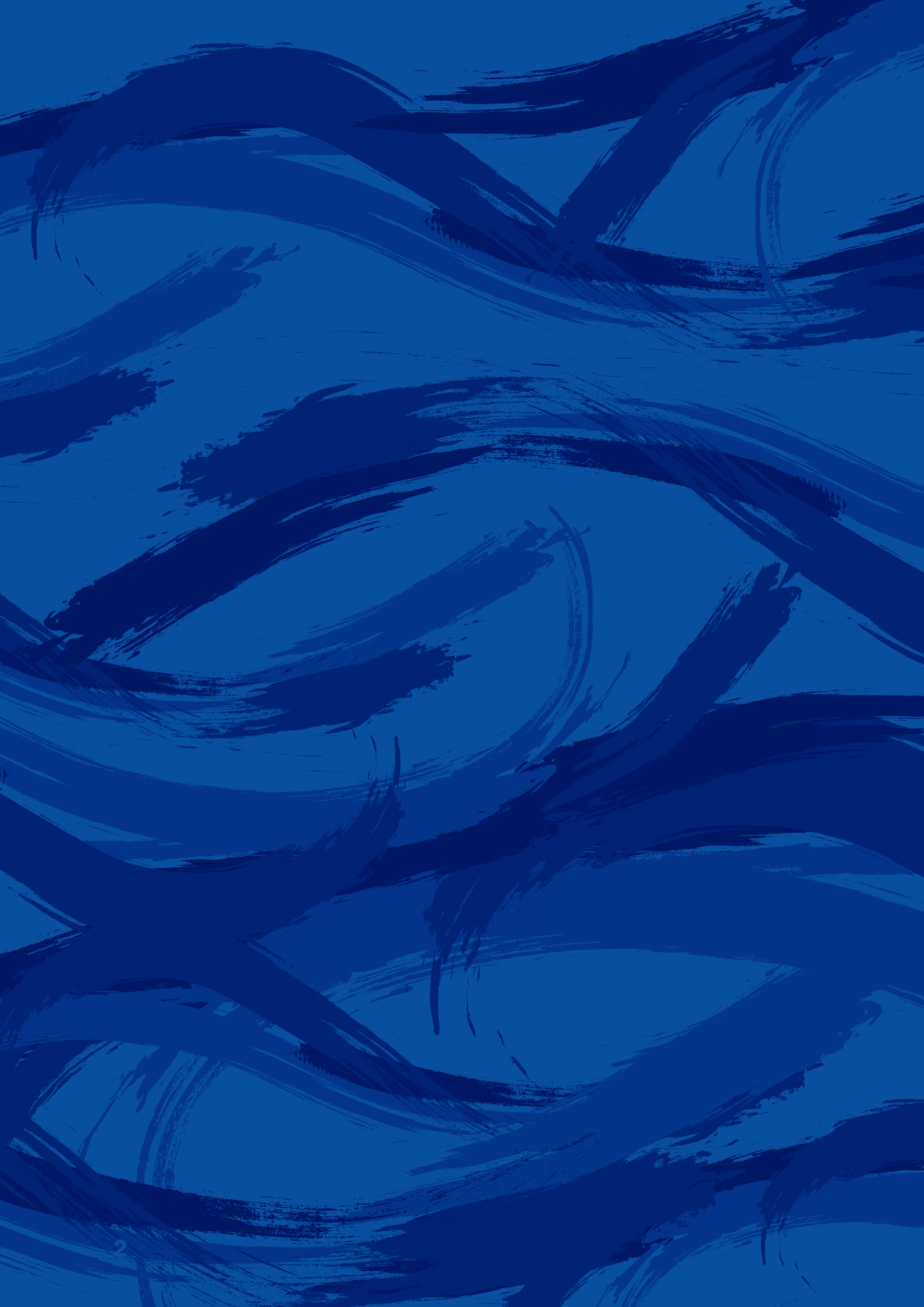




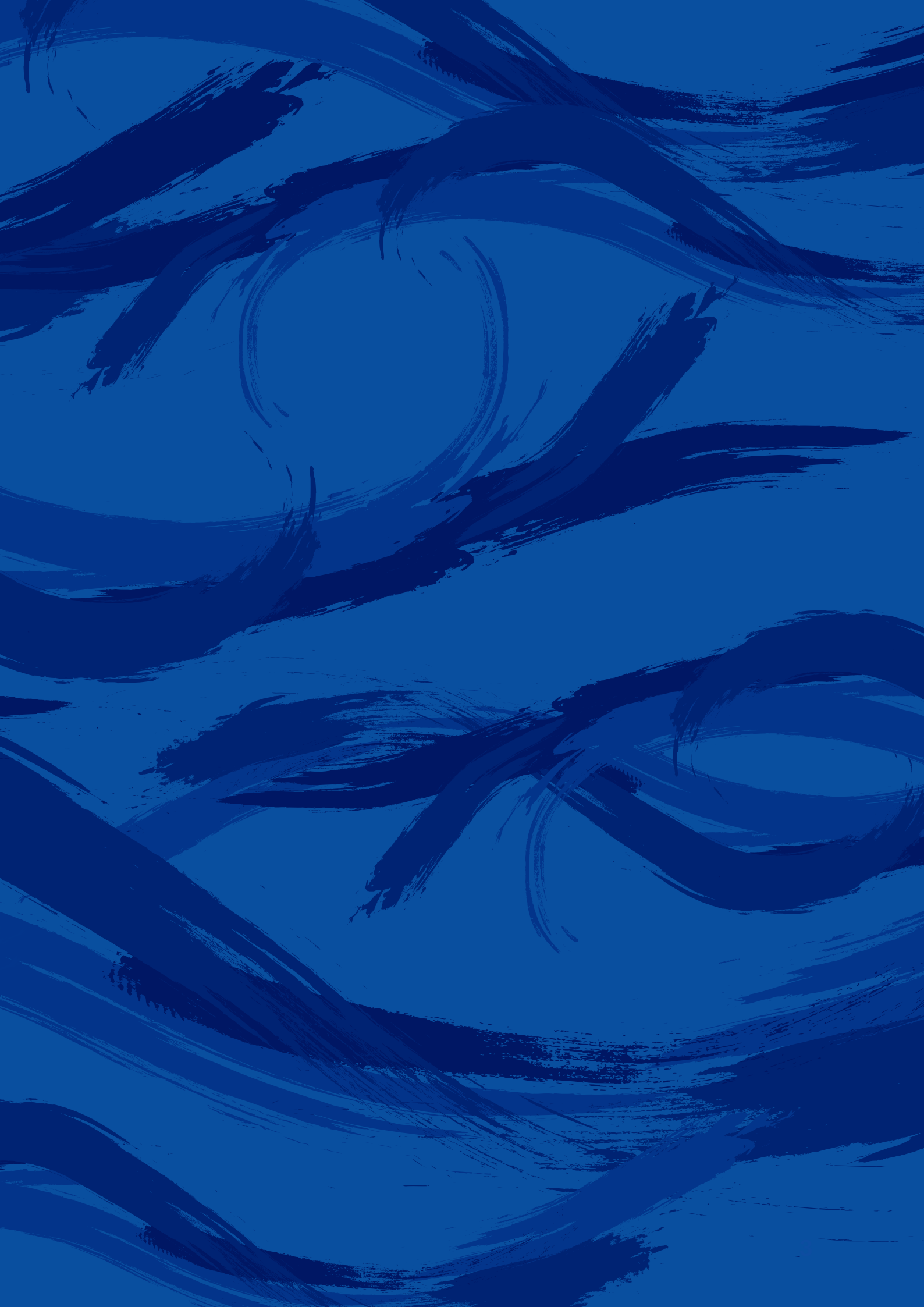
# **OUR OCEAN**

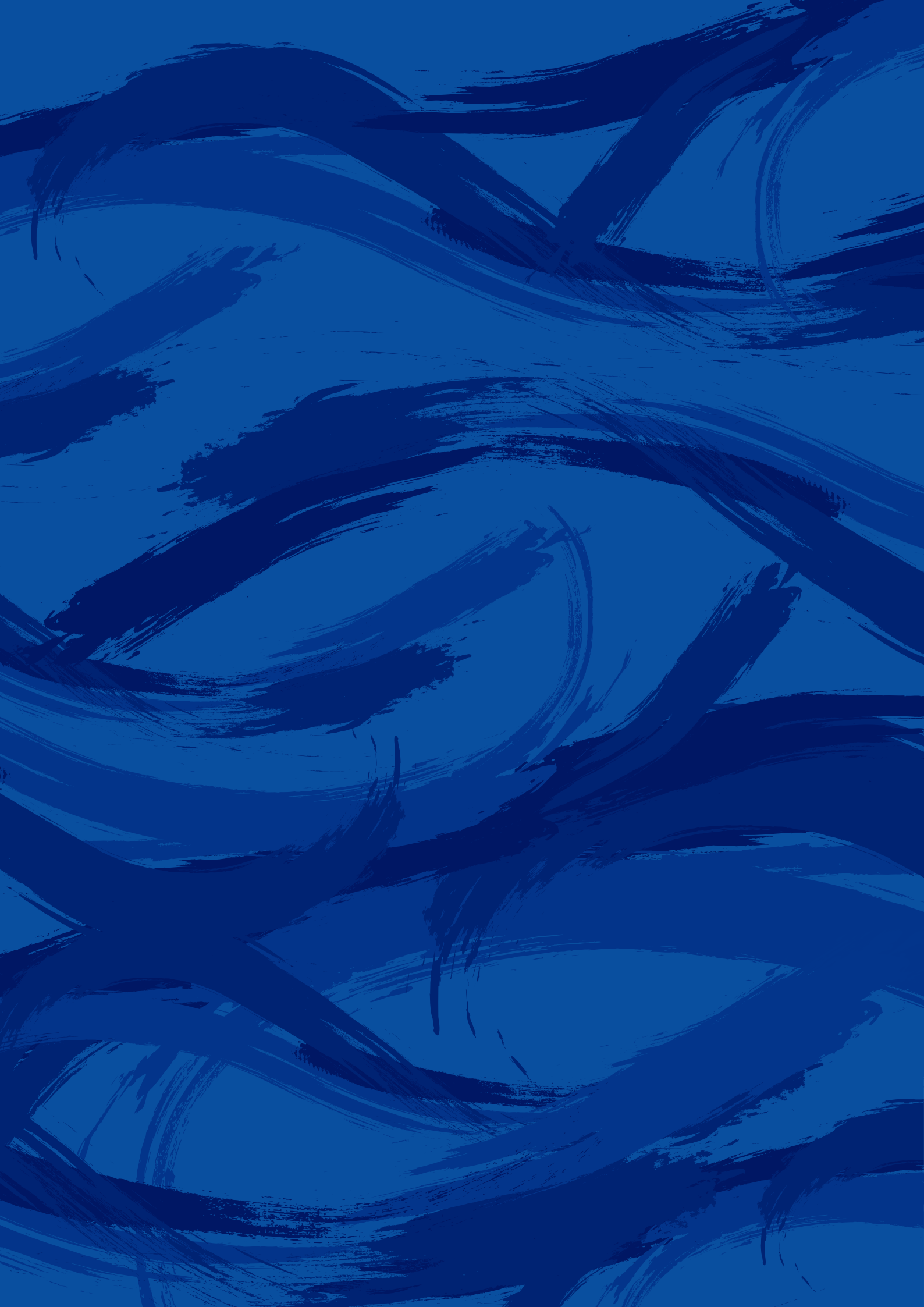
**SHORT STORIES**

**by young Indonesian writers**









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# Foreword

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Last October the European Union hosted the “Our Ocean” conference in Malta. This year Indonesia is organising the conference in Bali, to be held 29-30 October 2018. The European Union has a long commitment to protect the oceans and keep them clean, well-managed and alive, a priority it shares with Indonesia. Oceans cover 71% of our planet and we rely on them for water, food and our climate. EU policies, campaigns and strategies aim to find a healthy balance among economic growth, global security and good ocean governance.



We want to raise awareness about our shared responsibility for preserving this precious asset. For that reason we organised a short story competition in all European languages for young Indonesian writers to find out how they feel about the oceans. We were overwhelmed by the number of entries, from writers as young as 12 years old!

I have been touched by the stories which take place on islands and in cities that we know well — Lombok, Bali and Jakarta — and by the fantasy, sub-marine worlds populated by mermaids, speaking plastic bags or “merfolks”. I have jumped 100 years to see the effect of human actions. I have laughed with Nadira’s obsession with her Instagram account in “2117”, I have shared Rio’s longing in “I wish I had fresh fish for dinner” and I have felt Tim’s pain in “What happened to the kids?”.

What do these stories tell us? It is time to act to protect our oceans!

Enjoy the reading!

**Vincent Guérend**  
*European Union Ambassador to  
Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam*



# Our Ocean Short Story Writing Contest

Inspired by the ‘Our Ocean’ conference hosted in Malta in 2017, the European Union (EU) Delegation to Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam organised the “Our Ocean” Short Story Writing Contest to raise awareness about this topic in view of the next edition of the Conference to be held in Bali at the end of October 2018. This contest shows the EU and Indonesia’s commitment to protect oceans – to keep them clean, well-managed and alive.

The contest invited Indonesians under 26 years of age to write a fictional story under 1000 words in any of the 24 official EU languages. The theme of the stories revolved around ‘Our Ocean’ touching upon one or more of the priority topics of the ‘Our Ocean’ Conference in Malta:



**Marine protected areas: protecting marine ecosystems, their landscapes and biodiversity**



**Climate change: ocean acidification and rising coastline levels**



**Sustainable fisheries: seafood as a limited and shared resource**



**Marine pollution: plastic litter and urban waste**



**Sustainable blue economy: offshore renewable energy, blue biotechnology and coastal tourism**



**Maritime security: illicit trafficking, piracy and smuggling**





The contest was jointly launched by the Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs Mr Luhut Panjaitan and European Commissioner for Transport Ms Violeta Bulc during her visit to Indonesia on 29 September 2017.

There were over 250 entries in English, French, Spanish, German and Dutch from Indonesians between 9 and 26 years old. 207 stories matched the criteria of the competition.

In December 2017, the winners were announced and ten stories were selected (nine in English and one in French). All the winners are women with an average age of 19 years.

