

The Pond
By Annika Thakarar

She came under the cover of darkness to sit beside the pond. Moonlight shone off the surface of the glassy water, like a flashlight's glow. She sat hushed and motionless.

The shadow of an owl passed overhead, but it made no sound. A quick, silent hunter. Mice scurried for cover under the ever-growing thicket of thorns and bracken, disappearing into the darkness that framed the tree trunks. She watched, eyes piercing the dark. Waiting. The owl passed and still she sat, arms folded around her legs, hair bouncing in the gentle breeze.

Then, suddenly, a call split the air. Full of despair and loneliness and longing, a wolf's howl. Sharper than a knife's blade, sadder than a thousand tears. Yet free. Eternally free and wild, in one howl the wolf speaks of racing through the forest, pack at his side, fur whipping in the wind. The feeling that he could run forever, never stopping and never once looking back at the life he left behind.

The howl did not startle her, as she sat more calmly than ever. The wolf called again, but it was farther away. She moved now, looking down at the pond near her feet. Slick, glossy lily pads floated on the surface, moving with the wind as though they wanted to go ashore. But their thick stems kept them tethered to the bottom. Unlike the wolf, they were not free. Still, they were content. They were stuck in the pond, but why move, when the pond gave them everything they wished for? Why go searching for something you don't need? They had no knowledge of ever wanting to be free, only the simple fact that they were not.

She looked at the lily pads, considering them. They looked plain and green, but soon, she knew, delicate pink flowers, petals tinted white at the ends, would emerge. *Sometimes the simplest things are the most beautiful.* Her hand brushed the round, green face of those simple lilies.

A rustling made her look up. Emerging out of the reeds surrounding the pond, a heron stepped, its tall legs swirling the water. It looked at her haughtily, its gaze sharp and inquisitive, wondering who this strange animal was and what it was doing in its pond. After a few seconds, it looked away, dipping its long, graceful neck to the water's surface. She watched it feed, hands fidgeting ever so slightly in her lap. Such a fine creature would never allow itself to be tethered like those lilies.

When it had eaten its fill and moved on, she stood up. She left the pond, leaving the owl and the mice and the shadows and the moonlight and the lilies and the wolf and the heron. She smiled as she walked away.

Because in those moments, she was not observing nature. She was part of it.