

## M\*A\*S\*H\* Returns Excerpt:

### Golfing For Gall Bladders

Hawkeye Pierce looked at the verdant vista before him and felt that not only were the spirits with him—courtesy of a flask of a particular gin and vermouth concoction favored generally in the evenings and taken with olive, onion or neither—but the weather and prevailing wind was going to make his day.

He looked down and then up again, wiggled his posterior in a manner generally to be seen in this sort of location, brought his arms to his extreme right and paused. With a seeminly slow yet speedy *whoosh* he brought the arms back in front of him and allowed them to travel almost to the extreme left of his body accompanied by a small cracking sound.

“If that doesn’t hit the green I’ll give you the hole!” he told the somewhat red-faced man standing behind him. Needless to say the man, one Jackson Rimmer, attorney at law and the man T. Alfred Crumly—hospital administrator and person nemesis—still referred to as “that ambulance chaser,” sighed.

The little white ball indeed landed just shy of the more tightly groomed surface of the 16th hole of the Wawenock Golf Course (also acting as the 7th hole as this was a nine-cup facility) took a favorable bounce and ended up seven feet from the cup.

“Okay, Hawkeye,” Rimmer told him sliding his number three wood back into his bag. “I give up. I concede the rest of the game. I’ve got to get back to the office, anyway. As it is I spend far too much time with the likes of you chasing a ball with a stick, and have recently had to raise my fees by a full five bucks per billable. So, are you going to tell me why you insisted on

ruining my day before I go?”

Hawkeye was still admiring his shot but lowered his arms, slipped his four iron into his bag and began walking toward the path to the clubhouse. “You coming?” he called over his shoulder. “I’ll tell you about it over one small drink.”

“Only if you write that as a prescription, Doctor Pierce,” Rimmer said trying unsuccessfully to put a little menace in the tone of his voice.

“Done,” Pierce called back quickening his pace. The lawyer had to jog to catch up.

Inside the darkened room, known at most golf clubs as “The Nineteenth Hole,” also described in less refined locations as “the bar,” Hawkeye ordered two perfectly dry martinis knowing that the bartender, a woman who sported only one and a half lobes of her lungs thanks in part to a lifetime of smoking and the skills of one B.F. Pierce, M.D., knew exactly how he liked them.

He took the triangular-shaped glasses to the table where Jackson Rimmer was wiping his face with his handkerchief. “How much do I owe you?” he asked.

Hawkeye stopped in the middle of setting the glasses on the table. “Nothing. These drinks are on me.”

“Come on, Hawk. You know what I mean and it isn’t how much per hole. I figure that I pooped out so I owe you the entire ten bucks. How much are you going to hit me for, and why?”

“Drink that and I’ll tell you. I also will tell you that will be the last alcoholic drink for you for the next couple of months.” He looked meaningfully at his golf partner.

“Should I sip or gulp?”

“Whatever your need is, my son, take this little offering of spirits for thine stomach’s sake and also to thine other infirmities.”

Rimmer took the little plastic stick that looked like a sword and set it with its cargo of three olives on the napkin, then drained the glass in a single, large gulp.

“That serious?”

Hawkeye nodded. “Yep. You know those symptoms you’ve been complaining about? The ones you only describe as ‘a little twitch down here?’ Well, that last blood test we did on you tells me a little different story. You have, in the quaint patois of my profession, either ascending cholangitis or pancreatitis or both.”

“Meaning what? Remember, I’m one of the deprived members of the professional community. I’m just a simple country lawyer. Besides, how can you be sure it’s one of those?”

“Because the x-ray we took shows that the gall bladder under your apparently healthy liver is inflamed and there is no sign of stones in there. And, you can knock off the southern drawl. I’m serious, Jackson, as is your condition. And while I can continue to give you prescriptions for the pain killer, at least for a month or so more, you will soon either get hooked on that or your other organs will start to have problems.”

Rimmer started to raise his glass to signal for a refill but Hawkeye gently pushed it back down.

“I’m serious about the booze as well. So when can I get you in for a little jerking of that nasty gall bladder of yours?”

“How about never, Hawkeye? As in I happen to have been raised in a particular religious community that believes not in surgery for ills. Try as I might, I just can’t shake that. The disappointment my mother would feel might kill her. What other options do I have?”

“Well,” Hawkeye began not wishing to bring up the subject that the morphine Rimmer had been on for three weeks was also against his beliefs, “you have three options. One is surgery and you don’t want to be cured

so that is out. Two is wait and have some amazing miracle cure you where nobody else has *ever* been cured. Perhaps you will find a good article in *Colliers* or *National Geographic* to bring about a cure. Three is that you most likely die in about five to eight weeks when you sort of explode inside.”

