The Long Game

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I cannot begin to tell you how much my father loved the game of golf. We lived next to a golf course, even though that meant him paying top dollar (there is a premium for houses anywhere near a golf course) and me and my brother having a commute to school. My father could then play anytime that daylight and work commitments might allow.

He played with friends, but he also on his own.

“Your real opponent is the course,” he would say. “You can only beat it by getting better.”

That meant practice. Even after dark he would practice his swing and he would putt in the garage or even the living room.

When I was too small to remember when, he brought me some golf clubs – not the plastic ones but real clubs but sized super small. And as I grew out of those he bought replacements. At one stage I got clubs every Christmas for five years.

I adored my father and if he wanted me to love golf that is what I wanted to. He also loved being a man and he wanted that for me too, so I tried just as hard to be that.

Being with Dad meant that I got to be good at both. I had other things to do but when we were at the golf course we were playing or practising or talking with his friends about things men talk about, but mainly golf. I would sometimes sit an listen while the game just played, or played a year, or played by professionals on TV was recounted hole by hole and shot by shot.

But I just knew that I was never going to be a great player. I was good at putting, and I had some skill with approach shots, but my driving was woeful. It was either way too short or if I tried harder, way off.

“You need to work on your long game”, he would say.

My answer was to tee up on the ladies tee. “Call it a handicap, Dad. Give me a chance to beat you.”

“The Ladies tee is to make up for women’s lack of power,” my father said. “But if you want to play off those tees then you can, but if you want to keep on doing it, you had better beat me every time we play.”

I did not beat him often, but at least I could beat him if I had that little edge.

“You can file a score card if you are playing off the ladies tee unless you are female,” my father said. “But you should have a club score and get a handicap.”

“I can just sign up as your daughter,” I teased. “Just so I can register my scores. They will never check who you are playing with, and I will be able to see just how good I can be.”

“It’s a nice idea, Buddy, but you won’t know how good you are unless you play of the right tee.”

I just shrugged my shoulders. “Never mind. It is just for fun, right? Who needs a handicap anyway?”

I guess I knew that this would rile my dad, but I just went about taking my shot, which silences any golfer, until the ball is away.

“Ok, Danielle, I will sign you up when we finish this round,” he said. He used a feminine version of my name. I kind of liked it.

“Whatever,” I said, but I wanted it to happen.

The thing with handicaps is that it is the scores over 8 games, so If you blow out every 7 games you keep your handicap up, meaning that you don’t look like a great golfer. My pattern was to lose my shit in the middle of the game and triple make a mess of my putts on that hole and say that would put me off for the rest.

“Competition golf is all in the mind,” my father would say. “There are plenty of golfers with the skills but without the temperament to deal with the pressure of competition. You need to get a grip on yourself.”

“That is the Dan in me coming out,” I would joke. “Danielle is a much better golfer.”

And then one day the new club pro Hadfield “Haddy” Gilbert called Dad out of the blue. He said: “Mr. Langton we have not met properly but I have been looking at the scores of … well I assume that this is your daughter Danielle Langton? Well these scores look really good. I see from her date of birth that she is under 15, and so she would be eligible for the junior interclub …”.

My father said that he would call him back. Things had gone pear-shaped and he wanted to talk to me.

“This reflects on me,” he said. “It looks like you are cheating – pretending to be a girl.”

“You registered me, Dad,” I said, laying it back on him, but adding: “It would sure be neat to compete though – just to see whether I had the temperament to deal with the pressure of competition.”

“Well, competition would be good for you. But you are clearly not Danielle.”

“Not without the right clothes,” I said. “*And just the right voice*.” I used a voice I had been playing around with. My father’s jaw dropped.

“Wouldn’t it be fun?” he said. “To play against somebody other than your old man and his pals. To play against somebody you own age. I am not talking about winning. That would not be fair on the girls you would be playing against. But it would be competition. And representing our club. That would be cool. If you could just be Danielle for a day.”

“I could do that!” I was worried that it came out too quickly. No guy would jump at the opportunity to impersonate a girl. “It could fun, just fooling people, I mean. I could use a fake ponytail that one of the girls at school has. I just need a pink golf shirt with something stuffed inside.”

“It’s wrong son,” he said, as if overcome with guilt for even proposing it. Or perhaps just trying to be a father who leads by example.

“Ok,” I said. “I understand. But as you say, if I don’t win then nobody suffers, and I might pick up a few pointers on my game.”

