

Light and Shade by Kathy Shand

(Finalist, 15 years and over category, Janis Clark Short Story Competition)



Montgomery Snitterthwaite was an enthusiastic golfer but unfortunately he had few invitations to play with other members of the Meadows Golf Club. Every morning he would wait patiently by the pro shop and tag along with players who mistakenly caught his eye because although Montgomery was friendly and could play decent enough golf, he could not resist helping his fellow players, whatever their handicap.

Not only did Montgomery offer unwelcome advice, he chatted constantly and on sunny days, his shadow would fall across the hole during a tricky putt. He had a passion for 'The Rules' too, his favourite was rule 23/6.5. Apparently, a dead snake is treated as a 'loose impediment' and can be removed. However, a live snake is considered an 'outside agency' and it cannot be moved before continuing play.

Montgomery's most irritating habit was the way he chuckled at his nicknames for golf shots. He had one for every occasion. 'James Joyce' (a difficult read), 'Military Golf' (left, right, left, right down the fairway) or, for the ball that nearly reaches the hole, 'You need a Fidel Castro (one more Revolution).'

Woody, the Captain was keen to drive the Golf Club down the fairway and not into the rough so he urged - begged - members to be generous towards Montgomery who was obviously lonely. They tried hard but it was embarrassingly noticeable that Montgomery never reached the 19th hole.

During one grey afternoon, Woody was sitting outside, working on the fixtures list when the Montgomery Problem invaded his thoughts. He looked across at Tom Waters, gazing vacantly at a group of golfers. He remembered commiserating with Tom after they had spent almost a day playing a round with Montgomery. Not only had Montgomery taken five practise swings before every single shot but had insisted on spending *fifteen* minutes raking through undergrowth for a cheap practise ball, which they never found. Tom had once been a talented player but dementia was slowly tangling his neurones and pulling him into the shadows. Woody wished he had more time to spend with Tom.

Suddenly, Montgomery appeared, looking for prey. Woody sighed but surprisingly, Tom's face brightened.

"It's Arthur Scargill!" said Tom, grinning. Woody was both startled and amused by his response. "Good strike but poor result!" replied Montgomery, with his usual chuckle and he darted across to join them.

.....And so a legendary golf pairing at the Meadows began. Montgomery spent a couple of hours a day with Tom and he was very patient with him. Soon, they graduated from putting on the practise green to trips out on the course in a golf buggy.

Tom's swing was not what it used to be but it was powerful in its own way. Montgomery delighted in making other players wait whilst Tom took his time over each shot. But no-one minded. The smile on Tom's face was enough and, of course, Montgomery did not have much time to play golf with anyone else.