For more information: <http://ouroceanstory.id/>

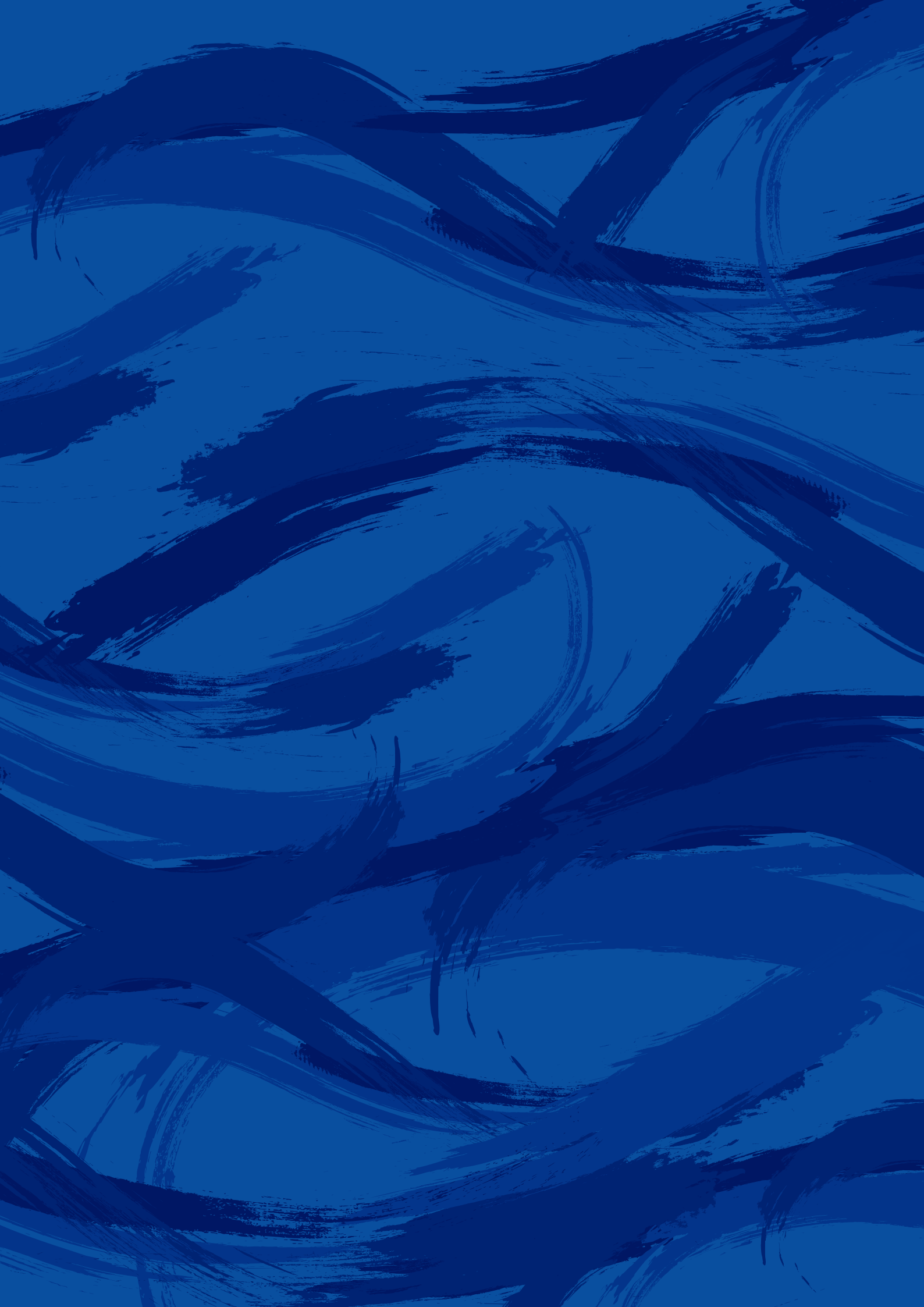
## The Jury

**Beatriz Chivite Ezquieta**, Poet (winner of the 2012 Pamplona City Hall Literary Prize)

**Josefine Yaputri**, Blogger of [thejournal.com](http://thejournal.com) and [senjamoktika.com](http://senjamoktika.com)

**Bowie Holiday**, Blogger of [thetraveljunkie.org](http://thetraveljunkie.org)

**Rafael De Bustamante Tello**, Head of Political, Press and Information Section at the Delegation of the European Union to Indonesia



The background is a solid blue color with numerous white, expressive brushstrokes of varying thickness and direction, creating a dynamic and textured effect. The strokes are most prominent in the upper and lower portions of the frame, with some forming circular or swirling patterns.

# THE WINNING STORIES

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*Besides serving as an outlet to develop my writing skills, this competition also serves as a platform to inspire the community to take an actual action toward saving our slowly degrading ocean. We do not realize that collectively, small things - such as reducing plastic waste and/or our energy consumption - make a difference in saving marine life. We 'care' silently because it has yet to directly affect our lives, but it's not enough. I hope that the story will be able to encourage others to start taking small actions to preserve our ocean. The competition has become a platform where aspiring writers could share their works as well as ways to save environment, specifically the ocean. It is interesting to read stories written in different styles and languages as through them I was able to learn new things.*

**JURY'S COMMENT**

*I love how this story's theme is so relevant to today's environmental issues. The plot is so smooth, and I really enjoy reading the story over and over again. So modern and bright!*

*- Josephine Yaputri*



**Gabriella Tiara Utomo**  
**Surabaya**  
**21 years old**

# 2117

---



“The next time you drag me to your morning marine adventures, I’m going to kill you.”

Irina glanced at her sister—at the pitch-black dark circles rimming her droopy brown eyes and the menacing scowl gracing her beautiful features. Seawater was still dripping from her long ebony hair down to her blue and black diving suit. Nadira was not a morning person, and Irina was nearly scratched trying to rouse and drag her to the dive boat.

“Didn’t you beg me to take you because ‘coral reefs and sea turtles are going to be so Instagram-worthy’?”

Nadira sat up straighter at that. There were only very few things that she cared more about than her perfectly curated account and five thousand virtual followers. “The pictures *are* gonna look so bomb on my feed. I’ll probably caption them with one of those save-our-oceans quotes or something.”

“Oh, please—” a flying plastic bottle interrupted Irina before she could even shake her head, landing on the clear surface of the Lombok Strait. She stared

at Nadira, who stared back incredulously, and said, “What?”

“Nice way to save the ocean,” Irina remarked. Nadira snickered and gave her a hard shove, something they always did when the other was being annoying. But this time it caught her off guard. Irina slipped from the edge of the boat, and the last thing she remembered was her sister shouting her name hysterically.

\*

Irina’s eyes fluttered open and she was immediately greeted by a girl around her age hovering above her.

“Oh, thank God you’re not dead.”

She blinked a few times and took in her surroundings. The last thing she remembered was plunging into the water after Nadira shoved her. “Wha—”

“Relax, you’re okay. I found you washed up on the shore,” the girl said, smiling warmly at her. “Though I don’t really understand why you would want to swim *here*.”

“My sister and I were snorkeling. We were taking pictures of the coral reefs



and sea turtles,” Irina explained.

“Oh, you’re one of those mythical creature hunters, huh.” The girl scoffed and shook her head, sighing. “Look, they’re gone, okay? Stop wasting your time. The only thing you will find under the sea is the beauty of underwater garbage. Plus, what are you wearing? Diving suit from 2017?”

Irina stared back at her, dumbfounded at the question. “Yes?”

“Well, welcome to the future, lady. It’s 2117. Time to donate that horrible suit to the museum.” The girl started to walk away, leaving Irina in shock. What on God’s green Earth is she talking about?

“The Earth isn’t even green anymore,” the girl replied, turning to Irina. Oh. Seemed like she said that out loud. “Are you an actress or something? Is this you getting into a character in a movie set in the 2010s? Is the movie about saving what’s left of the ocean? If it is, joke’s on you, you’re about a century too late.”

