and I have come out. Eileen's fiance is in Mesopotamia, and it's a nice outlook for me. Sometimes if I wake up in the night I turn cold all over with fancying myself still a flapper and my hair turning grey. How do I know that Gerald won't get killed or fall in love with an Egyptian. And it's not likely Eileen will get another chance, she's twenty-six and there are no eligible men left, anyway. Of course she might do with a returned soldier if he wasn't too badly knocked to pieces. She's had some training as a nurse. But the doubt of the thing is pretty hard on me.

The reason I wanted so much to learn golf, is because Cora is the lady champion of the Pacific Coast, and she's awfully cocky about it. I can beat her at tennis, and at hockey, and I can even beat dad at billiards. He and I play a lot in the evenings. He and I both know I could put it all over Corrie if I had the chance, and of course that's why I don't get the chance. Dad sympathizes with me. Poor old dad, not a son to his name and four girls. He and mother wanted terribly for me to be a son. I suppose that's the reason that although I was born a girl, I've got all a boy's energy and aspirations. It's pretty hard. On rainy days when the boys can play footer or any old thing they like, I've got to stay in and read or practise or sew or knit, and all those perfectly good golf clubs in the cupboard and Cora's tweed skirt and jersey and brogues and things fitting me as well as they do her.

HOWEVER, things happened. They began in the most harmless way. But "C'est le premier pas qui coute," as the French say, it was just the same the time I took out the motor car. The first thing was to get it out of the garage. A slight thing enough, but leading to most unforeseen results. I had just cleared the doors when I ran over the cat, then I broke the left hand back gate clean off its hinges, and dashing into a telephone post, smashed one of the front lamps, new ones they were, too. I got the blame for a horse running away and upsetting a cart full of groceries, although it was not my fault, for the horse was not tied, and anyway, nothing was hurt a bit except a lot of eggs smashed. Then I knocked over a Chinese laundry waggon. After that, when the motor was climbing the steepest hill in town, not because, goodness knows, I wanted it to, but because it would in spite of me, and I tried to change the gear, I disconnected the whole works, and started slithering back down the hill. As we were nearly at the top when I made my false move, the descent grew more rapid every step, and we simply ploughed, across the boulevard when we reached the bottom, sprinted into Mrs. Winterburn's garden, flattening all her dahlias, and crashed into her cellar windows. They had an awful time getting us out. Part of the car and I were in the cellar, and we did a lot of damage to her plumbing and stationary tubs. But, of course, it was really Mrs. Winterburn's fault. She is an American and does not believe in fences. If she had had a fence, we would probably have just bent it or something. However, she was

very nice to me and gave me stuff to drink and rubbed me till the doctor came.

Well, it was just such a little thing as getting the car out of the garage that started this other affair, although results in this latter case were not disastrous, but only very, very wonderful.

It was Saturday and rainy. We were all about the fire in the sitting room. The girls and mother had been talking for a week of an officer by the name of Forsythe, who was coming to town specially for the golf. He was a returned soldier on furlough, a D.S.O., and had had all kinds of write-ups in the papers. Cora had been practising early and late, she was to give an exhibition match while he was here. Besides, he was young and unmarried. Suddenly Cora very vexatiously:

"Now I have done a stupid thing, left my clubs at the club house."

I started to slide out of the room without being noticed, but "would Jeannie"—I am always Jeannie if I'm to be wheedled into doing anything—"would Jeannie put on her raincoat and run down and get them and take them to Brown to be cleaned?"

N O, Jeannie would not put on her rainclothes and go out in the wet for sister. Sister could just jolly well go and get the clubs herself.

"Mother," Cora pleaded wailingly, "please insist. I've got these bed socks to finish for the box this afternoon, and they must be at the Red Cross rooms by four."

"Yes," I said, wrathfully, "and I suppose Jeannie is going to be asked to deliver those things, too. Well, she won't do it."

"Jean," said mother, "It's only drizzling, and the walk to the links will do you good. You are always so eager for an excuse to go down to the links, I should think you would be glad to get 'the clubs.'"

"Whoever said I was glad for an excuse to go down to the links?" I asked, angrily. "Nobody but a fool would want to go puddling around down there in the wet unless they were going to play."

"And I've got an hour's work to do on my dress," went on Cora, "if I'm to go to the dance to-night."

"If you're to go to the dance to-night," I said, sarcastically, "when you've been talking, thinking, eating, sleeping dance for a week."

However, after a bit I said I would go, because I had got an idea—the first step "premier pas" I mentioned a while ago. Cora thanked me effusively and offered me half of a box of chocolates that was in her dressing-table drawer. But I told her I didn't want her candy, that I wasn't going for her, but for "mums." Besides, I didn't feel it would be quite the square thing to take the candy in view of what I had made up my mind to do.

