

SPRING 2023 | VOL 5 | ISSUE NO. 10

# THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT

GLOBAL ART & LITERACY MAGAZINE



## NATURE & ENVIRONMENT

BLISSFUL US



# THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT

GLOBAL ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE

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**DESIGNER**     **Avika Bansal**

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VOICE & VERSE

# THE BLISSFUL PURSUIT

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# A Rainbow Ocean

by Andrea Wu

I squeeze my eyes shut in a tight, narrow line, scrunching my face until it contorts in fear, while wrinkles run from my chin to my forehead. Dread twists in my gut, and my body tightens like a rock at my sudden elevation from the ground. As if going down a rollercoaster ride, I hold my breath as my heart drops to my feet, overwhelmingly painstaking while equally addictive. This time, though, the usual glowing anticipation of a thrilling ride is stripped away by the uncertainty the adventure takes with its new form. I ensconce myself in my own world of darkness and suppress a shiver that tingles at the very tip of my nerves. I listen, despite wearing heavily-padded headphones, to the noise around me stumbling and falling just to rise back up, a mixture of the whirling propeller, howling wind, and my own inaudible screams loud enough to shatter every part of my organs, shooting a freezing current right through my spine. Pressing firmly against the back of my seat, I count my breaths as I inhale and exhale, stop, and repeat once more. My body freezes at the thought of hovering seven thousand feet above a perilous reef with waves that lurch and splash at the enormous protruding stones, ready to devour me at any second.

“Three minutes!” My mom heightens her voice rivalling the roaring and clattering of the turboshaft engine. “Three minutes until we land, and yet you have not opened your eyes to see the view!”

My fear of the unknown from both above and below crushes me like the meat between two pieces of bread in a hand-toaster. With my heart pounding restlessly, I recall how I came onboard this wild helicopter ride across the Great Barrier Reef.



The sun beams amidst the azure blue sky. As I stand by the ocean shore, a gentle zephyr tickles my cheeks while it nudges at the dotted feathery clouds, morphing them into shapes of deformed cotton candy. The air smells pleasant with the occasional surge of a warm breeze wafting towards me from the lines of bakeries down the road. With the majority of my childhood spent living in Western China, I am deeply familiar with landscapes of mountains and lakes, but am foreign to the coasts. Here, in Australia, despite well into September, the hot summer stubbornly scoffs at the coming of a new season, blowing its arid breath in the air I sit on the benches covered by the extended umbrella of a small convenience store and look into the opening. Kids my age scream and laugh as they begin a water fight in the shallow ends of the ocean. The beach, speckled by all colours of towels and bags, is strewn with posing, photogenic tourists. From afar, a tiny white dot grabs my attention as it beams under the sunlight; it moves further from shore, into a world of mysteries not yet explored. Though I'm not afraid of the unknown within the ocean, I wonder what extends beyond the shallow ends humans have long claimed as their natural aquatic playground.

Mom interrupts my thoughts as she returns from her ritual of browsing the roadside boutiques. "We're going on a helicopter ride to check out the coral reefs!" She holds two tickets in her hand grinning from ear to ear.

Mom points towards the far dock where a whirlybird has just taken off, its gargantuan blades swirling as the body shifts from left to right. My stomach surges, and I quickly avert my gaze. Being someone who enjoys tranquillity and a rather leisurely afternoon spent building sandcastles on the beach, I am wary of taking on a new form of adventure that would inevitably challenge my fear of heights.

The walkway to the helipad seems endless. As I stand gazing at the monstrous contraption, my twelve-year-old body cowers at this goliath. The sparse patches of grass are being blown helplessly by the enormous blades of the helicopter, which spins so fast that a low hum resonates inside my ears like mosquitos flapping their wings at 800 times per second. Mom reaches over and fastened my seatbelt, uncomfortably tight. I hold my breath, and all that is going through my mind is how my life is now in the hands of rows upon rows of illuminated buttons and controls.

—

“Two minutes.” Mom howls again, tapping at my shoulder. “Look at the water below us, the coral reef, oh! And all those different coloured fish! Open your eyes and look at the world around you.” She insists, “We’re not going to get this view anywhere else.”

“One minute!”

Perhaps I'm losing control of my facial features from squeezing them so tightly, or perhaps my curiosity has momentarily bested my concerns. Though my body is tense, my eyes open in a straight line and I peek at the window to my right.

My heart skips a beat.

Limbs trembling, one second is enough for my eyes to become glued to the striking view. Around me, the windows have been thoroughly polished to a gleaming clarity. I don't feel suppressed like I usually do in confined spaces; rather, a feeling of weightlessness settles inside me. The world grows quieter.

I'm listening, and the world is listening to me.



On the right, a pod of dolphins glides swiftly in the water, playfully leaping out to create half-circles, reminding me of meteors shooting through the sky; each one holds its unique path. And the fish! Schools of fish sway from right to left in larger groups, as if guided by unseen hands; their movements cover the sea with a million colours. They merge with other species to form brilliant patterns, swiftly swimming together and then breaking apart, in sync with nature's natural rhythm, creating an art piece that is truly alive. As I slowly allow myself to absorb more of nature's gifts, they suddenly disperse and form a compact small ball within their school, isolating the colours like a kaleidoscope with an infinite variety of changeable patterns. To the left, coral of different shades and sizes covers the ocean like a quilt. Though it separates into patches, thin branches join the different clumps to form a single massive mosaic.

The helicopter descends closer to the surface of the ocean. The coral reefs now look like a meticulously stacked flower castle, all blossoming and blushing as I make out the finer details. I speed through this forever-extending garden at 120 metres per hour, gliding freely like a bird as I chase the day. All my apprehension is thrown to the back of my head, and I feel nothing but awe. *Unreal, all too perfect to be real.* Seeing everything in a 360-degree view makes me want to stop time forever. *Has the world always been so magnificent?* I exhale and lay back in my seat. Yet, among the dazzling patterns, something feels off. As if in a dream, I am conscious of my being and the beings around me, drifting smoothly over the water, the space below the ocean extending forever beyond, all too exposed, all too fanciful.

---

A surge of memory rushes into my mind. I suddenly see my five-year-old self in Kindergarten, sitting quietly on a minuscule chair while I engaged in the map colouring activity I had anticipated all day.

"The ocean is dark blue." Ms. Deng lifted a dark blue marker with her bony fingers, "only dark blue." She stressed.

Despite her consistent effort, the loud chatter and excitement which pervaded the class soon drowned out her voice as kids grabbed at varieties of markers in a scurry, layering all the colours they found to create an ocean that merely existed within their imaginations. A boy beside me held up his paper after an intense scrambling and scraping of markers. "My ocean is a sea of rainbows!" he exclaimed. "Look at my masterpiece!" as he held it up for all the students to see.

