

*Tee #1 Par 4*  
*360 yards*

The Autumn leaves crunched under their mid-October footsteps. They had walked this route to the first tee at Brockridge Country Club what seemed to be a few hundred times, although this time was special. This would be their last round of golf for the year. Each year they met in October, before the snow would fall on the mountains of the Pacific Northwest, to play their final game.

On this fall morning the wind blew out of the southeast off of

Brockridge Mountain, giving the morning chill an extra bite. The sun wasn't visible and probably wouldn't be for the entire day, which here was not unusual for Autumn. The gray clouds hung low over the course, not threatening clouds, but clouds that gave a sense of security. It seemed that nothing else existed except for the three figures lumbering their way toward the long avenue of meadow which was the first fairway.

The club was deserted, as it had been for at least a pair of weeks. The only action the club had probably seen in the last month was groundskeepers finishing final close-up preparation for winter. It was evident that the fairways and greens had not been cut in a handful of weeks. But up in the retiring Autumn mountains not much growing takes place, as the flora has long been expecting winter.

"No one to bother us today," expelled Roman. Roman was

always the one to point out the obvious. Not because he thought it needed explaining, but instead because he enjoyed the conversation of both Brooke and Philip.

Roman, Brooke and Philip had attended college together. They had managed to keep in touch in the few years following. This was fortunate, as many friends have only memories of their comrades with whom they thought they would never lose contact. Not that anyone is to blame, but time seems harder and harder to steal away with after marriage and possibly a family comes along. The roommates of earlier days had even found it hard to frequent each other's company. That is why this ritual, as it had become, was so important. It had become a sort of holiday for the three, as if it were a Thanksgiving to be shared with each other. To miss it would be the same as skipping Christmas for a year. So here the three of them stood overlooking a

blanket of brown leaves and dead pine needles laid out meticulously on a tablecloth of lawn as if it were decorated especially for this occasion. As they looked out over the links, each slowly inhaled the smells of nature, which were very tired from a full year of activity and ready for a rest.

"Shall I be the first to hit?" said Brooke, who at times was known to be a little impatient.

"Hit'em long and straight, my friend," said Philip in a tone that couldn't be mistaken for anything but sincere. Philip, in his sweater and khaki trousers, looked as if he could be playing a course in Scotland. He looked right at home and justly so, as he was half-Scottish.

"Or at least hit it a damn long way," said Roman. Roman, who was built as if he could have played professional football, was known to hit the ball 300 yards plus, although in what direction the 300 yards would

be covered was usually not known.

"I'll settle for straight and leave the home run swings to you, Roman," commented Brooke, who was the perfectionist of the group. Brooke stepped up to the tee box and started a routine which was exactly the same on every tee of every course that he had ever played. First, he carefully washed his golf ball, which had his initials neatly printed across it. Secondly, he drew a tee from his pocket, always blue, his favorite color. Placing the ball on the tee with the palm of one hand so the tee was exposed between his middle and ring finger boasted a glimmering gold class ring. Finally, he placed the ball and tee directly between the two tee markers. If what preceded seemed to take minutes, what followed took but a fraction of time. No practice swing. No time for anything but the precise swing the two had seen on every tee box they had accompanied him on

since they had known him. The club struck the ball with a "crack" that traveled down the ridge and signified the beginning of their day, their holiday.