Nothing Hawkeye could say would sway the attorney from his convictions, and so they left to go their separate ways twenty minutes later.

Even though it was his day off, Hawkeye went to the Hospital, climbed into his office through the big, swing-out windows that overlooked the lawn and parking lot, and sat down, fingers steeped under his nose, in deep thought.

This is where Trapper John and Duke Forrest found him an hour later when they entered the office intending on having a “Conference.” Conferences were nearly always held at the end of the day when the doctors and nurse Flannagan got together to wind down and discuss the operations they had accomplished and further treatment of said patients.

They began, traditionally, with the flipping of the switch (which both signalled the switchboard to hold all but emergency calls and turned on the **IN CONFERENCE —DO NOT ENTER** sign mounted outside the door) followed by the unlatching of the file drawer, the removal of the bottles, mixing of the martinis and sometimes, when Hawkeye and Traper John felt like it, a game of darts.

The dartboard was, as must be admitted, not regulation. Instead of the alternating rings and colored pie sectors, it contained the face of a man. It was a man wearing a regulation U.S. Army officer’s cap and with the insignia of the Medical Corp on his lapels.

The face was remenicient of a human and ferret breeding experiment gone horribly wrong, and the man had a silly, almost idiotic, smile on his face.

It was a picture of their nemesis while in Korea. Not an enemy national, but Major Frank Burns, nominally a surgeon and also nominally acceptable to be thought of as human.

The mouth, nose and especially the eyes were so filled with holes that the black and white glossy photo looked more like a mask to scare children on Halloween than anything else.

Doctors Jones and Forrest were arguing on a finer point of the previous evening's baseball game and failed to notice the Trapper John had stopped short on seeing Hawkeye. The trio sort of tumbled into the room followed by Esther stepping over the pile and heading for the file cabinet.

Hawkeye barely looked up at the commotion.

"What in the name of Ol' Miss is wrong, Hawkeye?" Duke got out as he straightened up.

"Huh? Somebody fix me a martini and get that sign lit," he grumbled in return. "I have a first class problem brewing."

Over the first, second and third round of drinks he told them about Jackson Rimmer, his condition, and his insistence to not have the needed operation.

Everyone agreed that his chances were somewhere between *practically* zero and zero, especially once they saw the x-rays and lab work.

"Speaking as the only one tall enough and heavy enough to still be considered sober, the 'Chucker told them, "and as someone who understands the deliterious effects of prolonged morphine use on the brain, I gotta ask how long has he been on the stuff and when are you gonna get him off it?"

"Three weeks on thirty milligrams, then a week at one-hundred and another at three hundred. I know I can go higher but I don't want him to feel so good that

he gives up. The old bastard ought to be good for another twenty years of me taking his money on the golf course, but I gotta get in here and cut him!”

“I know I’m not a duly licenses physician like you fine gentlemen,” Esther began in a tone that said she not just had a question but a point to make, “but is this affecting his practice of law?”

Three sets of doctor’s eyes swiveled to Dr. Jones.

“Oh. Me again. Well, it depends on the person. White people like yourselves can stay pretty normal with the pain just barely managed for months, but someone with black skin like me might have a bad time after a month. My guess is that the lawyer Rimmer will be okay for another few weeks if Hawkeye keeps him at three hundred mils. What are your plans?”

Hawkeye held out his glass and Esther refilled it from a pitcher she just finished concocting.

“I want to cut the son of a bitch really bad,” he declared. “Cut as in both reducing his drugs and jerking that gall bladder out as soon as possible. The problem is that he is, at least in the state of Maine, considered to be both an adult and able to make his own decisions at this point.”

“And by the time he gets to where he can’t make the decisions?” Esther put in.

Hawkeye just shook his head.

She turned to stare at Trapper John.

“Put it this way,” he told her. “Fifty-fifty at the time he where can’t handle his own affairs, seventy-thirty against a week later, and about ninety-ten a week later. Against!”

By the time it came for them to head for home –in the doctors’ case—and for Esther to go next door to her apartment in the Nursing School, they had come to no conclusion other that one suggestion of hiring a gang of

renegade Canadians to kidnap Jackson Rimmer and bring him, either kicking and screaming or fully unconscious, to the hospital.