“Well, you’ll be the one standing in front of crowd trying to pass yourself off as female.”

“*And you will be my Daddy supporting her little girl*,” I chirped.

“I suggest that you ask your mother to help you. Perhaps a dry run first … somewhere you won’t be recognized.”

“Do you really want to do this?” my mother asked. “You will need to use my stuff to rid yourself of body hair, and rolled up socks will not be enough to give you shape. I will need to get you something. And you have something for your hair?”

I did. My mother was impressed. It seemed to her that by sheer chance it was a perfect match for my honey hair color, but blonder at the end as it should be.

“It will work under a cap, but lets pull your hair up and see whether we can get it up on the crown with just pins and a scrunchie. Then maybe I can find you something of mine to wear to go shopping. Just to do that dry run your father suggested, and get a few things.”

Mom, do you really thinks so?” I said, but in my heart I wanted it to happen. I told myself not to overdo the resistance – it just seemed that it was called for.

But I thin k mothers know – don’t they. She just looked at me and smiled.

“Just for the day,” she said. “Get in touch with your feminine side. It was your father who got you started on this thing, wasn’t it?”

“He just wants me to improve my golf game.”

“And love the game as much as he does,” she finished my sentence.

She loved getting me ready, and even more she loved taking me to the mall as Danielle. She gave me pointers on walking and other movements, and how to “wear” my shoulder bag, and how to go through the racks of clothes as a girl would. I felt great, as if I had thrown off a heavy coat on a summer’s day.

We bought what we needed – some undergarments, breast padding, a girdle, some girls shorts, and long pants, some suitable tops for golf, and a dress. It was just a whim. I was looking through the racks just as she showed me and I just pulled it out and could not put it back.

“We’ll buy that too,” said Mom.

“But I will never wear it,” I whispered.

“Danielle may need something for after the competition,” she said with a wink.

We went to the coffee shop after. We were mother and daughter in the afterglow of a shopping high. She loved it – that I could see. I loved it too, and my guess is that she could see that too.

We gave Dad a little fashion show, but not the dress.

“I can’t believe how much like a girl you look, Dan,” he said. “Frankly, it is scary how attractive you are.”

“*Call me Dani, Daddy*.” He still had to get used to the voice.

That afternoon he took Danielle to the club to meet Haddy and sign me up for the inter-club competition. He had a scheduled game with friends but he took me early so he would not run into them, but still enough people saw him with a girl instead of one of his sons. Nobody recognized me, but why would they? He told me later that he had to say that I was his niece.

The girl’s junior interclub competition was a couple of weeks away, so Dad suggested that we get some dusk practice in. He wanted me to do well, but he understood that I would have to throw some bad scores in to make sure I was not on the podium at the end.

And when the contest came around that was just what I did.

As Danielle I was greeted by my playing partner whose name was Fay. Her father was her caddy just as my father was mine. Fay was a good player but weak in the approach shots. I may have made some suggestions. I was certainly complimentary of her quality shots. It seemed like we were just a couple of girls enjoying a game together, with not too much rivalry.

Her father said some nice things about me that I overheard. He said: “Your daughter looks like a really talented player, and I bet she is fighting the boys off with looks like that.”

I wished that I could have turned around to see my father’s face. Would he be proud or furious? I know how I felt. How would any girl feel to over hear those words.

“Don’t listen to my dad – he is so inappropriate,” Fay whispered. She had heard it too.

“Men are all the same, even fathers,” I whispered back.

I heard my father say: “She has the skills, but one bad shot will ruin her day.”

That seemed like my cue. I twisted the club head a little on my next shot and the ball shanked into the rough.

“*Fuck*,” I squealed.

“Dani! Watch your language, Girl,” Dad scolded.

As planned, I totally lost it on that hole and the next one, and then recovered a bit for the last two to finish strongly but off the Leaderboard at the end.

I did my best to look suitably dejected and Dad took the cue to come over and comfort me with a cuddle. It seemed to me that it was the first time that I could ever recall my father cuddling me, although I am sure he did that when I was very small. It was so special. I loved being cuddled by my mother but to have Dad hold me like really meant something.

I found a few tears just came, and I had to clear up a mascara run.

As we walked off Fay’s father said something about emotion being a weakness in girl’s golf. He seemed like a prick, but Fay was nice. She had given me the needed tissue. She asked me whether I would be in the next contest which was out of town and included many more clubs.