Irina grabbed the girl’s arm before she could continue with her rant. Despite

a million more important questions fighting to leave her lips, she asked, “What do you mean, we’re a century too late?”

The girl stared at her in disbelief. “The fact that there is more plastic than there are fish in the ocean? The fact that that we’ve overfished and let some species go extinct? The fact that the ocean is overwhelmingly acidic and warm that it is nearly impossible to swim in? If you are from 2017 – which of course, is impossible – well, then, great job. Your ignorance is a blessing to us all.”

“Hey, I’m not ignorant!” Irina protested. “I care about the ocean as much as the next person does. I never littered the beach or the ocean. I know that overfishing is terrible, so is illegal poaching. In fact, I never fished in my entire life!”

“Oh, should we get you an award for that?” the girl clapped sarcastically and gave Irina a mock salute. “Did you care enough to at least share the information? Did you care enough to choose only sustainable seafood when ordering your sushi? Did you care enough to actually use reusable shopping bags or did you



keep packing your groceries with more \*  
and more plastic? Guess where that  
plastic went, smartass. The ocean!  
Have you ever, even once in your entire  
life voiced your concerns about God's  
beautiful Earth?" the girl was screaming  
now, her voice raspy and eyes glistening  
with tears. "No. Because all you do—all  
we do is take and take and take from  
the Earth that was entrusted to us and  
never give back."

There was silence as the girl's words  
started to have an effect on Irina and  
stabbed her right in the gut. Tears were  
now falling down her cheeks too.

"You didn't even care enough to yell at  
your sister when she dumped her plastic  
water bottle overboard, Irina," the girl  
added. Irina's eyes widened. As she  
opened her mouth to ask a question, the  
girl shook her head. "It doesn't matter.  
You're not too late to fix this. But if you  
do nothing, if everybody does nothing,  
then, you're looking at the ocean of the  
future."

The girl gave her a weak smile and, before \*\*\*  
Irina could say anything, everything went  
black.

"IRINA!"

Nadira ambushed her with a bone-  
crushing hug as soon as she came to.  
Worry was written all over her face and  
her cheeks were wet from crying. "Oh my  
gosh, I thought I killed you there!"

"Oh, you're not getting rid of me that  
easily," Irina teased, returning her  
sister's hug. "I'm fine. You know what  
you're killing, though? The ocean."

Nadira's left eyebrow shot up. "Did you  
hit your head or something?"

"Probably. I had this super-weird dream  
while I was passed out." Irina chuckled  
and winked at her sister and rapped her  
on the forehead. "Look, if you don't want  
to see the cute sea turtle you posed with  
become the next mammoth, we've got  
work to do."



### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*My hobby is writing and this is my first time participating in a competition. The Our Ocean Story Contest was inspiring and hopefully there will be more competition like this in the future.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*Unusual perspective on sea litter written from the bad guy side: The plastic bag.*

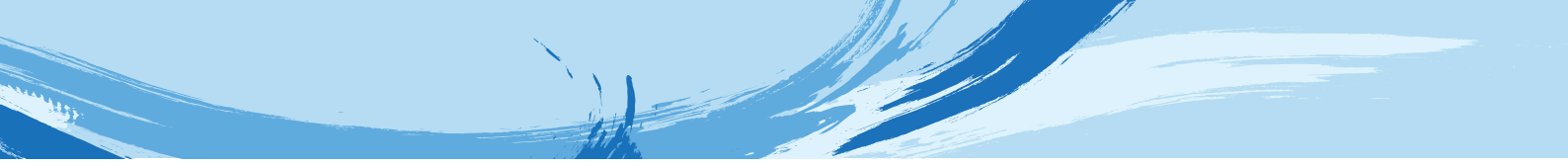
*- Beatriz Chivite Ezquieta*



**Putu Ambalita Arsana**  
Yogyakarta  
12 years old

**USEFUL  
AT FIRST,  
USELESS  
AFTER**

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Have you ever heard the story of the whale that ate plastic? No? Okay well I'm here to tell you the story. Wondering who I am? A human? A whale? Nope, I'm a piece of plastic. Yes, one out of more than thirty pieces of plastics that ended up in the whale's stomach. I'm here to tell you about my journey from the human hand to the newspapers.

It first started in this human's store. I lived in a small container with my family and friends. Every day one of my friends was taken away by a human, then was fed with human food then handed over to another human. "Mom why do we need to do this every day?" I asked my mother. My mother smiled at me, "Well sweetie, it is our job to help humans carry their food because if it's not us than who else?" Mom said. I smiled at my mom's answer. I love being a plastic bag, useful for human beings.

Today is the day when I am taken from my family and go to a new home. Like my friends, I was filled with human food first then handed to the other human. Before I was given away, the shop owner said a few words to the other human. I didn't really understand much human language but I'm sure he meant "enjoy."

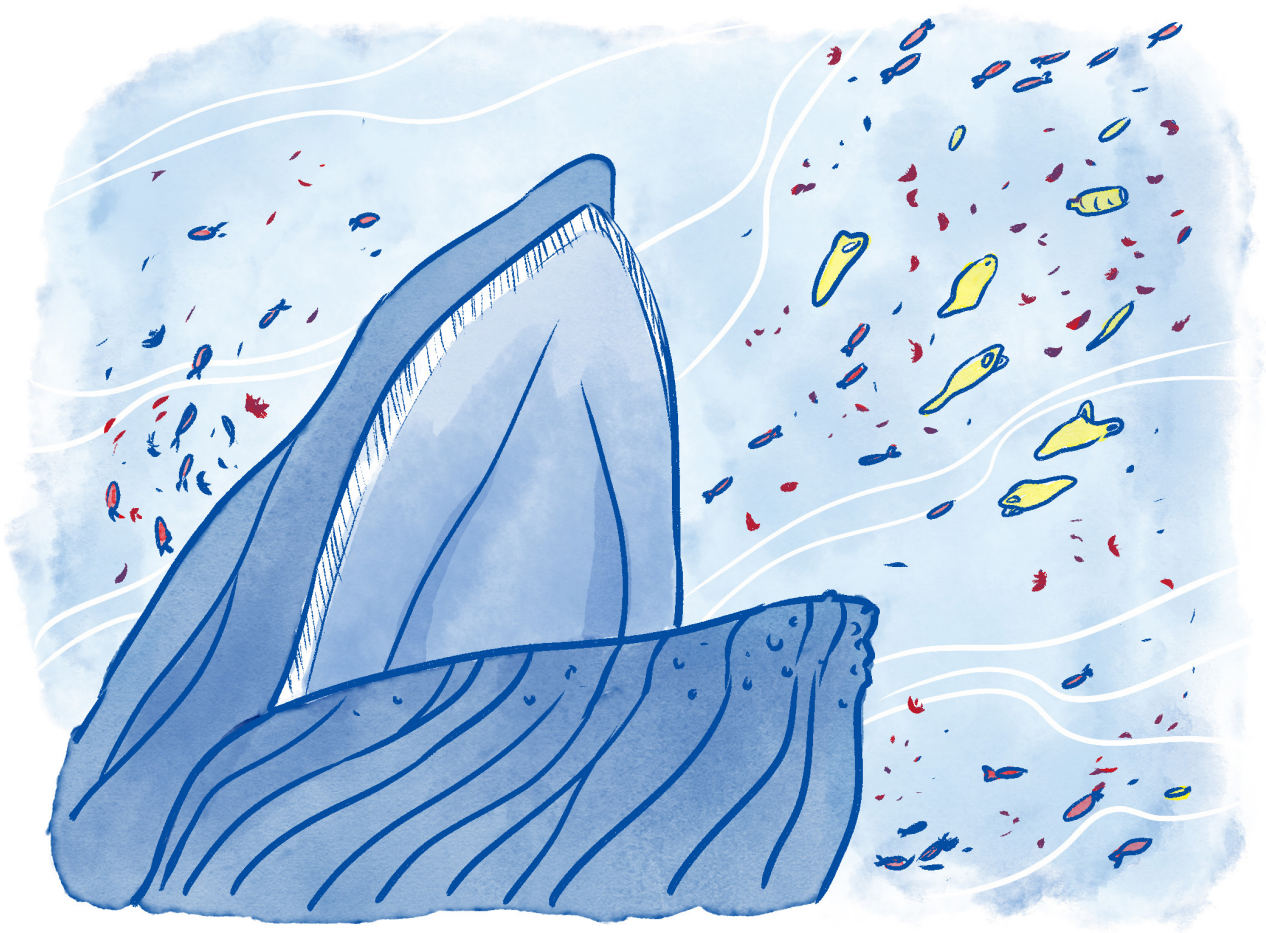
I hope this human can use me for useful things and not throw me away like how some of my friends ended up.