Legal action was out as the judge they would need to convince detested Jackson Rimmer so greatly everyone figured he'd laugh and tell them to let Rimmer die!

Two weeks went by with Jackson Rimmer refusing to take Hawkeye's phone calls. Even the ones made "collect" in the hopes of angering the lawyer enough to at least get on the line and shout a bit.

But the day came when the pharmacy in Portland called to see if the prescription could be renewed and the hospital switchboard operator transferred the call "to the attending physician."

"Hawkeye? It the dope dealer in Portland. He wants to keep juicing your lawyer friend. Line two."

In an instant moment of inspiration, Hawkeye picked up the phone and had a pleasant and professional conversation with the man responsible for dispensing the appropriate medications to the correct people in the proper dosages.

While Hawkeye Pierce had never heard of the man on the other end of the line, that man had most certainly heard a great deal about Hawkeye.

"Fer Christ's sake, Dr. Pierce," he said at one point. "The man's a lawyer. I could lose my license!"

"Not if I write a new prescription and drive it over to you. Not if you can't help it when an old label gets stuck on the box. And most certainly not if our Mr. X never hears anything about it."

It was agreed that simply mailing the new paperwork over would do, and their conversation ended.

Five days later, on a Sunday—not just a holy day for some, but a sacred "leave me alone" day for most doctors—Mary Pierce picked up the family phone on the

third ring.

“Hello?... Yes, this is Dr. Pierce’s home, but I’m afraid he is not available. May I take a message?... Oh. Who?... Well, wait a minute.”

She set the receiver down and went into the little side room Hawkeye and his father Big Benjy built onto their home a few years earlier to be his “den” and “safe place.”

“Benjamin?” she cooed at the closed door. “I know you hate to be bothered, but it is a man named Rimmer on the phone. He says you’ll understand.”

The door swung open and Hawkeye bolted past his startled wife.

“Jackson? What’s hangin’?” He listened for a moment before getting a small smug grin on his face. “I see,” he said, sounding both serious and concerned. “Yes. That is a bad thing. Tell you what I’ll do. I was just heading out to play nine holes. Meet me at Wawenoke and I’ll give you something stronger. It’ll knock the pain out in about ten minutes, so you might as well bring your clubs. See ya!”

He hung up before Rimmer could respond.

“Surely, Benjamin, you are not going out to play golf on the day you swore you would eventually get around to fixing the gutter that broke loose during the last spring storm. And certainly not to play golf against a man who even I could hear is in pain.”

Hawkeye kissed his bride on the forehead and explained, “This is more in the line of a forced house call. It’s just that the patient is meeting the doctor a bit more than half way. I shouldn’t be more that two hours there and then another two jerking his gall bladder at the hospital. Bye!”

“I’ve been married to that nut for more than seven years and I still don’t understand him,” she muttered to



the closing front door.

Hawkeye had been standing around shooting a few practice putts for a half hour when Jackson Rimmer pulled up. He almost felt a pang of guilt and pity when he saw how difficult it was for the attorney to get out of his Cadillac sedan. Rimmer slowly moved over to where Hawkeye was lining up a good fifteen footer.

“Shhhhhh,” he told the lawyer. “Three bucks says I hit this dead on.” Not waiting for an answer he stroked his putter forward and connected with the ball which rolled toward the cup and made a nice little half ring around the edge before dropping in.

“Bang!” Pierce shouted causing a trio on the first tee to turn and tell him to be quiet.

“Listen. I’m here and I’m in a lot of pain, Hawkeye. That last batch of pain pills have done nothing for me. Not even when I took them two at a time.”

“Tsk-tsk-tsk,” tutted Dr. Pierce. “The phrase is ‘*physician* heal thyself, not ‘shyster.’ But as I told you on the horn, I’ve got something better. New and about twice as strong without the dizziness and other symptoms. Now, this is just part of a professional sample the drug company sent me, but not only does their literature promise amazing results, we’ve used it on post-operative patients after chest surgery and they feel so good it gets them up and out of bed after just five days, not three weeks. I bought you a Coke out of the machine over there. Take it and let me get the pill out.”

Rimmer grabbed the bottle and took a small sip to wet his dry lips.

Hawkeye looked to his right and then his left checking to see if anybody was watching. “Can’t be too careful. These aren’t supposed to be used outside the hospital.” He stood up and pretended to shake hands with Rimmer. The pill—a gelatin capsule, actually—was duly passed and the lawyer raised his hand to his

mouth. Before popping it in he took a quick glance.