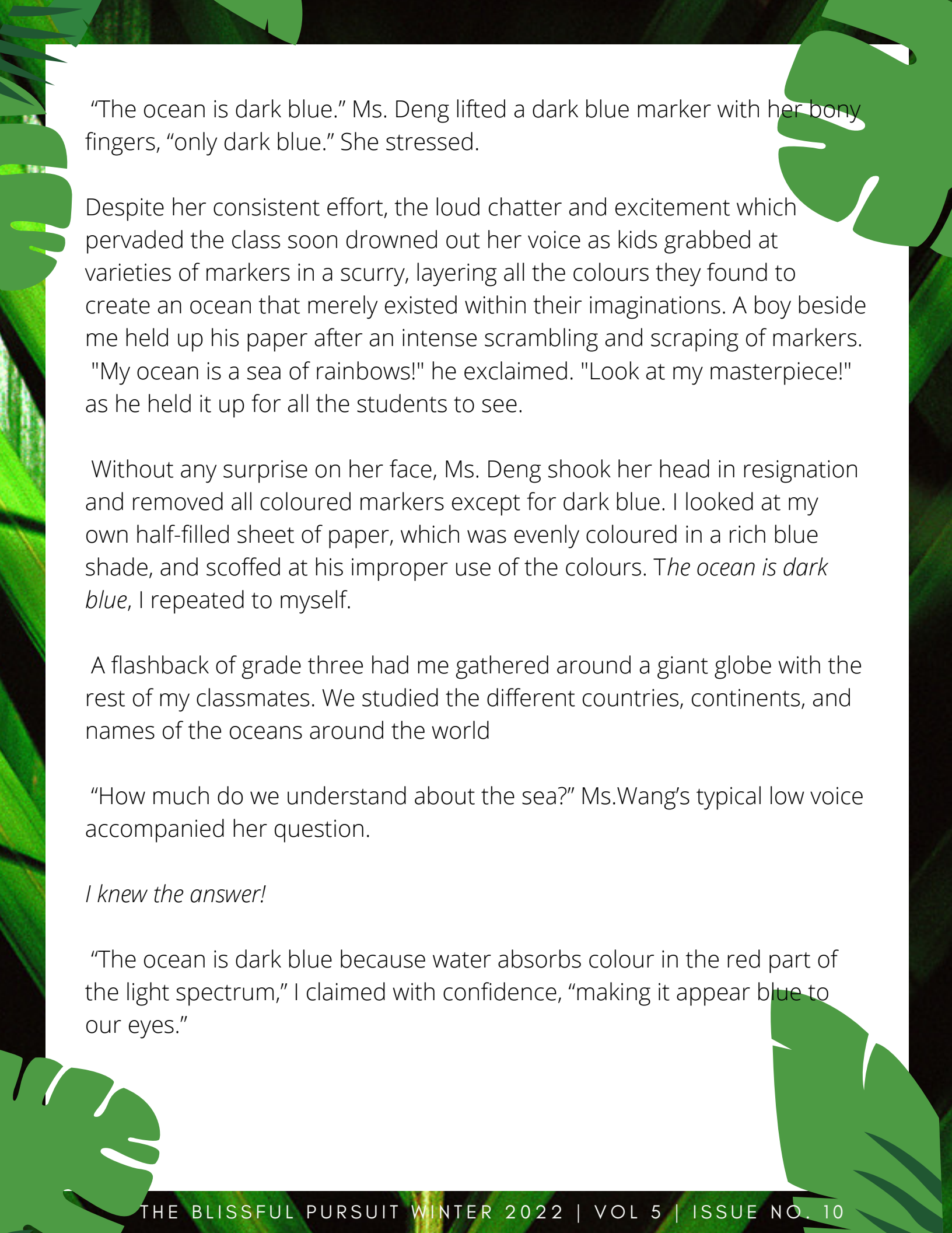
Without any surprise on her face, Ms. Deng shook her head in resignation and removed all coloured markers except for dark blue. I looked at my own half-filled sheet of paper, which was evenly coloured in a rich blue shade, and scoffed at his improper use of the colours. *The ocean is dark blue*, I repeated to myself.

A flashback of grade three had me gathered around a giant globe with the rest of my classmates. We studied the different countries, continents, and names of the oceans around the world

"How much do we understand about the sea?" Ms. Wang's typical low voice accompanied her question.

*I knew the answer!*

"The ocean is dark blue because water absorbs colour in the red part of the light spectrum," I claimed with confidence, "making it appear blue to our eyes."



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“Yes!” Ms.Wang nodded in satisfaction, “And to be more specific, an ocean is a body of water that separates two continents. Make sure you remember that for the quiz too . . .”

—

The rest of her words are drowned out in my mind as I am suddenly pulled back into the current moment of time. I look out the window and take one last glance at the water full of fish and corals while the helicopter draws near the helipad and securely lowers to a stop. Oh! How I had once been so confident in my knowledge about the ocean, marine life, and its different geographic locations by simply doing well on my tests and writing good papers in school! Without truly immersing myself in the natural world and learning from my own eyes, I would have never seen the beauty that lies within the water.

Sitting by the ocean’s shore, I gather myself from both the fear and awe of the ride. Gentle breezes caress my bangs as I calmly gaze at the kids playing in the shallow ends, families celebrating on the beach, and tourists who have flown over half of the world just to get a glimpse of the extraordinary view.

*Why would the tourists travel this far despite their extensively preoccupied life?*

In kindergarten, I thought I had learned the colour of the ocean. I came up with my better definition during social studies in grade three: a dark blue body of water that separates two continents.

*Certainly, people do not come here just to verify a predigested definition of something so commonly known.*

When I gaze across the water, I see lives of a million different colours painting the ocean. As they dance and clash with each other, I am once again amazed at the complexity of the marine world; how each individual is destined for their own path, yet these paths intervene at times with those of others. In front of me is a water that is animate, a water that is alive, a water that is completely accepting of the differences in individuals.

In front of me is a rainbow ocean.

**\*\***

### **About the author**

My name is Andrea Wu and I am a high school junior at Crofton House School in Vancouver, B.C. Outside of school, I have always been passionate about journalism and music, and I often find myself lost in my own world when writing or playing a musical instrument. In this writing piece, I recounted my experience riding a helicopter for the first time in Australia while discovering the magic of the ocean and marine life. As someone who has rarely seen the ocean and only learned about it through an academic lens, I was thrilled to be able to see everything from a unique perspective true to my own eyes.



# A Breath of Fresh Hair

by Vincent Lu

Global warming is related to the extreme heat and droughts that cause the burning and loss of forests. Much of this destruction is caused by human activities such as breathing, and producing and burning resources like natural gas, coal, and oil. These human caused carbon emissions have led to an increase in global temperatures resulting in destruction to our planet. We have a natural solution to this problem growing right in front of our eyes and sometimes even in our backyards—trees. Trees take in our carbon emissions and produce oxygen for us. For far too long we have been threatening our own existence by cutting down trees whether it's for space or resources.

