

MISS HARDING'S LAST GAME

By Frederick Upham Adams



BEFORE narrating the story of my last game with Miss Harding I must make a note of a peculiar incident that happened yesterday. Carter and I were playing a game with Harding, who was in high spirits over a four-point rise in the stock of his favorite railroad.

"That means a cold two hundred thousand for me, Smith," he said carelessly, as if he had won a golf ball. "If I hadn't neglected my business the other day to play golf with you children I should have closed out a deal at a figure which would have netted me that much less profit. As it was I fooled around with you, Carter and the 'Kid,' lost a few dozen balls to you, an automobile to her, and during all that time the stock I intended to sell was legging it up toward par. That is what we keen financiers call good judgment. Watch me lambaste this ball!"

The same cow that swallowed his ball the preceding day had broken through a fence and was wandering about the links. By some strange fatality Harding's ball seems to have an affinity for that bovine. It bounded toward her and stopped a few inches from her nose. It was the longest drive Harding has made since his famous first shot, and he was wildly excited when the cow began to nose about it.

"Fore! Fore, there!" he shouted, waving his club in the air. "Let that ball alone, you slab-sided, broken-horned derelict! She's got it, Carter, and she'll swallow it sure as somebody made little green apples. Drop it! drop it! She's swallowed it again!"

Grabbing an iron club from his bag, he started for that cow, yelling like an Indian. She regarded him complacently until he was within a few yards of her, then lowered her head, pawed the turf and lowed menacingly. Harding threw the club, but missed her horns by a slight margin. Then she turned and beat a dignified retreat.

Harding recovered the club and started after her, and by fast work overtook the cow as she was crossing the brook. A resounding blow with the shaft of the club on her flanks accelerated her speed, but he managed to hit her six times before she reached the putting green. There Harding hit one more blow, and then paused and watched the cow as she ambled toward the woods to the right. We supposed he had resigned himself to the loss of the ball and his shot, but when we reached the green he was standing over a mangled object which we recognized as a partially masticated golf-ball. It lay within a foot of the hole.

"Fairly good for my first shot, eh?" smiled Harding. "Four hundred thirty yards, so the card says."

"Do you claim that as your first shot?" demanded Carter.

"Well, I should say I did," rejoined Harding. "I've hit it only once."

"Did the cow drop it there?" I asked.

"That's what she did. I've got her trained."

He studied his put carefully, and ran the scarred and mangled sphere into the cup.

"In in two," he declared, throwing back his shoulders. "I reckon that's the longest drive and the best score ever made on that hole."

"You made it in eight," asserted Carter. "I dislike to dispute a gentleman's score, but it took you exactly eight strokes."

"Eight strokes?" exclaimed Harding. "How's that?"

"You hit the cow six times," insisted Carter, who is a stickler for rules,

"and your drive and put make a total of eight."

Harding laughed so that one could have heard him a mile, and after defying Carter to prove his claim by the rules insisted on counting two for the hole, and we offered no objection.

The Excitement Had Added New Depths to Her Eyes

"I made a longer drive than that," asserted Carter, who is a monumental liar. "I was in Rio Janeiro two years ago. The links there are along the shore of the bay, and at the close of a tournament we had a driving contest. Did you ever see a frigate-bird?" he asked, turning to Harding.

"Never mind if I did or not; go on with your story," said Harding rather impatiently. "It starts well."

"All observers and naturalists are familiar with the wonderful rapidity of flight, keenness of eye and voracity of the frigate-bird," continued the unabashed Carter. "The only golfer of whom I stood in fear was a young Scotchman who had made three long drives, and in order to beat him it was necessary for me to put out one at least two hundred twenty-five yards."

"The soil was all sand, and there was practically no roll to a ball. The moment my club struck the ball I realized that I had hit it too low for a long carry. It soared into the air and had just started to drop when a frigate-bird darted at it like a flash, catching the ball squarely in its beak. I do not suppose the bird retained it more than a few seconds before ascertaining that its prey was indigestible, but the line of its flight was straight out on the course. At all events the ball dropped five hundred sixty-eight yards from the tee, the longest drive ever made in Rio Janeiro."



I Never Dreamed It Possible for a Woman to Play So Remarkable a Game

"Did that drive win the match for you?" asked Harding, without the suspicion of a smile. Carter stupidly said it did.