It took a few minutes until I ended up on a white table. It was a little cold. Yeah it was cold but I'm not complaining, as long as my humans use me I'll be all right. I stayed on that table for hours. The food inside of me was already taken out but I'm still here on this cold table with no one to talk to.

Suddenly some human picked me up. I was glad that at least somebody in this house cared about me. However, I was wrong. After I was picked up, I was then thrown away into this dark container. I was confused. Why is it so dark? And it stinks in there!

I stayed there for some hours. No wait, it was for days! Imagine it, inside a dark and stinky box, all alone. What's worse than this?

Sadly there is something worse, like being thrown into a lake. Well it wasn't really a lake. All I remembered was that it was wet and cold. I was carried by the water for miles. Sometimes I got stuck on something but then got washed away again. It carried on like this for a few



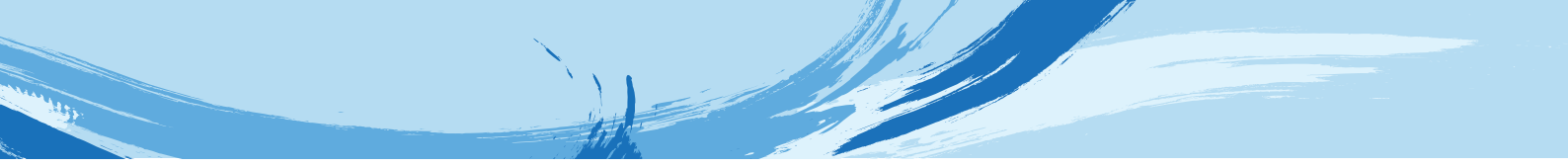
days until I ended up in huge lake. It was blue and the water felt different.

Over there I met new friends. We traveled together in a big group. Later I learned that this big lake was called a sea. It was beautiful, especially the blue water and the coral. Sometimes some of my friends got taken away by this big net that humans use. My friends tell me that

we are polluting our sea, that's why we need to be cleaned up.

One day my friends and I were traveling under the sea. We were looking at the coral and the fish that swam around us. It was beautiful down there, the colorful coral and the blue water match well. After a few moments we continued our journey.





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It was peaceful until suddenly a huge fish swam towards us. It was opening its mouth, trying to eat us. We tried to swim away but of course it failed. In just seconds we were in the big fish's intestines. Again, it was dark and stinky, but I wasn't there alone, at least.

I thought we were supposed to be thrown into this sea to feed these hungry fishes. I felt happy because I felt useful once again. However that happiness didn't stay long. A few days after my friends and I ended up in the fish's stomach, we were back outside. However, we were on the land again not the sea and the fish we were inside of before was dangling from a hook. It was dead.

After we were taken out, we were placed on the ground neatly. A lot of humans came around us with these small boxes that I heard were called cameras. They came only to take pictures of us with these cameras that shoot these very bright white lights.

Then I learned that we plastic were the cause of the death of the big fish, or so-called whale. We were trending in the news all over the world. I felt sorry for the whale. Of course we didn't mean to

kill the whale, it was purely an accident. Or was it?

All of us plastic bags that ended up in the whale's stomach came from humans, either from houses or shops. Humans use us only once even though they know we can be recycled or even reused. Instead of reusing us they choose to throw us away. They choose to get rid of us even if they know that it will take years for us to decompose.

We were supposed to be something useful for the world, something simple that can help humans carry their belongings. If you really don't need us then we should have ended up in a recycling center, not in a whale's intestines. If we are only used once then why use us anyway?

You all can just use those reusable fabric bags, rather than use us every day then throw us away. Besides, that's what people now are talking about, a replacement for plastic bags. Yes they have found our replacement but still humans use us over and over and us ending up in the sea always happens. So please use us wisely so we won't harm any other living beings.



### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*My teacher told me about the Our Ocean Story Contest in class. I visited the website, watched the inspirational video from the website, and decided to enter the competition as I found the theme very dear and near to my heart. This is the first competition I joined and I think it was very well organized. I definitely don't regret joining the contest and it was a great experience for me.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*I enjoyed the ending of this story and the way it was written. It's sad to think that our actions today could take away beautiful things from future generations. The final sentence gave some idea of hope that things could be altered. The image of people in Hazmat suits was scary and effective.*

*- Bowie Holiday*



**Alexa Kirana Sudarto**  
**Jakarta**  
**16 years old**

# BLUE

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## CAUTION: HAZARDOUS WASTE

Signs with these three words written on them were plastered on the large, electrified fence that stretched for miles. Neon-coloured posters were strewn carelessly at the foot of the fence, ignored and left neglected after the last environmental rally held a few months ago. No one had bothered to pick them up—but who had the time?

The electric fence was the only thing separating us from the vast ocean beyond. Physically, the closest I have ever gotten to the endless caress of the waves of the sea were the hundred billion grains of sand that dotted the surface of the beach. Further down along the fence, I could see a group of scientists donning Hazmat suits and collecting samples of the ocean water in test tubes. Scientists were the only people allowed to come within five meters of the water and truthfully, no one ever complained about that rule. If you came within even 20 meters of the water, the stench would hit you like a direct slap in the face. It was a smell so awful it would make you tear up. The sight of the ocean was a completely different matter on its

own. The water had turned from what was once a pristine deep blue colour into a green, murky, vast nothingness. Pieces of trash and plastic floated atop the stable waters, floating farther and farther towards the horizon and towards the unknown. That is why the fence was erected a long time ago: The toxins in the water had become so uncontrollably dangerous that scientists concluded no human would be able to survive the amount of hazardous chemicals in the sea. For the longest time, I had pitied the creatures living underwater until I realized that the unrelenting ocean must have spared none.

I had heard about the ocean before. I had heard about a beautiful mass of water that nurtured millions of species in its care, whether it was inanimate multi-colored corals or exuberant schools of fish. I had heard of a deep blue ocean that sparkled like diamonds under the bright, hot sun. I had heard of so many things about the ocean but have unfortunately never seen these things for myself.