Even though trees give us the oxygen we need to breathe, we cut them down for everything from paper to building homes. Humans have been cutting down trees at a rate much faster than they can regrow. This is a problem because trees give us the oxygen humans need to breathe on a daily basis. They also take in the carbon emissions we emit that can damage the environment. A human emits 2.3 pounds of carbon dioxide per day, and with close to 8 billion people living on the planet, this provides a challenge for trees to take in all our carbon emissions. It isn't helping that we are also constantly cutting down trees to make products that usually emit more carbon dioxide during manufacturing. Instead of destroying trees, we should be replanting forests and protecting them from the negative effects of global warming. Trees are the main thing countering our carbon emissions. A fully grown tree can provide oxygen for up to four people. Since there are eight billion people living on the planet, we need at least two billion trees to supply our need for oxygen and more so that it can even out the carbon emissions in the atmosphere.

Our existence is heavily dependent on the availability of oxygen, and oxygen is a vital molecule produced by trees and has been an important part in allowing animals like humans to thrive. Since humans walked the earth, trees have always been our partner in eliminating carbon dioxide and producing life supporting oxygen. The problem is that every single day we take oxygen for granted, and we cut down trees for wood to make buildings or paper without regard to what trees do for us. Without trees, humans won't be able to breathe, the world will be extremely hot, and the earth will lose its ozone layer, making it similar to many planets that are in outer space—uninhabitable planets.

To prevent our planet from becoming a frozen wasteland, humans need to preserve trees instead of cutting them down. We need to contain our carbon emissions that indirectly spark fires, in turn affecting the environment and leading to the burning of more trees. More trees eliminated equates to more carbon emissions in the air, leading to fire and droughts and causing a chain of events possibly resulting in the end of human existence. Instead of destroying trees, we should focus on planting more trees so they can absorb the carbon from the atmosphere, which will lessen heat in the air. This reduction of heat will most likely lead to fewer droughts and wildfires, which could be our only window of survival.

If we wish to continue to live on the planet, we need to protect trees in order to increase our chance of survival. Many people and organizations are raising awareness of the importance of planting trees. An organization called The Nature Conservancy has already begun a campaign called Plant a Billion Trees, which is an effort to raise awareness and attempt major forest restoration to the earth. This effort is an example of how humans can save billions of trees on a global level, but on a personal level we can take care of trees in our backyard and watch them grow to show our concern for nature. Humans need to view trees as living beings that work with us like we work with others in our everyday lives. It can be difficult to process the idea that our existence could end soon, but we can't give up that easily. If we all work together, humans can do almost anything.

No matter how dire the situation or however impossible the problem may seem, humans have always found a solution.

Trees are a gift of nature; we didn't need to invent them, yet they are an essential part of our survival. All we need to do is conserve the gift that we have and respect the existence of trees. If we decide to ignore this gift, we are risking our own lives. Future generations can be saved, or just live a better life, if we support nature by planting more trees for ourselves and the planet.

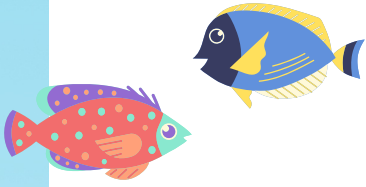
**\*\***

### **About the author**

I am Vincent Lu and I'm in 8th grade. I live in Fremont, California. I play badminton and I wanted to write for this magazine because I care about nature and am concerned about how we are abusing the planet.







# Lost from Land to Sea

by Isaac Yook

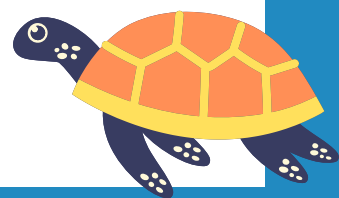
From the Mountain Gorillas living in the forests of Africa to the Vaquita dolphins swimming the oceans of Mexico, many animals are fighting for their life and place on our planet. Over the last 50 years, animal populations have declined by over 68% due to climate change, habitat loss, and hunting. In the case of the Mountain Gorillas, the forests in which they live are being destroyed. Diseases transmitted from humans are another common cause of death for the gorillas. They commonly die of respiratory diseases such as pneumonia or the flu. Due to these reasons, there are only about 1,000 Mountain Gorillas still alive in the wild, and less than 400 in captivity. While the Vaquitas of the oceans of Mexico are relatively unknown, they are even more threatened by extinction than the Mountain Gorillas, or even any other known species on the planet. The tiny, 4-5 foot long dolphins that live in the Gulf of California have been hunted down to the point where there are only ten alive in the world. These are only two of the 41,000 species that are in danger of becoming extinct. All of these animals, from the smallest to the largest are endangered because of the actions of humans. Humans are responsible for actions such as deforestation, hunting, pollution, and transmitting diseases to species that have no immunity against them. Since humans caused these problems, they must take responsibility and save these endangered animals.

Raising awareness about the huge loss of wildlife and the possibility of a future without the diversity of animal species is the first step in preventing additional extinction. One of the main causes of death for most endangered populations is habitat loss. This is usually due to human encroachment and our own development, however in doing this we take away the homes of these animals. For example, the Mountain Gorillas' forests have been cut down to create space for farms and livestock.

This pushes them out of their natural habitat where they do everything, from eating food to raising their families. While the gorillas are significantly impacted by this, other species are affected by habitat destruction as well. Animals from Southeast Asia to even Brazil suffer from this, such as the Jaguar, which has lost approximately 38% of its natural habitat.

Deforestation isn't the only human action that causes extinction, however. Direct poaching and hunting of animals is very common, even for known endangered animals. This is true for both Mountain Gorillas and Vaquitas, which have no defense against human machinery, weapons, and fishing nets. The Vaquita is killed for their swim bladder, which is used in Chinese medicine and is illegally sold on the black market for \$8,500 USD per kilogram. They are also accidentally killed in big gillnets used to gather smaller, less endangered sea creatures such as shrimp and other fish. Like the Vaquitas, the Mountain Gorillas are also being caught in snares and traps set for other animals. However, they are also poached and killed for their meat, which is considered a delicacy, which created a high demand among the wealthy for the animal. Their body parts such as their head, hands, and feet are also used by local healers to complete traditional rituals. This ignorance of the endangerment of these and other threatened animals will lead to further death and even extinction of many species.

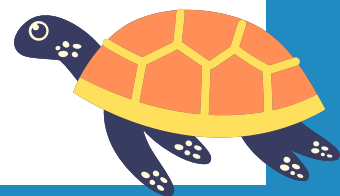
The only way to save these animals is to take action against poachers and to re-evaluate laws that allow development of land that negatively affect animal habitats. Educating people about these animals can reduce the demand for their body parts, for example the Chinese medical belief that the swim bladder of the Vaquita can cure diseases, or that the Mountain Gorillas have magical qualities in their hands and feet that can be transferred to humans through rituals. Even though most people are fully aware of these issues, many aren't willing to take the action necessary to stop hunting or using land that belongs to these animals. As someone who is still only in middle school, I think it would be disappointing if gorillas were extinct by the time I finish college.



