

Children of the Lake

A story

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On silver summer days, when no clouds graced the sky and gold tinged the very air, a field at the center of a small town felt like heaven on earth. Nearly every child spent long days congregated at the field, participating in tag or hide and seek, or crowded around a boy with a book whose voice dripped with honey and watermelon juice. These were days to be fondly looked back on when one wanted to feel the magic they'd lost with age. The ticks which clung to the tall grass and the late-evening mosquitos weren't considered and once or twice a child would disappear for a week or two. Those children would be barely an afterthought until their unnoticed return. He or she would simply slip back to the group as if they'd never been gone.

But we aren't here to talk about the field. For, just a few miles away a lake had a much more interesting story to offer. You see, perfect places on perfect days are not without their flaws and the lake was the place where the flaws gathered. It was itself a magical place, where the water was so clear you could see right down to the rocky floor at the deepest points, and more often than not mist clung to the surface of the water on damp nights. A rainbow or a star would show on the still surface and old trees leaned over the edge of the shore to see their reflections. At a particular clearing on the furthest edge of the lake (every aspect of the town was judged by its relation to the field, the townspeople's crowning glory), gathered four or five outcasts. They had been shunned from the field for various reasons, a summer homer who hadn't earned entry over the winter months, a girl who cheated at duck duck goose, and a boy who had never quite recovered from his weeks of absence. There were others, they were too new to know though, or too stubborn to say why they weren't allowed in on the whimsy. They called themselves the Children of the Lake and they resented the Fielders.

On a particularly fine day, Goose, who'd gained the nickname for her fall from grace, decided it was time to swim. Half-finished food was strewn out on a blanket near the water, a picnic packed by the New Girl's mom, and a bit of crust clung to Goose's shorts when she stood. The Children of the Lake, who had tired of running home every time they decided to swim, had begun to store their swimwear in the hollow of a tree, and the kids all crowded around it to find whichever suit would fit them best (the Children of the Lake shared everything). Silently, Lone Star, who was named for the tick which had given him the allergy that sent him to the waterfront, flicked the squished-up crust from Goose's shorts. He'd skipped out on most of lunch on account of his allergies and he felt a tad faint, though he wouldn't admit it.

Lily had been sent to the Lake for her cowardice when the other children passed around a stolen bottle of brandy and she was eager to prove the Fielders wrong. She was thankful to be able to pass off the nickname as something cooler to the new kids, but the others knew it was short for Lily Liver. She was always the fastest to accept a dare and the first to try something she thought could be dangerous. In a pair of swimming trunks and a half top she was in the water

before the others. As the first, Lily got to choose what water game they'd play and excitedly she suggested the rock pile they'd started last night.

Slowly steeping in the crystal water, the children dove down deeper and deeper until their ears stopped popping, Lily always the one to show up a new record. Contraire, a short girl who refused to reveal why she left so was named for her contrarian attitude, had swum to the middle of the water and was determined to dive deeper than Lily. The Children of the Lake had all gathered around her to witness the esteemed feat. Contraire closed her eyes when she dove as, in all her Lake summers she'd never gotten over the sting of water in her eyes. She had just barely reached the bottom and could barely think over the pressure headache forming in her temple when she reached blindly for a rock. Instead, her hand clutched something soft and fleshy. She opened her eyes and tried to scream at the sight but only water entered her lungs, flooding air out of her and into the water.

She violently kicked at the depths, trying to get far far away from the hand protruding from the sand. When she had broken the surface and coughed all the water out of her lungs, she frantically described how she had held hands with a corpse. At the news, Lone Star, who had already felt ill, lost his grip on consciousness and began to sink. Instantly, the Children of the Lake jumped into action. They may have never admitted it, but they had a stronger bond than any Fielder could ever hope to feel and none of them were ready to let anything befall one of the others. The boy who had a summer house in town and who went by Posh, would have broken half of the Lake Children's records had they been timing him, but in his mission to get help, he hadn't the time. Tattle, the newest member of the group and the strongest swimmer dove down to stop Lone Star's descent.

The Children of the Lake had disbanded by the next summer, becoming Fielders by order of the adults in town. Even if they wanted to keep their titles as outcasts and Lakers, the events of the summer previous had prompted a new rule: nobody under fifteen was permitted at the lake without supervision. The death of two kids will do that.