“Competition will be tougher and some pro scouts are out looking for young talent.”

Dad had also heard about this series. I saw him talking to Haddy who had been watching me through the whole game. Dad knew nothing about junior golf but Haddy did. He was engaged in building youth golf driven by healthy competition. He and Dad came over to talk to me.

“Dani you are toying with me,” said Haddy. “You are a much better player than that. I think that you could be a great player. I am so confident that you will be that I am going to offer to coach you for free through to the next competition. In fact I would be happy to coach you as long as you are an amateur, if you want to go further in this sport.”

I told him that my father was my coach, and I was happy with that.

“I thought that this was your uncle,” said Haddy, putting a hand on Dad’s shoulder.

“Well, she has only just started living with us,” Dad said. “It is a complicated thing, but this is definitely my daughter.” He smiled at me. He was proud of me. I could see it. I tried so hard to that look of approval, and there I was standing dressed as a girl, and at last I had it. “Will you take her on Haddy? I think that she could be really good.”

So what happened to the idea of losing? How was this going to work? I would now have a coach expecting me to win. Maybe he would see that I was racking up shots to deliberately lose? We needed to get away from this course so I could discuss this with him in private.

“These girls are the best we have and they cannot touch you,” he said to me on the way home. “Lets play this regional contest and see if there is an real opposition out there. It seems to me that in junior women’s golf you would clean up.”

“What about pretending to be a girl is like cheating?” I protested.

“I just want you to realize your potential,” Dad said. He then drove on for a bit in silent contemplation before he dropped what seemed like something of a bombshell. “Dan, I am a competent golfer but I will never be a great golfer. There was a time when I thought I might be. There was a time when I thought that all I never was more practice, or to modify my swing or my stance, or buy better clubs, but the truth is that you need talent. All the work in the world will not make you a champion golfer if you do not have that talent. I think you’ve got i. It would be a crime not to exploit it. You are just short one thing, and that is the long game. Your driving is not good enough and I doubt it ever will be. But how good can you be with what you have? This is how we will find out.”

“Dad we are talking about a three round contest over two days out of town,” I said. “This isn’t sticking a ponytail to my cap, some boobs on my and some eye makeup and lipstick. I would have to pass as a girl for a whole weekend, on and off the course.”

“If you don’t want it I will understand,” he said. “I don’t think that a regular guy like you, a chip off my old block, should be dressed as a girl. That isn’t natural. But I was just so proud to be out on a competition course with you today, Buddy. It would be great just to move up to the next level.”

“I will think about it,” I said. “It would be kind of neat to play that game.”

Mom was supportive of both of us, as mothers and wives must be.

“But I agree that you will need to improve your look,” she said. “Luckily it is term end so if we need to fix those eyebrows and get some extensions into your hair then you will not have to front up at school looking odd.”

It seemed that I was on the rollercoaster and there was no getting off until it came to that stop. But I love rollercoasters … and this one in particular.

So at the end of term Mom took me to a salon on the other side of town and I got the works. She said that the sensible thing would be to appear as Danielle whenever I was in public until after the competition. Then I could ditch this look and go back to being Daniel, but until then my appearance might be hard to explain.

I started coaching sessions with Haddy. He was an ex-pro-golfer so he had a whole new area of knowledge to share with me. He also had ideas for me to overcome tension, which he saw as a weakness. For me that was just a pretence, but when I worked on the breathing and the diversion before concentration strategies I found them beneficial in any case.

But there was something odd about the situation and Haddy knew it. It was only a matter of time before he took me to one side on the practice hole and grilled me.

“Look Dani, I have not been working here for long, but everybody here knows you family, but nobody knows you. I am told that your father has two sons. The oldest is named Daniel. Nobody has seen him since you arrived. You are Danielle. Apparently you are a daughter miraculously appeared. Dani, forgive me if I have this completely wrong, but before we go on, I need to know … are you transgender?”

“Yes,” I said. It was that simple.

“Okay, so in anticipation of that answer I have checked with the competition organizers and they have confirmed that you can be a contestant in the junior women’s only declaring that you are in transition, which I think means that you are on hormones or whatever?”

“Yes,” I said. It was not quite that simple, but it was true.

“I need to talk this over with your parents,” said Haddy. “The organizers need confirmation”.

