

## A Sea of Grass

by Kathryn Lyde

The clouds had been hanging low all day on the golf course, but the air felt warm for October and it was a beautiful day for golfing. Players had been teeing off and crossing the fairway all afternoon, walking in and out of the tall shadows of office buildings on the perimeter. As afternoon faded to evening, one solo golfer was having a particularly great round. Allen had, incredibly, managed to hit under par on every hole so far. It was about to be the best game of his life, and, frankly, he needed this win. Work had not gone well. His mind was still reeling after the meeting with his manager, John. John's words echoed in his head between every stroke.

"Allen, this project you're working on, it's... well, a bit underwhelming."

*Whack!*

"I don't have anything against you personally, but this might not be your forte."

*Whack!*

"Maybe you're not cut out for this kind of work."

*Tap. Sink.*

The termination letter was sitting unopened on the seat of his car. He hadn't been able to make himself read it, to face the reality that the company he'd invested eight years in was done with him. His whole body was tight, muscles tense. He wondered if that intensity had given his golf game its killer edge today.

*Whack!*

Golf. It seemed like all he had left. It felt good to play golf right now. He had never been skilled enough for competitions, but that almost made the game more appealing to him. It had been his stress-free hobby outside of his stress-filled life. Whenever he felt the disappointment of his high-performing parents, the rejection of a girl, or the disapproval of John—there was always golf.

*Tap. Sink.*

Allen marked another under-par score on his card. He felt a disorienting mix of elation about this round and despair about everything else. *Wow, what a game—I'll have to tell my buddies! But my career is ruined and I have no backup plan. But what a shot!* A gust of wind picked up, combing across the grass, and a few drops of rain began to fall.

Allen glanced up and realized how dark it had grown. He scanned the course and saw the remaining players heading out. He thought he might join them, but immediately pushed the idea away. *No way am I ending this round early.* He resolutely picked up his clubs and began walking to the last hole. The rain felt cold, but Allen wasn't far from the tee box. He knew it was right at the top of the highest hill on the course. The idea occurred to him as he walked that golf

could be his new career. *Why not?* he thought. What if he became a famous golfer and John saw him on TV in the majors? He could picture himself talking to a newscaster. *Never give up on yourself*, he'd say. *I thought I was a failure. But I just needed to find work I was cut out for.* He would look straight into the camera, he decided, so John would feel the stare-down through the screen.

Allen's foot slipped on the wet grass and he hit the ground hard, sending his clubs sprawling. The rain fell faster now, and a clap of thunder filled the air. He began frantically stuffing clubs back into his bag. *Won't this storm make a great golf story?!* he thought. He decided he would casually mention it next time he saw his buddies—after, of course, mentioning his final score. He hauled the bag of clubs back over his shoulder.

The thunder rumbled again, echoing across the fairway. It boomed like John's voice. *Haha, nice fall!* it said. *Always underwhelming, aren't you, Allen?*

Allen froze. *Am I losing it?* He looked into the dark sky and a sense of uneasiness crept over him. *It's nothing, he determined, it's just in my head.* He started to go, but the whole sky suddenly filled with an enormous flash of lightning. Allen was temporarily paralyzed with fear. Stark shadows, like craggy tree branches, stood out against the edges of his vision. He realized how exposed he was on the open fairway: the only upright object in a sea of grass.

*This isn't your forte, Allen!* the John-thunder boomed again. *You're not cut out for this!*

Anger seared in Allen's veins. *I am a good player*, he thought. *I always had it in me. And this round is going to prove it!* He clutched the scorecard in his pocket and sprinted through the pelting rain. At last he reached the tee box. He yanked out his driver and teed his ball, then raised his sights towards the final hole. Gripping tightly, he swung the club behind him, raising it high over his head. *This is it. I made it. Take that, John!* he thought.

*Crack!* Allen realized with horror one instant too late that his raised club had just become the highest object on the entire course.

The flash of lightning was blinding: a column of electricity searing its way down the quickest path to the earth. As it struck Allen's raised driver, the metal crackled with electricity. Down, down, swung the club, acted on by the pull of gravity and the momentum of Allen's final, perfectly-formed swing.

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John looked at the shattered glass littered around his office the next morning: jagged shards carpeting the floor near his broken window. He shivered against the autumn breeze. *What a morning*, he thought. He glanced at the letter on his desk—the one he had given Allen yesterday, explaining his transfer to another project that better matched his skill set. He hoped the news had landed okay. It was hard to tell, since Allen had left in such a hurry. John turned to walk out when something caught his eye: the culprit responsible for his broken window. It was a blackened golf ball, melted around the edges from intense heat, lying in the corner of the room.