From where I sit, the view of the ocean is pretty clear. I can see clearly the murky



water and the pieces of trash floating atop the water. I wonder whether the water is cold or hot. I wonder if there is still any life under the water. I wonder if the fence will ever be taken down.

Before long, the stench of the ocean becomes too much for me. I begin walking back into town, leaving behind the unruly sight and the hair-singing smell of the ocean. At the entrance of the beach, there is a sign with information about the beach and pictures of what the beach once looked like.

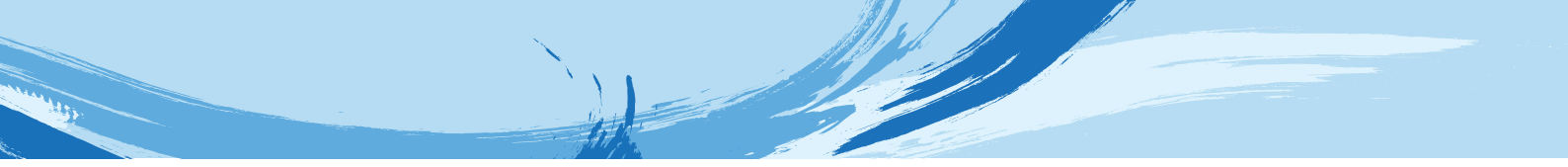
**PANTAI NUSA DUA**, it read. The beach used to be the cleanest on the island but nearly 100 years after the sign was put up, I think a change might be long overdue.

From where I stood at the entrance of the beach, I could see a run-down store that used to sell surfboards and swimming supplies. It had been boarded up years ago due to a lack of profit to keep the business going. A few stores down was a seafood restaurant that was decorated to look absolutely glamorous. My parents had told me that seafood was once the regular everyday diet of

billions of people all over the world but today, seafood has become a luxury that only the richest can afford.

I began my journey home. I lived not too far away from the beach, in a small apartment above the store that my parents ran. They ran a modest souvenir store that sold everything from postcards to educational magazines. The first thing you see when you enter the store is a rack of postcards. They were mostly blue, displaying images of what used to be the ocean. Scrawled on the picture were catchy taglines: “Visit Bali!” “Wish you were here!” Now, it just seemed sad; a reminder of what once was. The postcards on the topmost rack were gathering dust and their colors were fading—the color of the blue sea had slowly faded into a dark, incomprehensible image. It looked more accurate now.

Spread out on one of the tables in the store were educational pamphlets. Vintage, you could say. They’d been around for as long as I could remember. Mom and Dad tried to do their part as much as they could, but no one really cared about the ocean anymore.



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**“Save our oceans!”** read the text on the pamphlet. Just like the postcards, a thin layer of dust rested atop the surface of the pamphlet, clouding the once-bright color. Funnily enough, you could tell a lot just by looking at the pamphlets. No one cared about the ocean, no one cared about preserving it anymore. The ocean was nothing more than an old wives tale. Another story to tell future generations about something humans had been blessed enough to have, but neglected and lost in the long run.

I traced my finger over a line on the pamphlet, scoffing lightly at the words

that were written almost ironically, and in vain. **“Preserve our oceans for future generations to come!”** it read.

I do not know what the oceans were like. I just know that they were blue. The most perfect, exquisite shade of blue. It was taken away from me even before I got to know it. The ocean was blue for a moment, and then it was not. And just as choppy ocean currents guided men back home long, long ago, I hope the blue finds its way back too.



### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*My childhood was very close to the nature. I lived on the coastal area where I always enjoyed looking at the ocean on my way to and from school. It made my love for the nature, including the ocean, grow bigger each day. Seeing today's ocean makes me sad. Participating in the Our Ocean Story Contest gave me the opportunity to reflect and invite more people to care about the future of the ocean. This program should be conducted every year with more age ranges.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*A look into how our future might be and the impact on ordinary lives if changes aren't made now...*

*- Bowie Holiday*



**Liliana  
Bekasi  
24 years old**

**I WISH  
I HAD  
FRESH  
FISH FOR  
DINNER**

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My name is Rio, an ordinary kid of a so-so family in this capital of Indonesia. It is 19 December, 2117 which means I will celebrate my ninth birthday in five days. Just like the previous birthdays, my parents allow me to request the present I want from them. And just like the other years, I ask them to make me a plate of fresh fish. "Oh, dear, you know that it is not possible for us to make it for you." That is exactly the same answer I get every year asking for fresh fish for my birthday.

The last two years, when I asked them the same thing, they came out with grilled chicken, which they had cut into the form of fish. And last year they made some snacks from tofu shaped like fish for me. So what I have had so far for my birthday were chicken, tofu and other meat and ingredients in the form of fish. I thanked them every time they made the dish for me, as I know they tried their best. Oh, also, in every fish-like dish they prepared, they put some fish flavoring, available in the supermarket, in it.

Alright, that's enough about my birthday. Now, it is time to go to school.

"Good morning, kids!" Ms. Anna greeted us with full spirit as usual. She is the

youngest teacher in this school. The rest of the teachers are 40 years old or more. We actually had some young teachers before but they ended up leaving the school to do something else. "For today's theme, we will talk about animals. Could you name me five animals that you often see?" Ms. Anna said to start the lesson. Diana, the smartest kid in the class, quickly raised her hand.

"Yes, Diana."

"Dog, cat, chicken, ant and lizard."

"Alright, that's good"

"Anyone else?"

A student then raises his hand.

"Yes, Tommy."

"Bird, mosquito, fly, mouse and cockroach"

"Good"

Tommy is from a less fortunate family. His father works as a parking attendant and his mother as a housemaid. Every day after school, Tommy goes to Ancol beach to work as a trash picker. And most importantly, Tommy has never tasted a fish in his life. I am lucky that I could eat





fish at least once a year. Every 17th of August, the government lowers the price of fish so families could buy some, but of course with a purchase limit per family. My father usually comes home with two long-jawed mackerel on that day.

Diana, on the other hand, could eat fish at least once a month. As her parents work as high-level officers in a company where my parents work as staff, her parents could afford the synthetic fish sold in some supermarkets.

“Alright, to conclude our topic on animals, I would like to invite you to the city aquarium tomorrow at 9 a.m. Please bring your notebook and pen with you tomorrow,” Ms. Anna ended the lesson.

At 9 a.m. sharp, everyone had arrived at the only aquarium in the city. Ms. Anna did the headcount and helped us with the entry process. Ms. Anna always works hard to introduce us to different things outside the class. And all the entry tickets today were paid by her.

Today, we saw things we had never seen before. We saw many beautiful fish, shrimp, octopuses, crabs and other sea animals as well as corals and seaweed. Ms. Anna told us that everything we

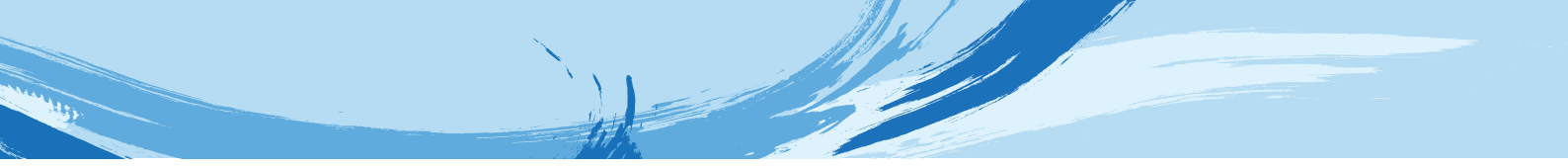
saw was actually living in the sea years before but then killed by trash people throw into the river that flows to the sea and gathers in the ocean. That is why it is difficult for people to eat fresh fish nowadays. My mother once told me that price of a kilogram of tuna on an ordinary day was equal to a round-trip airplane ticket from Jakarta to Bangkok. That is why we have more cow and chicken meat for dinner.