My father was horrified. He said: “You told them you were on hormones? We have to take you to a doctor and get you on hormones for you to play in this contest?”

“It is just for the contest Dad. You have told me that you wanted me to do this, and now I want it too. I was only worried that I would be cheating, but if I am a transgirl I am not cheating. We just get the prescription. I don’t even need to take any of the pills.”

That seemed to settle him down. “So you could go all the way through to a win if you play well enough?” he said.

Suddenly this seemed like the solution. Still, he was not keen to visit the doctor with me. He just gave Mom a letter consenting to hormones for his transgender child.

Mom was there when the doctor carried out the examination and asked the question: “How long have you been taking blockers and hormones?”

I looked at Mom before replying. She looked startled, but somehow not surprised. “Blockers for a few years to ward off puberty, but hormones only recently. I know that I should be doing it, but you know about this thing Doctor, so you will know how it is for me.”

“Patches are better,” he said. “But to get you off these black market pills I will give you slow release shots. I have your father’s consent so if your mother will just confirm …?”

“I just want what is best for my daughter,” said Mom.

I felt a tear run down my cheek. I needed to hug her and say how grateful I was, but I would keep that until after the capsules had been inserted and we were outside.

“You should have told me earlier,” she said.

“My relationship with Dad means everything to me,” I said. She nodded. No further explanation was required.

All he needed to know was that there was a letter for Haddy to submit that confirmed that I was on hormone therapy transition male to female and that I would not be taking any pills. I had a jar which I ceremoniously flushed down the toilet in front of him.

Mom bought me something which she gave to me privately.

“You don’t have to tell your father,” she said.

It was a nightie. It seemed like the most beautiful thing that I had ever seen. It was pink and had lace and some small flowers embroidered on the straps and in the middle. I could not wait to put it on.

I packed it when we got ready to leave for the tournament. There was no need for any boy clothes. Mom and I had been slowly building a wardrobe. And now that I had my own hair I need all the tools and accessories to deal with that as well, and a set of skills that she had been helping me with.

Competition was fierce, but I was up to it. The only other competition had been my local interclub where I had the added de-stressor of not intending to win, but this time I needed to take Haddy’s advice on how to deal with pressure.

He was there as my coach and caddy. That meant that Dad could be in the crowd and show unbridled enthusiasm when his daughter shot a birdie – in fact more than one.

I won that game. There was a prize giving dinner. I turned up in an evening dress that Mom and I had selected, and some glamor makeup that I had been practising for quite some time. My father escorted me in and applauded loudly as I collected the prize.

At some stage it had been disclosed to other competitors that I was trans, and in the course of the evening this became a point of some contention. The thing is that all the girls I competed against seemed supportive of me because they had seen me play. It appeared obviously that I was using no genetic male advantage. Others can and did drive further than me. The lengths of my shots were average for the field. It was accuracy that won the game for me, and they knew it, or learned it from other players.

No, the problem was the parents. They believed that somehow, in some manner not clearly identified, I was cheating in just concealing something in my panties that did not belong in women’s sport. One of them baled up my father to protest.

My father stood and listened and then responded: “Look at my daughter here. She was the best golfer without being the strongest. That was skill on display. And tonight you see on display her femininity. Look at her. Such beauty and grace. Tell me that this is not a woman. She had the misfortune to be born in the wrong body. Soon that will be put right. But until then she should be allowed to pursue the sport that she loves, almost as much as I do, to the highest level that she can. She should be an example to the other girls here. She exploits not advantage. She has overcome a disadvantage of birth. With practice and perseverance your daughter may make you proud, but never as proud as I am of my daughter.”

It seems that I cry too easily these days, but who would not?

The following day he suggested that we get up early and play a round on the championship course. After the night before I could refuse my father nothing.

“You can play off the ladies tee,” he said with a smile. “It seemed that is definitely what you are.”

“Let’s both step back and play of the championship tee, Dad. It is a championship course after all.”

Of course he was surprised, but not nearly as surprised as when I lined up my driver for the first hole – a par 5. There was that wonderful musical note of good shot, and my father watched the ball fly into the distance.

“Wow,” he said. “I don’t think that I have ever seen you hit that ball that far.”

“I actually have a pretty good drive Dad,” I explained, tossing my beautiful long hair over my shoulder. “It is just that if you knew you never would have let me play of the ladies’ tee. The truth is that I have been playing the long game all along.”

The End

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