Her tweed skirt and her rose-coloured jersey fitted me exactly, and the brogues and the new plaid stockings filled me with pride. I'm a bit longer and leaner in the leg than she, but that didn't matter. I put all my hair up, but as it does not curl like Cora's, I found some little false ringlets in her drawer that she had for some fancy dress affair, and I pinned them on under the tam-o'-shanter. I looked quite dolly.

I went out of the house by the back door and across the fields. It's a short cut the girls often take. Nobody saw me. And there was not a soul at the club house. I got the clubs all right. Just as I knew, old Colonel Appleby and Mr. Brett, the secretary, were playing away off on the horizon. I was quite safe.

I made a splendid beginning. The very first ball was a bird. I made up my mind to go right around the eighteen holes. But I was not so lucky at the second hole. I lost two balls and dug up a good bit of the turf. No one saw me except Teddy Appleby, the Colonel's grandson, who was supposed to be caddying for his grand-dad, but who had run away. He helped me put the grass back. To test my

makeup I asked him to guess which one of the Miss Devers I was. He said promptly I was not Miss Dever at all, I was Jean. I said, "Teddy, I'm surprised," just like Cora, and then the little fellow blushed and said, "Oh, yes, now I know, you're Miss Cora, but a while back there when you said, 'Blame that ole golf ball,' I thought you was Jean." He called me Miss Cora always after that, prefacing and ending every remark with "Miss Cora" until I got quite tired of him and sent him off to find his grandfather.

I think it was at the fifth hole that the ball got in the most abominable little guet-apens—that's a French word, it means a trap, but not a rat-trap. You only get in guet-apens in war or something like that, but it's what the ball was in, anyway. I tried one club after another, and if Teddy could have heard me, he would have been quite certain I was me.

All of a sudden I heard someone say:

"By Jove, you know, you've no right to do that," and I was quite frozen in an instant with horror. I did not dare turn round. You see, there was quite a little avalanche of bits of turf all about the guet-apens, and I was not sure whether that was what was meant or whether my identity had been discovered. A last I peeped over my shoulder expecting to see Colonel Appleby, the voice was like his, rather gruff and commanding and insolent. But it was not Colonel Appleby. It was a stranger. He wore tweed knickers and a most uncouth plaid jacket. He was bare-headed and his hair curled. He had a moustache about as big as a minute, and he leaned on his golf clubs and looked at me piercingly. After all, what business had a perfect stranger to find fault with me, for all he knew I might be Eileen or Martha, and every member can tear the turf up providing he or she pays for it. I said, coldly,

"I beg your pardon."

"I beg your pardon," he said, smiling with rather a nice white smile. "I had no right to say anything, of course, but I have been watching you for some time. You've got a beautiful shot there, you know. If you will only use your niblick properly. Here, let me show you."

And he did show me, made the play with the utmost ease and curled that beastly little ball out of that guet-apens into the hole as if the hole had obligingly opened to receive it.

"That," said I, forgetting myself in my admiration, "was a corker. You are some little golf-player, are you not?"

He looked at me, his eyebrows raised for a minute, and then laughed heartily. "Am I to take that as a compliment?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, my face getting uncomfortably hot all of a sudden. "It's a Canadian slang way of saying 'That was an excellent shot.' Permit me to congratulate you on your finesse as a player."

"I like the Canadian way best," said he. "I stood and listened to you for a little while when you did not see me, and I was lost in admiration. It is so much more forcible than mere conventional English."

A NICE state of things! I have no idea what language I had been using. I must correct bad impressions. "It lacks dignity," I said, as primly as I could. "I am trying to break myself of using slang. It impoverishes the vocabulary, and besides, what could be more forcible than the simple, yet beautiful English of Shakespeare and the Bible?" I asked, triumphantly.

"Oh, lord," said he, and he looked so comical that I laughed before I could stop myself, and then he laughed and we both laughed. He said, in a minute, "My name is Forsythe. I came in last night. Three weeks ago I was on the Somme. I'm stopping with my uncle, Hugh Kennedy."

"Then," said I, "you're a lieutenant-colonel or something, aren't you?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "just a plain captain."

"You rank very high as a golf-player," said I. "You've got the whole town talking about you, and practising to meet you, and show their best shots. And lots of the girls have new jerseys and shoes and—"

"Stockings," he suggested, looking at mine.

"Oh," I told him, "I haven't been planning to meet you. I haven't taken the slightest interest in you. I've been bored to death with hearing about you."