

That Summer, This Summer
by Annika K

I rested my chin on my crossed arms as I leaned on the side of the rustic, green bridge in my grandfather's backyard. Insects hummed around me as I closed my eyes and called to remembrance all the many times as a child that he reminded me of the wonders of that bridge.

"Don't forget, my young Joshua, that your great-grandfather made this bridge especially for our family. Legend says that the spirits of the water lilies will grant one wish to those who have a pure heart and a pure wish. When you wish, you must hold a water lily in your hand and whisper it to it. Then you must gently place it back on the water."

"That sounds like a silly fairytale to me, Grandpa. Are water lily spirits *actually* real?"

A splash in the pond stirred me out of my thoughts. I glanced over to see a frog enjoying itself in the cool water. I smirked, internally wishing that my life was as care-free and wonderful as that frog. My mind was too full to feel that way. Being in your last year of high school, working part-time, and having to take care of your aging grandfather is a lot to have on your plate, but that just about sums me up.

Yes, the same grandfather who told me about the secrets of the bridge was not in good health. It had been eight years since that summer when I learned about it, and i'm being completely honest when I say that I never fully forgot about it. In the back of my mind, I always thought about whispering my wish to the 'water lily spirits'. I never told anyone about that day in the garden with my grandfather, for fear that they would make fun of me for believing in childish fairytales like that.

It was spring break, and the weather was so beautiful that I couldn't resist spending the whole day out in my grandfather's garden by myself. I stood on that wonderful, old, magical, bridge, just thinking about what I would wish for.

"Don't worry about it right now. You can save your wish for sometime later in life when you really need it." I told myself. Little did I guess of what my grandfather would say to me the next day before he passed.

I twisted the bottom of my school uniform jacket around my finger as I waited for the doctor to let me into the hospital room. My mom had called me during class and said that my school would let me leave right away to tell my grandfather goodbye. I immediately left for the hospital, trying not to let my emotions out as I drove.

My dad burst into the hallway and joined me by the door to my grandfather's room, breathing heavily as we waited. He had been out of town for work, but was allowed to come as soon as he heard what was happening. It was *his* father, after all.

The doctor stepped out of the room and faced us. "Now's the time to tell him goodbye. He can hear you and understand most of what you say, but it's not likely he'll respond. I'm sorry."

I nodded, not moving my eyes from my sneakers. Giving the doctor a quick glance, I followed my father into the room.

Grandfather was lying straight on the bed, silent and unmoving. My dad joined my mom by his bedside, where she was watching his breathing with a hand on the bed railing. I walked slowly towards them, my eyes glued to the oxygen tubes that helped my grandfather to breathe. I started to sweat from the stuffy room and uncomfortable atmosphere. Everyone felt as if they would break everything by uttering even one word.

My fingers laid gently on my grandfather's arm. He opened his eyes and looked directly at me, and in that moment, time seemed to pause. I couldn't move. I couldn't speak. I could hear my mother gasp from across the bed, and then rush to tell the doctor what had happened, but I couldn't do anything.

The doctor rushed in just as my grandfather whispered, "Now's the time to make your wish, my boy."

His eyes closed and his breathing slowed. The heart monitor went flat and I froze, everything whirling around me. The doctor and nurses ran to the bedside and began trying everything they could to get his heart going again.

Nothing worked.

Grandfather was gone.

My parents rushed to my side and embraced me, my mom sniffing behind me. We silently left the hospital, and I returned home rather than back to school. I didn't talk to anyone. It was like my brain had stopped, only it hadn't, because my grandfather's last words were loud and clear in my mind. They didn't want me to forget them anytime soon, and I wasn't going to.

Arriving at home, I went straight to the garden. I needed to be on that bridge. I needed to talk to a water lily spirit.

I marched right up to the edge of the water and picked up a big, pink and white flower in both hands, lifting it up to my lips. My mouth opened, but... I paused. I didn't know what to say! It's not like I was gonna ask for my grandfather to come back, because I knew that couldn't happen. The water lily spirits would probably get mad at me for asking for something that I knew well I couldn't have.

And I wasn't going to wish for a thousand dollars or a new car. That would be a waste of my one wish. What did I need so badly that my grandfather would choose his last words in the way that he did?

As I was deep in thought of what my grandfather could possibly want me to have, an old memory came from the deepest spaces in the back of my mind. It happened like this:

[Summer time in Grandfather's garden, 4 years previous]

I rushed into the orchard to find Grandfather picking some beautiful red apples and placing them in a basket on the grassy floor. As I neared him, I slowed down and walked nervously up to him.

"Grandfather," I asked. "Do you believe in soulmates?"

He chuckled and wiped his hands on his overalls. "I think so; why do you ask?"

I looked around nervously and rubbed my hands. After a moment or two of awkward silence, I sat down on the second to last step of the ladder and sighed. "I've been looking at the photo album, and

I can't help but be jealous of how cute you and grandma are together. Do you think i'll find my soulmate before I die?"

Grandfather put an empty basket upside-down next to me and sat down. "Love is a beautiful thing that I want you to experience, my boy. I wi- I, I wis-" He paused and looked down at his hands, seeming to be at a loss for words. I said nothing, waiting for him to finish his sentence.

"I really hope you do, Shua."

[Spring time in Grandfather's garden, present day]

It only then occurred to me that my grandfather was about to make a wish that day years ago in the orchard. Of course, he wasn't at the pond telling it to the water lilies, so why didn't he finish? I figured it wouldn't work unless you did it exactly how he told me, but maybe there's more to it than what I was told.

If he could still make a wish even without all those details, why did he stop? My guess is that my grandfather had already made his wish. I don't know for sure. Even though we were really close all my life, and told each other almost everything, he never told me about *his* wish. He must have made one at some point, without my knowing.

Anyway, back to the present.

I let out a heavy sigh on the water lily I was still holding and placed it back on the water. What was I to do? Of course I didn't want to disappoint my grandfather by not obeying his dying words.

The cool breeze blew my dark bangs in my eyes and I brushed it away quickly, then sitting down on the bank of the pond and pulling up small handfuls of grass. I lifted my hand and watched the blades blow over me in the breeze, some of them landing on the water.

In that moment, realization hit me. I jumped to my feet and hastily scooped up the nearest lily. Lifting it to my lips, I closed my eyes and uttered the words that I knew I was supposed to say.

"I wish I could find her."

I set the flower back on the gently rippling water and stepped back, smiling as the breeze pushed the flower down the slow current. I felt fulfilled for the first time in...ever, probably. It was the best feeling; knowing that I had just lifted many things from my constant thoughts, and I had done what my grandfather had been waiting for.

Now that it was over, I just had to wait for it to come true. Ugh, waiting is the worst part. I walked back onto the bridge and rested my head on my folded arms as I had done just about everyday as I sat deep in thought. I closed my eyes and let my mind go blank...

My ears perked up at the sound of footsteps approaching me.

"Joshua?"

THE END.