"If you ever have to work for a living, Carter," said Harding, "come to me and I will give you the job of preparing the statements of earnings of the N. O. & G. Railroad. The weak points of your story are first, that Rio has no golf course, and second, that it has no frigate-birds. Even at that the treat is on me."

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This is Miss Harding's last day at the Woodvale links, and I shall return to the city at the end of the week. She sails for Southern France in a few days. But unless I first tell the story of our last golf game of the season I shall spoil the climax of this last entry in my diary.

"I am going to play as well as I know how this afternoon, Mr. Smith," she said, as we stood on the first tee.

"Didn't you do your best yesterday?" I asked.

"You may judge of that when we finish the round," was her reply.

I never dreamed that it was possible for a woman to play so remarkable a game. Woodvale is a long, hard course, but Miss Harding made the eighteen holes in ninety-two, and was not in the least favored by luck. Only on the extremely long holes did I have the advantage over her, and she won four of the short ones and halved three in bogey figures.

The day was warm and pleasant, and we paused to rest at the far end of the course, where we seated ourselves on a grassy knoll and drank in the glories of the day, that were so patent on every hand. The mild excitement of the game had added new depths to her glorious eyes and tinted her cheeks with a lustrous shading that added to her entrancing appearance.

The thought repeatedly came to me as I watched the rare grace of her every movement that a nymph from Diana's train had been translated to earth for the purpose of teaching her mortal sex the physical possibilities of perfect womanhood.

I mustered up courage to say something to this effect, but worded it clumsily. It was nothing like what I have just written. It is one of my misfortunes that my bright and poetic thoughts come to me several hours after the psychological moment for their use has passed. I cannot recall exactly what I said, and only know that I framed some stupid compliment based on that sentiment.

She blushed and then laughed. "You seem to be fickle in your opinions, Mr. Smith," she said.

"I am unconscious of that defect, in this instance, at least," I returned, puzzled to grasp her meaning.

"You held a far different opinion of us unfortunate women not many weeks ago," she declared.

"Why, Miss Harding, I cannot understand—"

"Permit me to refresh your memory," she interrupted. "Who was it that inscribed this statement: 'I know of no agony more acute than to be condemned to play golf with women when good scratch men are waiting for you?'"

I looked blankly at her, but for the life of me could not say a word.

"And who was it who wrote: 'The artists who depict the woman golfer as graceful and attractive must draw from imagination rather than from models. A woman shows to better advantage climbing a steep flight of stairs than in any possible posture in striking a golf ball.' Have you any idea who was the author of those strange sentiments?" asked Miss Harding.

I recognized at once that these idiotic statements were lines from one of the first entries that I made in this diary.

"I wrote that," I admitted; "but it was before I met you. I now renounce every word and line of it, and offer a humble apology to the sex you so gloriously represent."

It was by far the best thing I said, and I was well satisfied with it. Miss Harding laughed bewitchingly, whether at the compliment or my bewilderment I do not know.

"How on earth did you learn that I wrote that in my miserable diary?" I demanded. "Do you happen to be a mind-reader as well as a nymph and a golf magician?"

"None of these," she declared. "The day after my arrival, and before I had seen you, or you me, it seems that you were seated on the veranda composing those reflections. Mr. Carter and others called you to play, and you were so interested that you left the diary where it was, jumped for your clubs, and forgot all about it until the steward handed the book to you later in the day. In the meantime an inquisitive young lady, who shall be nameless, was so impolite as to read your dissertations. She copied the extracts I have recited to you, and later revealed them to me. Of course they interested me greatly."

A light dawned upon me. "Was that the reason you played so abominably the first time you favored me?" I asked.

"I was curious to see if you would be so recreant to your declarations as to ask me to play again after such an exhibition," she said demurely, tapping the toe of her boot with a masher.

"You have no idea how hard work it is to play so wretched a game when one knows they could do better; but I enjoyed every minute of it."

"So did I, and I should have asked you to play again if you had played twice as bad," I declared.

"I should like to read your observations after that golf event," said Miss Harding.

"Would you?" I asked eagerly. "Sometime, perhaps—sometime I shall—"

"Let us go on and play in," she exclaimed, rising hastily, and I did not have the nerve to finish the sentence I had in mind.

I have decided to spend a few months in Southern France.

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He Hit Her Six Times Before She Reached the Putting Green



This Is Miss Harding's Last Day



I Have Decided to Spend a Few Months in France