“My father was a fisherman when I was in your age.” Ms. Anna started a lunch time story.

“He would leave the house in late evening and come back the next afternoon or early evening with buckets of fish in his boat. He took almost everything he got to the fish auction and brought some home for dinner.”

“Back then, I had fish for dinner almost every single day. But things are not the same anymore as globalization kicked in and people became absolutely ignorant about the environment, especially the ocean. Because of the limited land for waste management, more people took shortcuts to get rid of their trash by throwing it away in the river or purposely bring it to the sea.”





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“It has been 20 years since my father left his job as a fisherman because there isn’t any fish left to catch. Many have died as the result of polluted water,” she said. Ms. Anna looked sad and she was unable to continue her sentence.

Everyone was silent trying to put together all the images in Ms. Anna’s story. None of us had a picture of a fisherman and fish for dinner almost every day.

“Rio! Rio! Rio!” I heard my mother’s voice.

“Happy birthday, my boy!” said my mother while giving me a warm hug. “You are nine now. Not so young anymore.”

I was confused. So it was a nightmare

that I had minutes ago?

“Mom, what do we have for my birthday dinner?”

“Your favorite dish of fresh fish of course.”

“How much did you spend for the fish?”

“What kind of question is that? It is normal, just Rp 25,000 per kilogram.”

I gave a big sigh in response to my mother’s answer. I glanced over at my calendar. It is 19 December, 2017.

“Happy birthday to me!”



### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*The Our Ocean Story Contest is a great way to attract the attention of people, especially the younger generation, to marine problems. The story writer can find out more about marine issues and efforts to overcome them, while the reader can be aware of the issues of the story and be inspired to find out more. Through my story, I want to bring the reader to a fictional world that reflects the real world with an interesting imaginative world as an eye-opener. Maybe I have not been able to take a major step in overcoming the natural problems, but this contest can be my stepping stone to contribute. Not only science, which only relies on the rational mind, but also fictional stories can provide answers to real problems.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*The idea of the ocean having a pulse was beautiful and poetic.*

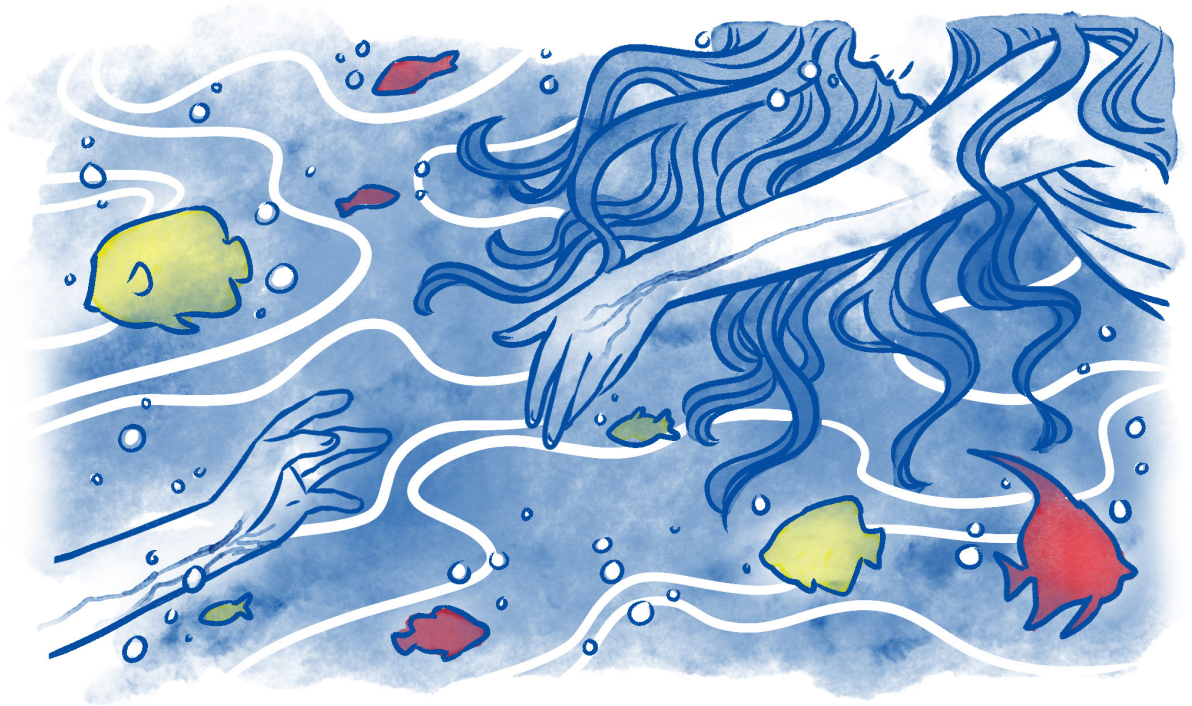
*- Bowie Holiday*



**Indiana Salsabila**  
**Tangerang**  
**20 years old**

# **CHILDREN OF THE OCEAN**

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When I was little, I met a girl who came from the ocean.

I was taking a walk along the beach when she surfaced from the body of water, her walk graceful and her footsteps so light it was as if the tide carried her to the shore. The first thing she did was look at me with her eyes—eyes so blue and deep that they were 50% oceanic and 50% drowning. Then, a smile stretched across her coralline-pigmented lips as her hand extended towards me.

“Is this yours?” Her voice was a blanket of tranquility, enveloping me in a feeling

similar to that of being underwater. Resurfacing from my flood of thoughts, I looked towards the object she was holding out: a plastic bag.

“Oh,” I replied, dumbfounded, as I came to notice the nearby convenience store’s logo etched on the plastic. “Ah, yes, it was mine. I just got back from buying ice cream...” I trailed off with an uncomfortable smile. It felt like she was implicitly calling me out on littering, so I felt my face getting warm from embarrassment. She continued to smile and handed the plastic to me, which I took awkwardly. I let the plastic bag



dangle by my side, my fingers gripping it loosely. My eyes had not left her hand, which was still extended. I blinked before lifting my gaze up to look at her face, questioning her wordlessly. She stretched her hand closer to me with her palm out in a gesture of invitation.

“Would you like to dive in with me?”

The events following that encounter were a blur. I can vaguely recall being underwater and witnessing more children. Some were exploring or playing with the sea creatures while others were picking up various kinds of urban waste to dispose of. I remember reaching the ocean floor and placing my hands on its sandy surface, feeling a pulse against my palms that beat in time with my heart. The moment we resurfaced, I questioned the girl about the ocean’s pulse that seemed to beat along with mine.

“That *is* your pulse!” she exclaimed, voice lilting with enthusiasm. “Take a look at your wrist. What colour is your vein?”

I paused for a moment before slowly

glancing down. My vein stood out against my pale skin, a bright blue crawling down my wrist. I couldn’t remember my vein being that blue, but then again it could be because I had been underwater for so long that my skin had paled and that let the colour of my vein pop out more than normal.

