



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

## The Lake

by Kathryn Faulkner

Green. Blue. Glass.

I woke up in a sweat. The lake again. My dreams always seemed to go there.

I lift my heavy left arm across my body to turn on the lamp sitting on my bedside table. My hands, which still feel like they are asleep, form fists and rub my eyes. I rub a little too hard, white specs fill the black of the back of my eyelids. I can feel the cold sweat running down my spine, right where my backbone sticks out a little bit. I look around. I'm safe, in my bed.

It wasn't the first time I dreamed of that lake. There was no reason for such a beautiful sight to haunt my dreams. It seemed almost idyllic, a lake you would see in a painting hung in a museum. But there was something off about it. A feeling I couldn't quite put my finger on. An uneasiness always accompanied its view.

It had been two weeks since Ben went missing. No note. No nothing. Up and gone. That wasn't like Ben. I would know. Ben was the brother I never had. I still remember the dirty blond hair boy with blue eyes, and a soft spot for me. Our dads had grown up together, inseparable to this day. And when their wives got pregnant two months within each other, they opened an old bottle of bourbon and lit cigars to celebrate the thrilling experience of fatherhood they would soon share.

I dragged myself out of bed and slowly waddled into the kitchen, my bare feet cold at the touch of the concrete floor. Blanket still wrapped around me, I scraped the burnt bits of bacon out of the pan and plopped them onto my plate, then slowly lowered myself into an old wooden chair, quickly eating my breakfast. In front of me was a picture frame. A frame made of light, sandy wood, the same color of the hair of the sixteen-year-old boy posing in it. Posing for prom. Our high school prom.

It had been six years since that picture was taken. A night of dancing and a little underage drinking. For me it was a little, Ben not so much. Ben was the sporadic one. The life of the party, always up for an adventure. I kept more to myself, naturally shy and introverted. But I was always happy to accept his invite to tag along on one of his adventures. He loved to introduce his “lil sis” to new things. That’s what he liked to call me, even though he was my elder by six and a half weeks.

The sun was starting to strike the picture frame through the window, the beam refracting right in my face. A reminder that it was time to feed the horses. My family has lived on this farm for eighty years. Three generations of raising kids to raise kids again. Farm, family and faith was what my family lived on. What I lived on. Ben was family, and I was going to find him.

After feeding the horses, the pigs, the chickens, and any other animal that crossed my path, I went to the barn to throw on my riding boots. I slid the long, thick socks up my calves followed by my boots, slowly bringing some warmth back to my toes. It was starting to get cold outside, enough where jeans and a sweater felt comfortable, especially with the occasional slap from the cold wind.

It was my third consecutive day going out to search for Ben. Four days ago, I passed out from exhaustion, but as soon as I could jump back on my horse, I began searching again. Our families’ plots of land sat next to each other. Intertwined with each other like our lives.

Ben’s parents had talked to the authorities the day he went missing. They filed a police report, missing person’s report, and any other report they could get their hands on. The police said they were looking. Search teams had been sent out, but it didn’t seem like we were getting any closer.

I had torn apart the land around our homes on the back of Henry, my favorite horse. I searched the creek we used to jump in, the corn fields we would run in, and the equipment sheds we would hide in when we got in trouble with our parents. Searching for him the first few days he was missing was like a treasure hunt for old memories. Around every corner was something I had forgotten, a sweet memory that reignited the need to find Ben.

As I circled the perimeter of the farm, I saw a break in the fence. Odd. I had never noticed it before. It looked intentional, not like an animal had plowed through it. It was just wide enough for Henry and me to carefully pass through. I didn’t like exploring new areas, that was something I had always left for Ben. But maybe I needed to think like Ben to find him. We made our way slowly outside of the family property and began our trek deeper into the woods.

Dark. It wasn’t just that there was little light because of the overgrown trees, but an eeriness overcame Henry and I as we galloped farther into the unknown. Light coming in and out between the leaves hanger on the trees, and the leaves on the ground crunching under Henry’s hooves. I could tell Henry was beginning to be unnerved. “Just a few more minutes,” I muttered under my breath to him.

Just as Henry was signaling he was going to forcefully turn us around, I saw it. A path. Not a gravel or concrete path, but one worn down by the steps of humans and horses. Pushing down my arising anxiety, Henry and I charged forward.

And as we rode down that path, my body moving up and down on the back of the horse, I saw it in the distance. Light hitting the blue green lake like it was a pane of glass fresh out of the box. I brought Henry to a stop. The lake I saw in my dreams.

That familiar uneasiness overcame me. And there he was, staring at me. His crisp, blue eyes piercing into my soul. I gently kicked Henry, spurring a slow gallop. I kicked again, and again, and again, until he was close to a full sprint. My heart began to pound. Ben. He was there. Standing in front of the lake. When we got close enough, I pulled on the reigns causing Henry to abruptly stop, quickly hopping off. My riding boots sunk into the soft mud.

“Ben.” I cried out.

No answer.

I started walking towards him. Walking quickly turning into a jog.

“Ben, it’s me. It’s me, Olivia. Ben.”

No response.

He was standing as still as a plank of wood. The placid lake perfectly framing his body cemented upright. His two eyes lifelessly staring at me. No feeling or emotion crossing his face. With his arms falling limp beside him, I went to grab his hand.

My hand flew through his. I stared in disbelief, mouth gaping open. Slower, this time, I reached out to touch him. My fingers grazing where his face should have been.

“Ben?”

Panic starts to hit me, bile swelling up into the back of my throat.

“No, no, no. Please, no.”

My hands are moving faster now, trying to grab onto any part of him I can. But I can’t grab a piece of him. Sobs bubble out of my mouth. I drop down to my knees.

Staring up at him, tears streaming down my face, I reach for him one more time. I fail to grab onto his pant leg.

Ben. A friend. A brother.

The hope of holding his hand again or seeing his big, wide smile was extinguished like a flame thirsting for water. He slowly faded away, along with my dreams of us being reunited.

I slowly stand up. Wiping the dirt off my jeans. Feeling numb inside. I stare into the lake.

Green. Blue. Glass. I wake up in a sweat. Alone in my room. The lake again. My dreams always seemed to go there. Every day I go out to find Ben, and every night I find him in my dreams just to see him fade away.