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### About the author

I am a 7th grader who lives in New York City. I play the piano and do fencing for a big part of my week. I feel like it would be pretty bad to live in a world where people wouldn't know what gorillas were because they no longer exist.



# Untitled

by Wendy P

Swish! The wind was howling through the dazzling night, stars illuminating the dark sky. Gillian was in her room falling in and out of consciousness. She had this pit in her stomach, like someone was watching her. Ding! The sound of a text filled her ears, as the once dark room was now glowing from the phone's light. Gillian stared at the ceiling for a little before turning her body to face her bedside table. She picked up her phone, pushing the tangled mess her charger left. She unlocked her phone and checked the message while her eyes still hung low. "AHHH!" Gillian's scream echoed through the room as her phone fell on the floor. The picture of her sleeping was now face down on the floor.

Gillian walked to her window, breathing heavily with each step she took. She peered out the window with fear drowning her thoughts. Nothing but darkness was what she saw. Before going back to her bed, she saw something. In the window was a tall figure of what seemed like a man. He wasn't outside nor was he a part of her imagination. He was standing right behind her breathing down her neck. She could feel his presence and his hot breath, which caused her to tense up. The silence was so loud it could make anyone's ears bleed. No one spoke, no one moved, and no one breathed. It felt like the earth stopped spinning and time stopped. The sound of a gun reloading made her breath hitch. Before the trigger could be pulled, she heard shuffling behind her. Before she could say anything, she felt a sharp pain in her lower back. The man was now standing over her as her aching body reached the ground. Her fluffy white carpet was now turning red with the thick liquid escaping her body. He held a large knife over her pale white face, blood now flushed out her. He stared at her as he began to pull up the rug a bit. Before he left, he carved

his initials on the floor boards. The initials weren't his, he wasn't so empty headed. He was a famous serial killer who hasn't been caught.

Once he finished, he got up showing almost no empathy. He lacked emotion as that's what he never experienced growing up. He began to walk around the room seeing all her trophies and pictures, Gillian's radiating smile being the center of attention in each photograph. He was seeing Gillian's whole life in a room, flashing by him quickly. And suddenly, his eyes began to water. A single teardrop escaped, falling down his face, and onto a soccer trophy. He didn't know what was happening to him or his emotions. He had never felt like that for anyone or anything, just like his mom. He fell to his knees and began to sob, burying his head in his hands. He then examined his shaking hands covered in blood. The blood of a pretty girl that was full of life. Her time cut short from a selfish man who envied her. He wanted her life, her parents, and the love she received.

He took his phone out, his hands shaking uncontrollably. His teary blurred vision and bloody hands made it harder to dial 9-1-1. He barely could speak and hear as he would interrupt the dispatcher with his sobs. *Wee!* The sound of sirens filled his ears. Blue and red flashing lights made his tears look glossy. The cops busted through the door of Gillian's bedroom and stared at the scene in front of them. He looked at them emotionlessly. Once he stood up, he turned around and held his hand behind his back. He finally broke the cold expression and held his head down. "I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." He repeated, accepting his defeat.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** This story is a gripping thriller that builds suspense! It keeps the reader engaged and curious about what will happen next. The author does a great job of describing the scene and creating a tense atmosphere. Additionally, the plot twist at the end, where the killer suddenly shows remorse, adds a layer of complexity to the story and makes it more interesting.

# My Mother's Love Language

by Pier D.

Indian recipes she got from her law school roommate. The golabki, a stuffed cabbage roll from our Polish ancestors, turned vegetarian for me. A pasta dish she found in the New York Times column that's become a classic. Crawfish étouffée from my New Orleans auntie. Soup her own mother would make, one that would keep me at the table till late because I refused to eat it. Barbecue shrimp that would marinate in the refrigerator for hours with their shells on; they were the messiest thing to eat. She'd still serve them anytime someone came for dinner the first time, almost testing our guests. A potato dish she would make so much of—it could feed a village. Pierogies that never came out how we wanted them to, but would still be devoured.

Every night, since before I can remember, my family would come together at around six or seven o'clock to eat a meal. The middle child, Ronan, and I would always bicker on who had to set the table. I lost quite frequently. I'd put the placemats down, and put my special plate at my special seat at the table, while my brothers would sit at the counter. They could never be closer than one stool away from each other or Jake would start a fight. My mother would come home from work, sometimes not even changing out of her suit, and start chopping vegetables. The intense aromas coming from the kitchen would drift up the stairs and lead me out of my room. Normally I would sit in the kitchen and watch her cook, it was the only time we could talk without the boys of the family around. Jake and Ronan always stayed in their room while she made dinner, and I'd have to call up the stairs for them for twenty minutes before they came down. It made my father furious. My dad got home from work right before the food was ready, like clockwork. I almost thought maybe he did it on purpose, so he'd never have to help. My mom had always loved to cook, but what she loved more was praise for her cooking. It was understandable, considering it

would take her hours. The second we all sat down, before we had the chance to pick up our forks, she'd ask us this one question, "So how is it?" Of course it was always delicious, but we had delicious dinners every night. I always told her, "Good." She'd look at me with this disappointed look and I'd come back with, "Amazing, I mean, it's really great. Not just good."

But the damage was already done. These dinners could've been in restaurants, making professional chefs jealous. My mother made sure we all had great meals in our stomach before we went to bed, it is what made her such a devout parent. She told us food was love, it was the glue that held us together. When we sat in those seats and ate the same dishes, all of our hard separate days melted away. It was the only meal we had together, and she made sure we all knew how important that was. There was always a slight grumble when Ronan said he was going out with friends and wouldn't be home for dinner. The table would always be a little quieter without him. Little did I know there were much more silent times ahead.

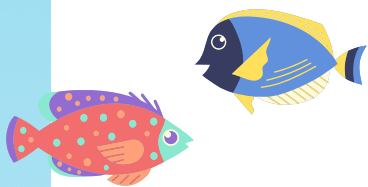
When my brothers went off to college, a year apart from each other, something my mother held so dear was lost. There were no longer five placemats, ten utensils, and twenty napkins. I'd catch myself constantly grabbing too many plates, and our fridge was full of leftovers. It was like my mother couldn't adjust, and neither could I. Soon I missed the yelling up the stairs and fights on who had to feed the dogs. The soup I always disliked became my favorite, because I remembered how much Jake loved it. What once was family dinners every night, turned into only Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. Then Ronan decided to go to college in a country that didn't celebrate Thanksgiving, and Jake wanted to stay at school with his girlfriend.

I soon found myself sitting at a table all alone, because mom doesn't get home until nine now, and with sports and work, my dad is already upstairs when I get home. I sit in my same special seat, with no special plate because it broke with so much use, eating a microwaved dinner wishing I could only go back in time.

Of course there are still Christmas dinners, and sometimes we have parts of the summer together. When we do sit at the same table and eat my mother's beautiful food, I am even more grateful for the times I took for granted.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** The themes of this story are beautiful! Very heartwarming and nostalgic reflection on the importance of family meals and their memories. The author highlights the significance of food in bringing families together and the emotional attachment we can develop to certain dishes. The story makes the reader appreciate the precious moments spent with loved ones.





