

## **“The Dive” by Alex Carlson**

### **Second Place**

I've always felt distant from the sea. It's a different world beneath the waves, one that most people will never experience. Most people will go their entire lives without ever touching the salty ocean water. But I, unlike most people, have had the privilege of spending time in it, if only for a short while.

I had the opportunity to go snooba diving. This is basically scuba diving, but your oxygen tank is on a raft, connected to you by a long hose. I went out with my twelve year old brother, my aunt, and a guide. We walked down a long, winding trail to get to the beach. There were kids playing, adults tanning, and boats running. As we headed towards the water, I wondered how we could see any sea life with this many people in the beach. I thought the sound alone would drive all the creatures away.

We swam out to the middle of a bay. You couldn't see much below you. The guide said it was about fifteen feet deep. I didn't believe him. It looked like a deep, blue abyss, waiting to swallow me. He said that we could go down and explore now. Cautiously, I began to dip my head underwater. As my head slipped under, the sounds disappeared: the children playing, the boats, all of it. All I could hear was the sound of my own breath passing through the breathing apparatus. I could see everything clearly now. A group of moon fish scattered about beneath me before darting away to hide in the coral. A small cloud of smoke puffed into the air, surrounding my knees, as I touched the ground. The sand resettled in a new spot where it would stay until it was disrupted again. I was overcome by this new world, this underwater civilization. Fish of all species were weaving around the coral: Oscar fish, brown catfish, blue gill sunfish, and even a humuhumunukunukuapua'a. It seemed like every kind of fish was in this small bay. Even eels poked their heads in and out of holes. Life abounded all around.

A leatherback turtle passed a mere five feet in front of me, so close I could almost touch it. It moved so gracefully, like a bird through the air. It became a whole new creature once it was submersed in the water. It moved so clumsily on land, but then it was like a dancer, spinning and twirling about everything else. I followed as long as I could, marveling at its ability. But it soon disappeared into the dark distance, too fast for me to keep up.

It was time to return to the surface. The silence was broken as I crossed back above. The children's laughter, the talking adults, and the roaring engines of the boats could be heard. It all came back, shattering the peace and bliss from below. I looked down at the water but in a new way. It was a look of wonder for the undersea euphoria. Most people never experience this, but I was lucky enough to.