The capsule was about twice the size he had seen before and was filled with three different colored medicines: bright red, a dark blue, and yellow. He popped it in and washed it down with the rest of the bottle of soda.

Gasping at the effort, he asked, “Really just ten minutes?”

Nodding, Hawkeye’s reply was, “That or maybe a minute either way. Ten is the average. Let’s go have a sit in the shade and then we’ll grab your clubs.”

They sat, barely talking about anything until Hawkeye looked at his watch. “Been eight minutes. Is it working?”

Rimmer straightened up, twisted a little to his right—the more painful side—and then to his left. A smile spread across his face.

“By god, Pierce, it is working! Not all the pain is gone but enough I think I just might be able to beat you at nine and then go dancing tonight with the wife.”

They waited another few minutes before rising. Rimmer insisted that he felt better than he had in four months and walked to his Caddie and pulled out his bag of clubs.

“So, just how good are you feeling, Jackson?” Hawkeye asked. “Good enough to humor me with a large wager?”

“Sure. I’m tired of playing for a ten buck pot. What have you got in mind? Twenty?”

Benjamin Franklin Pierce, M.D., F.A.C.S., and Chief of Surgery at the Spruce Harbor General Hospital and also at the Finestkind Clinic and Fishmarket took a silent deep breath. This was going to be it, the make or lose forever point.

“My special fund that would allow me to enjoy three nights and four days in Miami, Florida at a medical conference against your gall bladder.”

Rimmer paled but rallied. “And just how much is in this Hawkey’s Fun Bucks fund?”

“About four hundred dollars, give or take. You take the bet?”

Feeling incredibly good as well as currently about that same amount down on his various golf bets over the past two years, Rimmer nodded.

“You’re on.”

They both sported a nine handicap and were even at one under par for the first five holes. Rimmer muffed a putt on six and was down by one, but caught up when Hawkeye (purposely) hit short on seven and two putted.

They were even at the end of eight, and as they walked toward the final tee Hawkeye told his friend, “Jackson. I need to tell you something. Something important.”

“Anything as long as you don’t talk while I’m hitting.”

“Fine. I’ll make it short and sweet. That horse capsule I gave you? Well, it contained three things. Common old table sugar, some food coloring, and a dose of caffeine large enough to give you a little euphoria. And that’s it.”

Rimmer stopped. “No miracle drug?”

“Nope.”

“Nothing to take the pain away?”

“Again, I have to answer in the negative.”

Rimmer thought a minute. “You do know it hurts to high heaven in there right now, don’t you?”

“But the important thing is that you thought the miracle pill worked for you. At least long enough to get you here where I fully intend to beat you into the

ground scorewise and then collect on that bet.”

There was a bench by the final tee and they sat down.

“If I was in the least philosophical I would tell you that you have made your point. All of my reading and hope and even praying haven’t done a thing, and then you and your little trick pill make me feel like new. It’s a hard thing for a man to find out that what he has believed all his life might be up for serious debate. But, I may have to welch on that bet.”

“I figured you might and so I wrote to your mother a couple weeks ago. Here—”

Pierce pulled a folded sheet of notepaper from his golf bag and handed it to the lawyer.

*My dear Jackie,*

*When that nice Dr. Pierce wrote to me here at the care facility I was confused. But he explained everything to me about you and your bladder thing. He also was careful to Tip Toe around our religeon, but I get the feeling he is not a believer.*

*And that is fine because neither am I.*

Rimmer looked up into Hawkeye’s eyes. The doctor nodded and he went back to reading.

*I never told you but many years ago I found a new truth and that was when your father had his stroke. In the five weeks before he passed I read and I read and I read even more. I read to myself and I read to him. And he upped and died without ever opening his eyes or saying anything to me.*

No goodbye. He just died. It wasn't fair.

I also never told you about my cancer, did I? Well, I had an examination and they found something growing on my insides and so I had a hysterectomy. That was fourteen years ago.

I never read a thing and still I lived.

And when my eyes got so bad I couldn't read for pleasure, I had my cataracts taken out. Now I see better than ever before.

Don't think that you are disappointing me if you choose to live instead of suffering and leaving me behind. I truly want to be on the other side to greet you when the time comes, and I don't plan to leave for quite a few more years.

Love and Kisses.

Mom

"I'll send somebody out here to get your car, Jackson. It will be waiting for you when you get out of the hospital in a week."

They slowly walked across the fairway and to the parking lot where Dr. Benjamin Pierce helped his patient, Jackson Rimmer, get into the car and drove him to Spruce Harbor General Hospital.