# Untitled

by Manuela R.

I look around the room at second, third, and fourth cousins, great aunts and great uncles who I haven't seen since Christmas when I was eight. I straighten my hair, pat down my black dress, and smile. I look older because that's what they tell me. I look pretty and proper. I look presentable. I turn my cheeks to my distant family members to let them kiss me. I hear the words, I'm sorry, being whispered into my ear. My smile drops. I don't know how to respond. I know she's my great grandmother. But that's about it. I didn't know what her favorite color was until I saw the yellow flowers that decorate her casket. I didn't know the exact number of kids she had until my great uncle read the eulogy. I didn't know the story of how she met my great grandfather until my mom told me on our way to the funeral home. How to accept an apology for the death of someone I barely knew? But that's only part of the struggle. To face the grave is next. To say goodbye and to say a prayer. What should I say? I love you is the obvious answer. But it's not about what to say. It's about how to walk. How to walk down the dim lit room full of grieving relatives—their names unknown—kneel down and say hi and goodbye for the very last time because I've seen this woman's face many times before. The videos are proof. It may seem like this is my very first time seeing her but the videos are proof. The videos of her holding me as a baby. I look up at her. The room is in awe of a new little life. My parents are beaming with joy because life is good. Because I am there and so is she. But right now I need to face the grave.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *This relatable story captures the complex emotions and challenges of attending a funeral for a distant relative. It highlights the struggle of navigating unfamiliar family dynamics and processing the loss of someone who was essentially a stranger, while also acknowledging the significance of shared memories and family.*

# Untitled

by Nikolas M.

Liam walked into the kitchen and asked, "Mum, could I please join the British Army? I want to fight for Great Britain and the King."

"You're not going to join the British Army, Liam. We've been over this," Liam's mom answered, "You know the stories I've heard from friends of mine? Some of them even lost their sons."

"But Mum, I think this would be good for me, and I've always wanted to join the army, please?" Liam pleaded.

"No and it's final," Mom replied back.

Liam walked back upstairs to his room, stomping with every step in anger. "I really want to join, why won't mum let me?" Liam said, talking to himself. "But what if I forged my parents signature and lied about my age? Surely that would work, and how would they even find me after that? It's foolproof!" Liam exclaimed to himself, then got to work on forging his parents signature and thinking of a plan.

The next day while he was walking home from school, he saw a recruitment office full of people waiting and decided to join them in this long wait. "Why are you joining the army?" Liam asked a fellow in front of him.

"I want to fight for Great Britain, the King, and to help our soldiers fighting on the Western Front," the boy replied. "What is your name, by the way?"

“Liam Charles, you?” Liam answered then asked.

“James Harris, nice to meet you!”

“You too.”

After a while of waiting to get to the front, Liam finally got into the office. He talked with an officer for a while before signing some papers, and resumed what he did until Saturday. On Saturday, he went back to the recruitment office where he got into a truck and left for training in the Army, then ready for deployment.

“Liam Charles, you’re being deployed near Arras, France,” the commander told him. Soldiers cheered for Liam’s deployment, and were excited to wonder where they were being deployed.

“James Harris, Arras, France,” the commander said once again. Everyone cheered once again, but Liam cheered even more as they were being deployed together.

The next day, Liam sent a card to his mom before they were being sent to Europe. “Sending a letter to your mum too?” James asked.

“Yeah. I feel a bit bad. She probably doesn’t even know I joined, and if she did she wouldn’t know where I’d be.” Liam responded back, “I’ll see here again though.”

“You will, war shouldn’t take too long, we’ll be home by christmas!” James exclaimed. They both laughed before packing up and boarding the ship to France.

James and Liam took their things off the ships and onto the shore and were assigned to their units. Sadly James was sent into a different unit than Liam was in. "See you later, I guess." James told Liam.

"See you later as well." Liam responded. They both got into lines and marched into battle.

Liam looked at the battlefield once it came into view. Craters, disease, rats and more. Disgust came across his face. "Incoming!" a commander shouted. Shells from the Germans landed closely. Men ran into cover or laid down, some died by the shells, some wounded, some survived without a problem. They got back up, and marched to the trenches.

An officer greeted every soldier entering the trenches, telling them protocol and such. Liam was a bit disappointed, he didn't think of this, but he couldn't go back now. "Tomorrow we will be charging towards the German trenches in an attempt to take it. Prepare yourselves now," a commander revealed to the men. Everyone looked either upset, annoyed, tired, or exhausted. *It can't be that bad, can it?* Liam thought. It would be worse than he could imagine.

The next day, men prepared, and officers got ready. Liam knew what would commence this charge, a whistle with a different tone. He heard it and practiced while in training, now it would be real. A whistle blew, and men charged out of the trenches quickly, running into no man's land with no cover. Liam ran out and followed them all, witnessing bodies fall, fly from shells, cries and some losing grip of their rifles. *Will I make it home, or will I be dead?* Liam thought after witnessing it all, and a shell landed near him. Liam fell into a crater from another shell, crying from the huge wound caused by the artillery shell. Very slowly, he started to lose his vision and it fell more silent. With the last of his strength, he said, "I should've trusted my mother. I'm sorry."

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *This story is a heart-wrenching portrayal of the devastating impact of war on young soldiers and their families. The author successfully conveys the emotional turmoil and inner conflict of the protagonist as he grapples with his desire to join the army and his mother's desires, ultimately leading to a tragic ending that underscores the reality of war.*

# Untitled

by Lorena C.

As I'm out in the pouring rain, it hits me, it all comes back in a flash.  
An ocean breeze passed through us,  
the big blue waves curled upon land every second, left, and then came  
back.

Your contagious, bright smile caught my eye.

Then your angelic, warm honey eyes, the color of a warm cup of dark  
coffee, met my eyes.

It makes the moment memorable, it makes it last longer, forever maybe.

We sit and stare at many shiny lights that warm night,  
one big bright light we wished upon that night.

You gave me about a dozen or more pretty red roses that sunshiny day.

I smelled them every chance I could, knowing they wouldn't last forever.

Everything we had was sweet-bitter.

I knew everything about you, I always wondered what you had learned  
about me.

You're the only person I wanted.

You seemed to turn fantasy into reality.

Everything wasn't as it seemed though, it wasn't perfect.

There had come endless nights of crying.

You never heard me cry out to the hopeless moon about you.

