

PEARLS IN THE MIST

by

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“Pearls in the Mist” is published in Patricia Hamilton’s book, *Life In Pacific Grove California*.

If you are just a bit lucky, the fog rolls in like puffs of dragon’s breath, though holding coolness, haunted with some kind of invitation, and then, after a while, the sky’s blue dome gives way entirely to what can rightly be called silver air. Engulfed in such magic made quite this way by Monterey Peninsula’s subarctic-marine-current seaside microclimate, you stand on the tee box while a golf goddess somewhere across the links coruscates puckishly through the haze. Should you ever be pressed on the exactitude of her nexus, admitting such wiles emanate from pulses of the continuously illuminated beacon at Point Pinos Lighthouse. It is said that for certain old salts of Pacific Grove Golf Links these glimmers—which emerge with a kind of shyness and grace into fullness before retreating until there is only coquettish blankness, as if from the repetitious opening and closing of a rather humongous seashell—proffer a soundless metronome put to the purpose of timing swing rhythm: when syncopated properly, the golf ball comes off the clubface true and straight and long, manifestly disappearing into grayness, for moments later, upon the golfer’s approach at the green, revealing itself nestled beside the hole, a pearl slipped from an oyster like none other.

If you hear the goddess’s call in the slightest, then, dear reader, by all means, leave her, for the moment, where she resides on the seaside back nine among the sand dunes. She has family on the front nine clothed as majestic cypress trees and eucalyptus trees, Nature’s brothers and sisters, whom look out after the goddess, offering protection from lesser golfers, those too often ignoring the sculpted beauty of a reasonable forest left intact alongside fairways and

greens. If most all a golfer sees are obstacles to be avoided in these trees, beware of particularly careening bounces off their massive and immovable trunks, your ball inevitably coming to rest behind another trunk and in a dead stymie with the pin. If your game and the trees eventually reduce you to serial cursing, perhaps, tossing a club in anger, or, God forbid, snapping, say, a 9-iron in two across your knee, things will get worse for this golfer. Twisted branches begin reaching out to grab your ball, and, if you happen not to be worthy of forgiveness, they keep it snared in bunched feathery pine needles or thickets of green leaves. It's true, just come to the course after a windstorm or heavy rains and see for yourself all the golf balls fallen to the ground at the base of trees. The inland nine will send you home before you experience the magic the goddess has in store for you on the back nine, unless you recognize the trees as nothing less than pestiferous majesty, ecology's sculptures and, all the same, ironic sergeants at arms. If you can honestly laugh at the trees, at least most of the time they come into play, then they will grant you access to the back nine along the ocean. You will not be one of those who go to their car shaking their heads after getting to the turn but not making it. Or one of the others who ask only to play the back nine because it is semi-famous for ocean views. Even if the friendly folks who work in the pro shop grant you such a pass, the goddess will not be there for you. All you will see is some blinkered light from some obsolescent lighthouse set a bit too far off the coastline anyway.

Yes, I boldly put forward there is a special breed that gravitates to these grounds, those who naturally look for deeper truths beneath appearances. If in any way it appeals to imagine meandering your way to the course, rather than dashing along a busy thoroughfare in hot pursuit of not missing a tee time, then these eighteen holes where new myths can be made gives call. They can be kept secret if you prefer, those inner reasons without words for coming to such a place to play golf. But come you must if you are called. There is the young assistant pro working

in the golf shop who takes drives along Lighthouse Blvd. right beside the ocean to get to work, enjoying no small number of his lunches seaside, too. There is the electrician from Salinas, California who is bringing on as much work as he can in Pacific Grove and Monterey to be nearer the ocean. He also drives the coastal road to the course rather than taking the more direct route through the edge of town. I know these things about these guys because I volunteered my own seafaring proclivity to them. Another fellow who works in the pro shop is a published fiction writer, my regular playing partner is an opera singer, and, as for the first two fellows I met on the first tee at the start of my first round here, one was a poet and the other a golf writer.

Some call this delightful complex “The poor person’s Pebble Beach,” but for golfers who really get this place, those frequenting this course with deer roaming freely, the longest uninterrupted operating lighthouse in California on the grounds’ highest plateau, whale sightings as common occurrence out off holes on the back nine which hug the ocean close, and not to give pause without saluting the cypress and eucalyptus lined fairways on the inland front nine, I say, this is “The rich golfer’s paradise,” wealthy in artfulness, that is. And if golf is anything, it is athleticism and poetry in motion. After all, the great Arnold Palmer, may he RIP, once said, “There’s nothing more poetic than hitting a really good drive.”

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