

Short Story Contest

November 2025

Honorable

Mention

PROMPT #1: Center your story around a character discovering a hidden door or path.

The Door to Family

by Sarah Lindsey

This key, weighing heavily in my coat pocket, reminded me why I was here. Why I was jogging through the forest behind our small cottage, looking for a door that I had only ever seen in my dreams. The oak branches covering the front of the door, surrounded by sticky moss and a circle of lilies. Birds circling above it as if waiting for someone to try to open it. For years, it's always been there in the back of my mind, waiting for me to find it. And today would be the day.

I had found the small silver key in the back of our junk drawer, where the rest of the memories mom wanted to forget sat, wasting away. I didn't think anything of it until I saw the scratches in the back, *forest entrance*. And I knew. So now I was following the path I walked every dream, as if my feet knew where to go though I'd never been before in real life. It couldn't just be for nothing, all of this had to have an explanation and I was going to find it today. And I did. It was just waiting there, like it was every dream, though the shadows of the trees cast over it as a warning of what I might find when I slipped the key in. Though I was never one to listen to warnings, hence why so much of the past was meant to be forgotten, so I didn't listen to the shadows as the key slid into the lock and clicked into place. The door swung open and I was met with a tunnel of darkness. Something lured me in and I stepped inside, bracing myself for whatever was on the other side of the door.

Dried grass. That was on the other side of the door. And a similar looking forest. Weird, it almost felt like I never went through the door at all. Had it all been for nothing? No, there was

definitely a reason that door was there. I stepped carefully through the grass, searching for any signs or living beings, and it didn't take me long to realize that I wasn't on Earth anymore. A winged creature flew overhead and tiny gnomes raced past me, not seeming bothered by a human girl walking through their land. This place seemed peaceful, well at least until I was knocked over the head with something and everything went dark.

I awoke in a dark smelly room of a cottage far too small for there to be many living here. My eyes blinked rapidly as I adjusted to the darkness, searching for signs of what exactly happened when I saw her. Her piercing blue eyes, covered by the purple bangs that decorated her forehead, glared at me as if assessing if I was a danger. She paced around where I sat on the floor, studying every inch of me.

“What are you?” She spoke coldly, her eyes like daggers through my soul.

“I-I’m human,” Was the best I could do, not sure if she was one herself or another creature that called this realm home.

“We don’t have humans.” She spoke as she poked me and examined the fabric of my clothing, “Who sent you?”

“N-no one. I found a key to the door in the forest and followed it. I didn’t know it would take me...here” I responded, feeling more and more guilty that I had followed the door. I nervously ran my fingers through my hair, revealing the butterfly tattoo I’ve had since a child.

“What’s that?” she suddenly spoke, dropping everything to stare at the mark.

“Oh the tattoo? I don’t really know, it’s always been there. Mom has me hide it since it’s not normal for my realm.” I shyly mentioned, instinctively covering it back up with my turquoise blue hair.

She didn’t seem to like that as she pushed it right back out of the way, her cold fingers tracing the lines that formed the butterflies wings. She closed her eyes as she traced each stroke of the tattoo, as if trying to figure out what it meant. She stepped back, her blue eyes wide and full of curiosity as she once again began to circle around me, searching for more pieces of the puzzle she was trying to piece together in her head. “It can’t be,” she finally said, “she’s been

missing for 16 years." Her eyes trailed to a covered photo in the back of the room, as if my presence brought more than just an inconvenience for her.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Well, an outsider shouldn't know this but the circumstances make this different. That butterfly mark is the same that my twin sister was born with. But, twins are illegal in this world. One never makes it, whether for better or worse. They're too powerful. Dad always told me that mom disappeared the same day my sister did, only the upper fairies knew what happened to them. It's been 16 years since that day, and then you show up, with the same tattoo. What kind of sick joke is this?" Her tone changed and her coldness turned to rage, "Who sent you?"

I backed up nervously, feeling her anger spread through my body, sending chills through my bones, "I-i don't know, I swear. I don't know how I have the same tattoo as your sister. I swear I just wandered here through the door...with this key," I held up the key that got me here.

She took it in her hands, her anger cooling as she traced the decor engraved in the key. She ran to a drawer and fumbled through it until she found what she wanted. A duplicate key, almost identical to mine. "It can't be." She repeated again.

Her eyes glanced towards me again and she approached. "What's your name?" She asked, though the emotions she was feeling was a mixture so confusing I couldn't identify it all.

"Ally, though my full name is Allison"

"Ally," She repeated, "I think you're my lost sister."

"What?!" I freaked out, my mind racing with the possibility that I may not be so human after all and that I had a sister, and a whole other life. All because I went through that door in the forest.

"Well, this key you used to get here, Dad made it, well he made two of them. He says that he gave one to Mom when she left to Earth with my sister, so that they could always find their way back, maybe when they lift the twin ban. But she's never used it and never visited. We always thought she just moved on from us, until you showed up. You grew up with mom, didn't you?" She handed me a photo of her mom, our mom, and my hands began to shake as the woman who raised me stared back at me on the page. I glanced up and met her eyes, filled with hope of reuniting the family she'd lost.

“That’s mom.” I spoke quietly, “You’re my sister...”

Before I could say another word, she tackled me in a hug, my eyes filling with tears as her touch felt so familiar and comforting even though we’d been strangers before. For the first time since I’d met her, I saw that we shared the same nose, the same splash of freckles, and the same crooked smile. I wanted to bring her to Mom, because maybe it would light the fire in Mom again, and I could finally have a whole family, not just a part.

“Do you want to come back to Earth with me to meet Mom?” I asked once the tears had slowed. She lit up and nodded without hesitation. She handed me back the key, which I tucked carefully into my coat pocket, though there was a lightness to it now as if it too had been waiting to find its missing piece.

Hand in hand we left her little cottage and walked back through the forest to the oak branch covered door, still surrounded by sticky moss and a circle of lilies. We stepped in together, ready to put our family back together one member at a time, never to be separated again. All because I found a key in the back of a drawer for a door that I had only ever seen in my dreams.