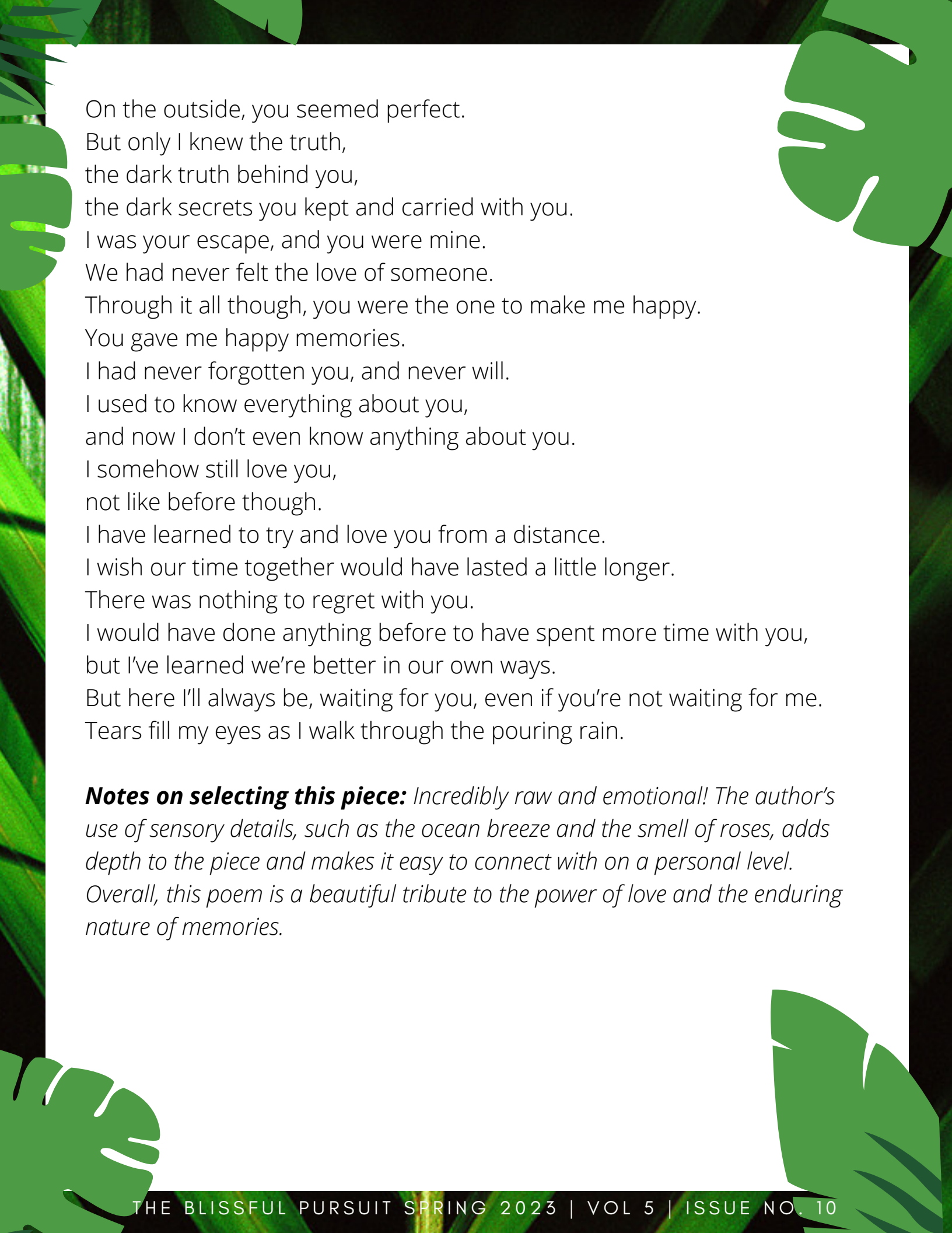
I was a fool to you, you were oblivious to my feelings.

The thing about you is you came with both the good and the bad.

Every time I was with you I would get lost in your eyes.

They were hypnotizing and mesmerizing.

I knew all the lies you spread, and your act of lying happy.



On the outside, you seemed perfect.  
But only I knew the truth,  
the dark truth behind you,  
the dark secrets you kept and carried with you.  
I was your escape, and you were mine.  
We had never felt the love of someone.  
Through it all though, you were the one to make me happy.  
You gave me happy memories.  
I had never forgotten you, and never will.  
I used to know everything about you,  
and now I don't even know anything about you.  
I somehow still love you,  
not like before though.  
I have learned to try and love you from a distance.  
I wish our time together would have lasted a little longer.  
There was nothing to regret with you.  
I would have done anything before to have spent more time with you,  
but I've learned we're better in our own ways.  
But here I'll always be, waiting for you, even if you're not waiting for me.  
Tears fill my eyes as I walk through the pouring rain.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *Incredibly raw and emotional! The author's use of sensory details, such as the ocean breeze and the smell of roses, adds depth to the piece and makes it easy to connect with on a personal level. Overall, this poem is a beautiful tribute to the power of love and the enduring nature of memories.*

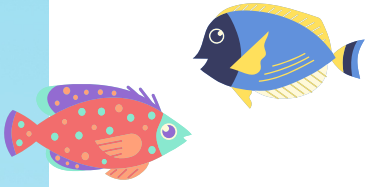
# Love

by Catie C.

Love is everywhere around the world. Love can mean anything. It can be anything, love can be a good and bad thing. We sometimes mistake love with something that actually isn't. Loving a person who's hurting you isn't love, you're being attached to someone. It's okay to let go, don't be scared. Love can be poison to you. It can be a drug, a substance that you can't control when you take it. Love has the power to control who you like or things you love. You can't force yourself to love someone or something because only your heart chooses. It's a drug, a substance that makes you go crazy for someone. When you look in each other's eyes you see the love, you can hear it and sense it. Love is like a pill that's good and bad. A love pill can kill you or give you good things you desire. Some love kills you on the inside while no one knows. And love can bring good things in your path, too. Each time you see them you know why you love them, I can see the love in your eyes.

***Notes on selecting this piece:*** *This poem captures the complexity of love and how it can be both a wonderful and dangerous thing. The author's use of metaphors, like love being a drug or a pill, really helps to illustrate the power and influence love can have on a person.*





# One Small Balloon

by Evie D.

A stormy Sunday morning,  
Children coming to play.  
A dog barks with joy,  
Beginning their day.

And one small balloon, clutched in two small hands.

Wiggle into rain coats,  
Shimmy into boots.  
Place your hat on your head.  
"Out we go," a child hoots.

And one small balloon, held in two small hands.  
Droplets splash on all their heads,  
While they jump with bounding glee.  
When clouds open up and rain pours down,  
The children feel ultimately free.

With one small balloon, in two small hands.

Climbing to a rocky outlook,  
Gazing over land.  
Out to shining waters,  
And beaches filled with sand.

And one small balloon, grasped in two small hands.

A sudden gust of wind,  
The drops of rain are slowed.  
The children cry out as they see  
The gray wave goodbye as it flowed.

Through the clouds,  
Through the rain.  
When eyes lift up,  
The smoke will wane.

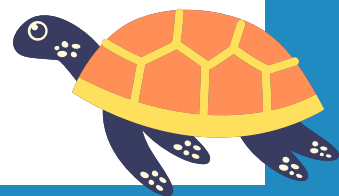
With one small balloon, clasped in two small hands.

