



CHAPTER 1 – Lissy’s Wish

The crisp evening air, promising snow, bit at Lissy’s nose. She listened to the trees around her dropping the last of their leaves. Indian Summer would be over all too soon and Thanksgiving would arrive. A chilling breeze caught the last few leafy stragglers.

Just like me, Lissy thought, pulling on her red mittens, *always last, and too chicken to jump*. The golden leaves swirled about her and she watched them fall to the ground. ‘Catch one from the treetop, and you’ll get your wish’, Grandma Brown once told her.

The thought of her grandmother suddenly made Lissy sad. Three weeks had passed since she had died and Lissy

was still feeling the pain and loneliness from her loss. She was holding the ragged, handmade book of a Child's Garden of Verses, and she hugged it tighter. The book was a comforting thing because it reminded Lissy of her beloved grandmother. When she was born, a woman that her grandmother knew had made the book for Lissy. The woman had cut each delicate letter and picture out of magazines and glued them onto bright yellow cloth. Whenever her grandmother visited, they would take the book out and sit for hours, looking at the pictures and reading the musical rhymes. Grandma had always said that there were secrets hidden in these pictures and rhymes, meant only for Lissy—that's why it was special. Its worn, soft cover felt like her grandmother's cotton summer dress and smelled of her rose water perfume, and so had become even more special. It was the one thing in Lissy's life that gave color to days of gray. She gave the book one more hug and placed it on the table for her mother to pack into the car.

Lissy, her brother, Bob, and their parents had spent the weekend at her uncle's cabin up in the northern woods. She had always loved the music of the lake and pines and often felt that it was her real home. Now they were closing up the cabin and packing the car to go home. Lissy inhaled the spicy sweetness of leaf litter and decided to run down the wooden steps to say goodbye to the lake.

Her moment of autumn bliss was shattered by the sound of Bob running down the steps behind her. She hurried down the last few, in hopes that he wouldn't push her down them again. "*Out of the way, Geek,*" he yelled, his

blonde hair flying.

Bob was four years older than Lissy and at thirteen, was already changing into a young man. He was smart, athletic and handsome. She would never be like Bob, and her own mother often reminded her of that. And even though he was sometimes mean to her, she couldn't help but to be in awe of him. She secretly wished she could be like him and win the love of her parents. Instead, she was clumsy, awkward and dumb, and she was sure that would never change.

Bob ran to the end of the dock to throw stones out into the shallow, sandy lake. The wind blew across the gray water, making silvery-white foam that frosted the waves.

"Mother said to watch out for the white cats," she yelled to Bob, trying to spoil his fun, "they'll take you away and drown you!"

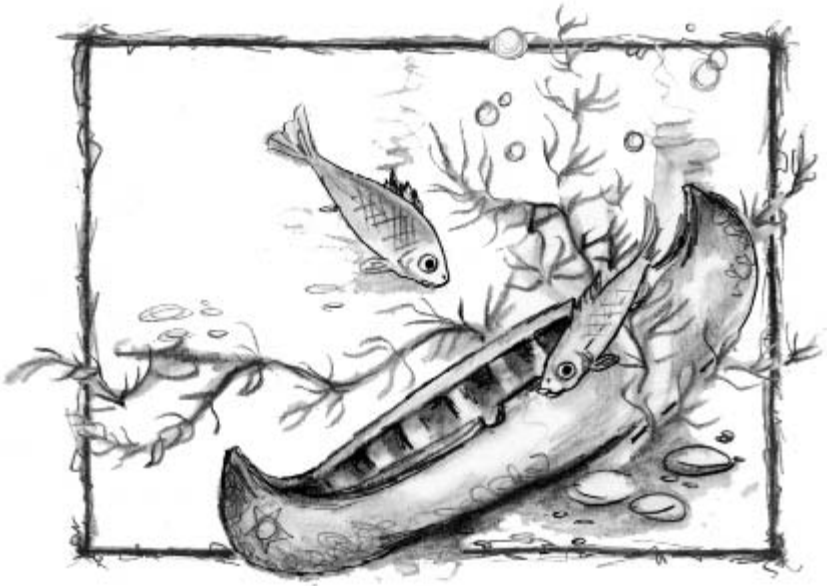
"You mean the white caps, *stupid*. They only get you if you're swimming. Gosh, how can you be so *dumb*?" he said to her as he skipped a stone across the choppy water. The setting sun slipped behind angry looking clouds nearly the same color as the water. An icy gust blew across the lake and lifted Lissy's collar, slapping her in the face. She looked away so that Bob couldn't see the tears in her eyes—just one more thing he could tease her about: being a crybaby.

I wish I could be here always. I don't want to go back home, she thought as her wet, blue eyes followed the last golden leaf from the top of the maple near the shore. It twirled and spun, gracefully floating downward. Lissy reached out and it landed in her hand.

“It fits like a glove,” she said, pressing it close to her chest as if to lock this beautiful lake memory inside her heart. Holding it out before her, she let the wind take her wish. She watched the leaf as it caught the breeze and sailed across the lake.

She looked up at Bob, who was still skipping stones. Then she heard Mother call for them in the distance. *Her wish didn't come true, they were ready to leave.* Another hot tear escaped and slid down her icy cheek.





CHAPTER TWO – The Gift

Lissy walked down to the water's edge to say goodbye to the darting minnows and the little crayfish that swam backwards. For an instant, sunlight peeked through the racing clouds and sparkled bright upon the water.

That's when she saw it. She caught a glimpse of something red bobbing up and down near the dock. There, tangled in the weeds, was a small plastic canoe, not much longer than her finger. Her heart leaped at the prize before her! She took off her mitten and pulled the canoe out of the water. She smiled, turning it over in her hand. It was perfectly detailed. She ran her finger over the smooth toy and noticed a small chunk taken out of its left side. What a wonderful surprise, this little gift from the lake!