

Haley Butzer-Collins

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Big Blue

Nestled deep in the middle of nowhere was a crooked, winding river through the swamp. Its murky depths echoed the grunts of alligators and the croaked songs of frogs as our rickety old boat carved its way through the grasses and reeds. Deeper in the wilderness, though, was a whisper, and the calling to venture deeper beyond the riverbank.

We don't know who discovered it first, only that my best friend's hawk eyes spotted the cut path and the remnants of a broken sign just outside. Only the post remained, a cracked section of particle board nailed on where the text must have been. I must have been confused because he gently whispered to me:

"You don't know, do you?"

I didn't think that one sentence would change my life.

I followed him back through the narrow path, his calloused hands gripping at my wrist. He had this earthly nature to him, as if Mother Nature poured herself into him when he was sculpted from clay, and as he guided me, barefoot, into that clearing in the middle of nowhere, I wondered just for a moment if he was even mortal. He held nature's secrets, just by knowing what the sign couldn't say.

As we stepped into the clearing, I could practically feel the air around me transforming, as though he guided me into a portal that erased all burdens and sins the moment we arrived. Rocks scraped at the tree line, their peaks dotted with the soft carpeting of moss. A ladder, gently tied to hooks in the stone with twine, lead to the top. There were rope swings too, but ancient in their motionlessness. Their ropes were frayed and painted green with algae.

Then, there was the spring, striking in its vibrancy. It was if the sky opened a vein and allowed itself to bleed its blue blood onto the earth. It's crystal depths called out to me, pulling me in deeper as my feet met the sand below the water. Wave by wave, and ripple by ripple, the lady of the spring lapped at my skin, her icy touch gently welcoming me as I trekked deeper into her embrace. I hadn't planned on swimming, but still, my white sundress danced across the water, the lace becoming one with the blue.

"What is this place?" I called to my friend, his legs dangling from the rocks above. His smile carved itself into my memory.

"Big Blue." He called from his perch in the sky. "Dad brings me here every summer."

I wish I knew then what I know now; I'd never see Big Blue after that summer night. She hadn't left us, but Mom wouldn't let me travel the swamps when she found we went off on our own, abandoning the trail. That's how kids go missing, she said. Still, I feel her calling to me, whispering desperate pleas for me to come back to visit and explore her shores once again. Now, I'm hours away, but I still miss her gentle touch.

I find her in all my writing, from characters I once thought was unrelated, to her gentle calling in all the settings I write. There was no greater tranquility than Big Blue, and we both knew it too. Not even the ocean could compare to her gentle whisper. I see her inspiration

everywhere, in the waves of the sea, in the ancient world flourishing on old stone, and even in the dreams I cling to as I sleep. She became my creativity, and she became my voice. She made me into a writer, and a storyteller, all without saying a word.

I still wonder if I'll see her again and wander into her depths once more. I wonder if I'll wear that old white sundress and let its lace dance across the water once more, or write another story from her rocky peaks. Perhaps that's an adventure for another day...but another day can't come soon enough.

I may have left Big Blue, but Big Blue never left me.