Then  
A small, glittering beam of sun  
Shining through the gloom.

Just one,  
Only one.

Shining on one small balloon, drifting away through the blue.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** This is a beautifully written poem that captures the joy and wonder of childhood. The imagery is vivid and the emotions it evokes are palpable. The use of repetition with the small balloon creates a sense of innocence and simplicity that is touching.



# Sincerely, Me

by Kylah P.

Life is a mystery  
that no one can understand  
but for some reason  
we all agree that  
chocolate and vanilla  
go hand in hand.  
There's unspoken rules  
like when to say thank you,  
when to say sorry,  
and when to apologize  
for being in a hurry.  
It doesn't always make sense,  
and it doesn't have to,  
but it would be nice  
to have a rule book  
where it states what is true.  
You can hold a door for someone  
and it is kind,  
but if you forget  
then you must be blind.  
For no one should be so disrespectful  
and if you are  
then your upbringing must have been  
very neglectful.  
These are the rules we learn to live by;  
it doesn't mean they're right  
or wrong,

it simply means  
that our human nature  
is very strong.  
To create a system  
that is meant to be  
is not easy to do.  
Sincerely,  
me.

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *This is such a thoughtful and introspective poem that explores the complexities of human nature and the unwritten rules that govern our interactions with others. The use of rhyme and rhythm creates a sense of flow and unity throughout the poem, making it a pleasure to read and ponder upon.*

# Breaking the Chain

by Kai S.

my father was my hero  
and when his figure was gone  
i put frames of him on the walls of my heart

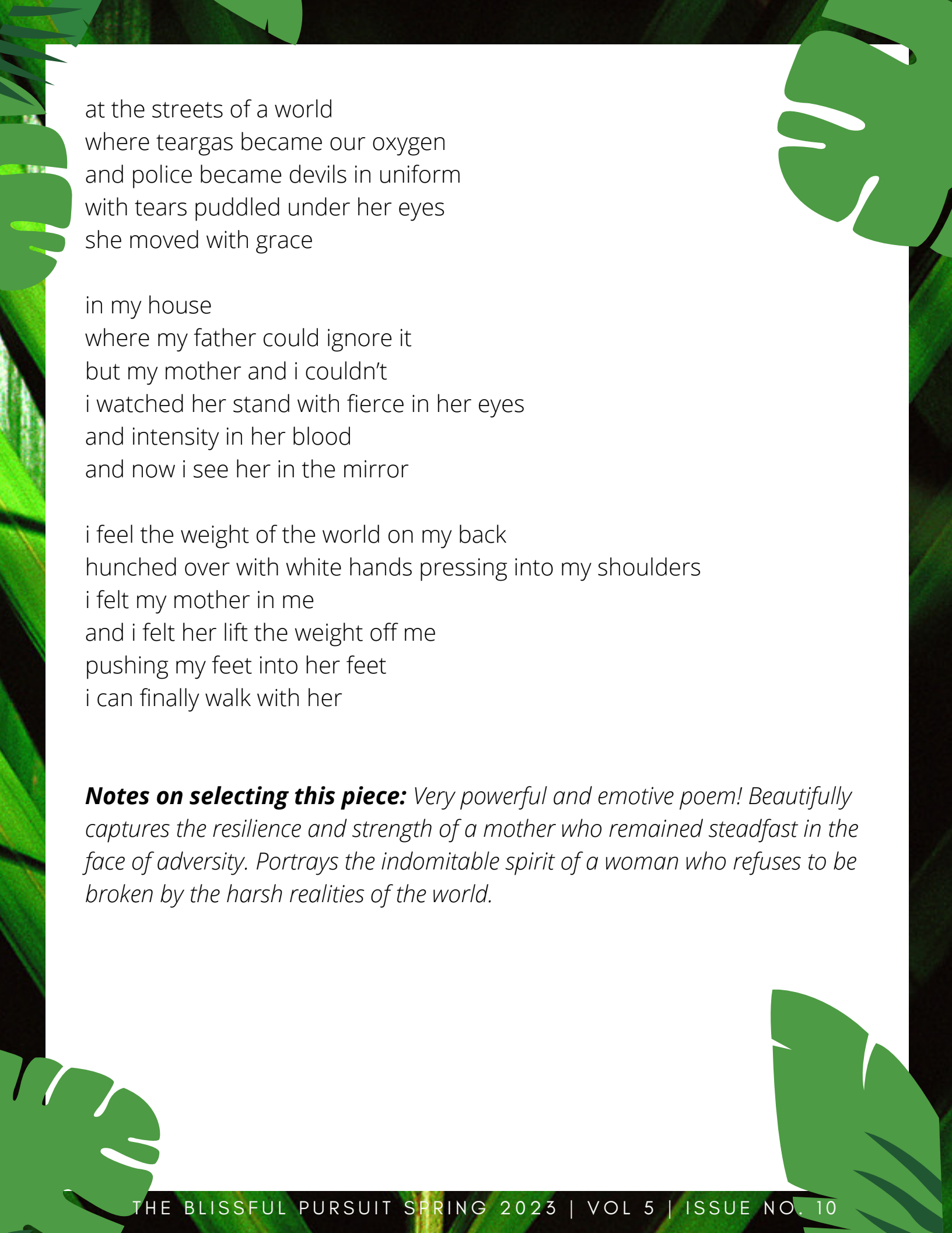
i watched him walk away  
and the dirt stained boot footprints  
engraved their graveled lines on my carpet

but i left my mom's handprint on my door  
i didn't watch the way she carried herself  
even when my door was closed on her

i didn't watch the way  
light emitted off her dark skin  
even when the sun hid away  
even when the moon was too dull  
to shed its light on the smallest ponds

i didn't watch the way  
she strutted with pride  
even when the world shut its doors against us

at the steps of a world  
who didn't care if my hands were still  
locked away in shackles  
or my knees still buried in muddy dirt  
she talked with power in her voice



at the streets of a world  
where teargas became our oxygen  
and police became devils in uniform  
with tears puddled under her eyes  
she moved with grace

in my house  
where my father could ignore it  
but my mother and i couldn't  
i watched her stand with fierce in her eyes  
and intensity in her blood  
and now i see her in the mirror

i feel the weight of the world on my back  
hunched over with white hands pressing into my shoulders  
i felt my mother in me  
and i felt her lift the weight off me  
pushing my feet into her feet  
i can finally walk with her

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *Very powerful and emotive poem! Beautifully captures the resilience and strength of a mother who remained steadfast in the face of adversity. Portrays the indomitable spirit of a woman who refuses to be broken by the harsh realities of the world.*

# The Draft

by Iona L.

How many poets have become soldiers?  
How many soldiers have died  
composing epics in their minds,  
classics blown to bits  
burned and left in the mud of battle?  
The pen is only mightier  
than the sword until  
you've been stabbed with it  
and words don't quite make the cut anymore.  
What is left is gurgling,  
a sputtering of prose  
that gets caught up  
in a spattering of blood.  
The poet and the soldier  
are one in the same,  
both searching for an acceptable suicide  
find it in glory and or allegory  
leaves you with gore either way.  
Be it brutal, be it beautiful,  
your goodbye etched between pages  
or stamped on dog tags  
and staked in the ground with helmet and rifle.  
Those final moments  
are the crucial ones,  
when poet and soldier  
approach each other  
pass on their journey,  
survive and switch.

**The poet becomes a fighter,**

gunpowder sort of anger

face like a minefield

risk it, I dare you

take a step.

The soldier becomes a romantic,

melancholy and introspective

holding too tightly to

the precious things,

stringing memories into story.

We are wounds,

we are bleeding

wells of ink within our veins.

There's a deafening quality

to a gun in new hands,

same way the room doesn't change

as it is observed,

same way we make spectacle

of that which is tragic.

Poet soldier

you pedantic, rambling

core of brute force,

speak with flourish and

move with trained stiffness

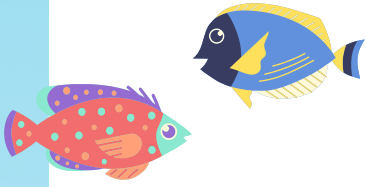
for you are the one

that goes into this war



and you are the one  
who must write down our histories  
and what it all means,  
give me meaning.  
Do not expect to die here  
we are past that.  
Find killing,  
find repetition,  
find living if you must.  
I am the poet  
that has become soldier  
that has become writer once again,  
an amalgamation of what is left.  
How many of them are left with us,  
poets, soldiers, and whatever  
lies between?

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *Vivid and visceral, drawing the reader into the emotional and physical experience of soldiers and poets alike. The final stanza is particularly striking, emphasizing the transformative nature of war and the lasting impact it has on those who experience it.*

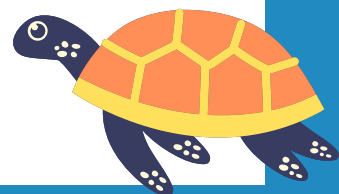


# Vellichor

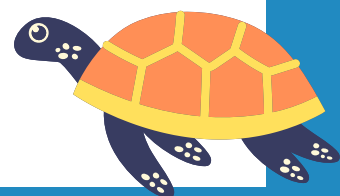
by Mubashira J.

Vellichor, I live in them  
when I discern that in this exquisite world  
indigent humans cases are unsolved  
by the government who rules for the hood rich,  
And not for the parenthood.  
Desperate-criticism eyes are watching,  
But I wonder how much they lack about who's right and who's not.  
But one will be right if he has a plate to feed you.  
Classical books, residue spaces between two lines  
Have the permanent marks of plaster highlighters,  
Since it's the knowledge about  
how I am made and how I was broken.  
Astronauts have successfully reached the moon,  
but never achieved the moon.  
How come I haven't still reached a soul within me?  
But have achieved maturity by locking myself  
in the chambers of hearts to win them  
when I should be playing outside.  
I have been missing for years.  
Condolences are now being received  
not in the form of letters,  
in the form of obliviousness and deafness  
as if I am wholly graved under their foot.  
They aren't sweet,  
but I was thought to be one.  
Didn't learn it by throwing lethal plastic bags  
In the dustbin,  
But when I was disposed off by those

For whom I dismantled myself in the nights  
so they could enter the rotten academies when it's sunrise time,  
But how come I was never hugged  
when they arrived there each morning there?  
Why you make a metaphor,  
And not write them differently?  
Are you making fun of me?  
How come you tell your love,  
But your lovers are now scribbling stories  
With saddest endings,  
And some of them have written their own.  
You only screech with bended knees  
When the about-to-be buried body is being carried;  
You express your loss to your nearest friends who were their enemies.  
When you grow up from being a little child  
relishingly climbing your neighbor's tree,  
To the small-fragmented one under giant trees,  
You perceive that not all drugs are injections,  
yet the one who would inebriate you  
Might first give you candies to suck.  
You killed yourself suspiciously,  
To defend someone for the sake  
that someday love would be healthy.  
I need help, I can't differ  
Can you please tell me?  
Is love tortured or tortuous?  
Am I yours or anonymous?  
This world is not for me.  
but I really thought it could be.  
I forgot I am one of the species  
That was born to make my pain infinity.



**Notes on selecting this piece:** *Thought-provoking poem that tackles complex themes such as societal injustice, personal growth, and the ambiguity of love. The use of metaphor and vivid imagery makes the reader feel the weight of the emotions and experiences being conveyed.*



# Dial Tone

by Easy Jack P.

Sure your hands are cold down my back  
But your breath feels nice against my neck  
It's a steady rhythm  
And that's what's so nice  
The consistency is key  
You're always just a phone call away

Isn't it all magical  
Little beeps and clicks  
Sent from miles apart  
Sinew and tissue  
Made of licorice wire  
Communicating through a breath  
Or a simple ring

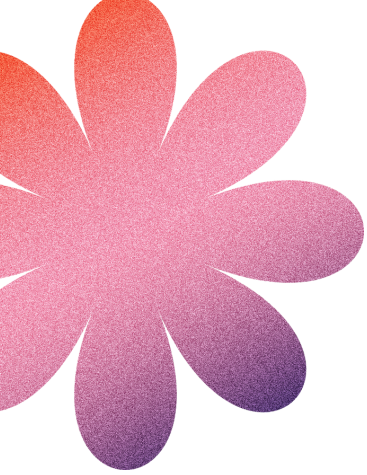
I used to call you more  
For when my sense were blinded  
But now I do it on irregular patterns  
Sometime just to talk  
You always answer

Speaking is our gift  
Given to us by elders  
Who knew how valuable it was  
To hold that power  
To understand each other  
On a level I can hardly comprehend  
Because I don't know who I would be without words

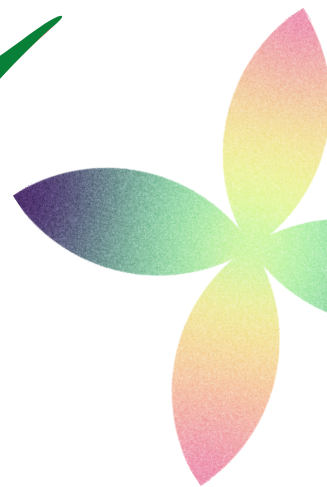
They flow in an unconscious stream from my lips  
And somehow connect to yours

I suppose every gift must have its end  
When the wrapping paper has been torn  
And the trinket has grown dusty on the shelf  
I guess that's what makes you so special  
Makes talking so nice  
Is that I know after every conversation  
I'll hang up the phone  
And return to normal life  
But we'll occupy a part of each other's brains  
For a little while longer  
Cause the telephone makes us stronger

**Notes on selecting this piece:** *This captures the power and magic of communication through the telephone. The author's use of sensory imagery and metaphor creates a sense of intimacy and connection, while also exploring the impermanence of human relationships.*



Stay  
Fearless  
& Keep  
Writing





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