“If you’re thinking that it’s blue because your skin has paled due to the long dip in cold water, you’re wrong,” the girl interrupted my thought as if she had read it, leaving me flabbergasted. “Blue veins belong to the children of the ocean, while green ones belong to the children of the forest. Long ago we protected our respective homes according to our veins. But today we protect both the ocean and the forest regardless of the colours wrapped around our wrists. The colours, however, remain as a reminder that we are all children of nature and that its destiny is in our hands. Humans, they tend to only care about things that are part of themselves. Now that you’ve learned that the ocean beats alongside your heart, you know that it is a part of you. Many other children, the ones you saw swimming around and exploring earlier—very much like you who started



off unknowing, ignorant—will come to this understanding as well. In the future when you've all grown up, you can claim that the ocean is the heart of our Earth; for the Earth in the future is made up of the children of today."

Her little speech struck me, so much that I could recite every word. Which is weird, because the memory of that day is mostly blurry and my logic keeps trying to reason with me. Do you know that feeling of not being able to tell between a childhood memory and a dream? Sometimes certain memories feel too vague to be real but vivid enough to be a dream, hence that is why it is so easy to mistake a dream for a memory. Well, meeting the children of the ocean feels like a dream. It most probably was, for whenever I recount the story, people always look at me weird or smile and say I had a wonderful imagination.

But the blue of my vein still stands out against my skin and my pulse still resonates with the ocean's.

-

I remember the message left for me by

the girl who came from the ocean; that I should tell people about how the ocean is the heart of our Earth. I had wanted to share my experience the moment I got old enough to be called an adult. By a universally accepted logic, it is mostly certain that an adult's words are taken more seriously than a child's. Is that true, though? Would you say that you believe me if I tell you my story is real? Because I know many would not, and that's okay. It is completely your choice to believe my story or not, and I have no right to force anything onto you. There is, however, one thing that I would like you to really take to heart: The ocean is in need of our help.

If you don't believe in the children of the ocean, then believe in the scientists, the news, the articles—all crying for attention to be drawn towards our ocean. If you don't believe my story, then believe the murky water, the crumbling reefs, the fish floating sideways on the surface. We are all children of nature, and if you ever need a reminder, let me ask you one thing:

Take a look at your wrist. What colour is your vein?



**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*My ambition always revolves around the world of fiction and literature, so when I saw a poster at the Dutch Embassy I thought I could join the contest and even if I didn't win, this could be useful in the future. I strongly agree that this contest is a one way to encourage the younger generation to conserve our ocean. With short stories, young people could be more interested and moved. Not to mention, in this way the younger generation can express their feelings creatively.*

**JURY'S COMMENT**

*This story genuinely depicts the condition of coast life. A quite simple story that gives me bigger hope for the future.*

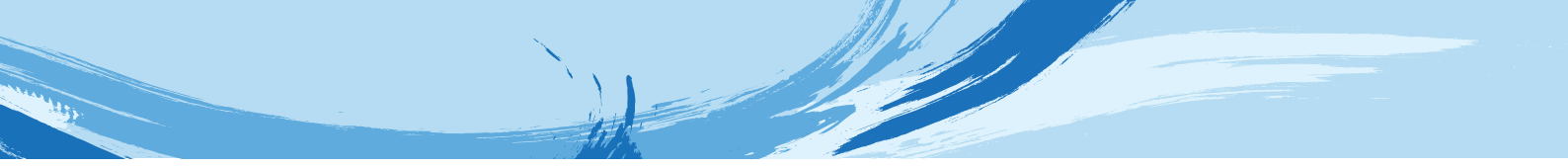
*- Josephine Yaputri*



**Shera Amira Rinaldy**  
**Bekasi**  
**15 years old**

# WAVES OF SHARD

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Mara adored the ocean. The gentle breeze by the shore swaying the tall palm trees that cast shade on her against the shining sun. Seashells in various shapes and colors—broken, chipped, or tarnished, colorful and bright, or dark and mysterious—were washed up on the soft white sand. The sound of the Bali Sea washing on the shore was the only thing that was existent. Mara walked past old logs, approaching the shoreline.

The heart-stirring view held many memories, bittersweet ones. Mara would remember the time when she would go to this quiet part of the beach every day. She thought of the ocean as a mother figure who would listen to her complaints, worries and anxieties in her heart. Mara would scream her pain away into the distance, or simply sit there with the ocean keeping her company in silence—the heart did all the talking. The ever-changing wave understood her feelings. When she'd yell her lungs out the ocean was there with soothing waves as if trying to calm her down. Mara would sit there for hours, maybe with a book or two, until the ocean veiled herself in the darkness of the night.

The soft, soothing tune of the breeze

equivalent to a mother's lullaby sang her to sleep, under the trees that shaded her much like a mother's warm embrace, despite her never having had the chance to feel such a thing. The feeling of comfort, protection, and being loved—the ocean alone was able to give her that. A feeling she wished she could have.

As the wind blew strands of her raven hair, she pressed her feet into the sand and felt the water brush her ankles. *Warm*, she thought, *but why warm?* Then suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her heel. Mara winced at the sudden impact. She lifted her foot. Blood was trickling from her sole. Mara's chocolate orbs widened at the cause of her pain: It wasn't small rocks nor broken seashells, it was a big shard of glass. Not long after, she saw glass and plastic bottles floating not far from her.

\* \* \*

Mara washed her feet at a nearby foot wash, carefully rinsed her wounded foot, not bothering to treat the wound. She was used to it. When she was about to head back to her spot, Mara heard the sound of cheers and applause from afar. She decided to check what was going

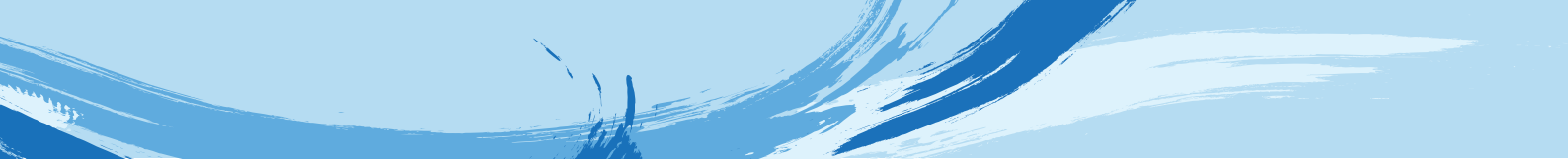


on—and it made her heart sink. There were men on a boat cheering for one of them. They went silent for a moment only to be greeted with a huge splash. The men cheered again as dead fish started to appear on the surface of the water.

Her heart brimming with anger, Mara's face went blood red. They were

destroying the peace, they were hurting her “mother”—their own “mother”. Like a mother, the ocean provided her children with gifts: food, salt, water and fascinating sea creatures to entertain and broaden their knowledge. Her kindness was endless but she didn't receive what she deserved in return. Mara was about to give the men a piece of her mind. As she stomped in anger





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(despite slightly limping), she saw the men's boat coming on shore. One of the men noticed Mara walking towards them and decided to speak up.

"Hey pretty lady! Where you heading to?" a man in his late-30s called out.

Mara's pace started to decrease. She got cold feet.

"Come on, let Uncle take you back home yeah?"

At this point, her heart was pounding fast, alert for signs of danger. Mara took a seashell nearby and limped back to her spot as fast as she could.

Finally back in her safe zone, she plopped down on the white sand and hugged her knees. She was afraid. *What was I thinking?!* They were fully grown men, she thought, and as for her, she's only a child, to make matters worse, a girl! How could a frail young girl win over adult men? Her screams and pleading go unheard by those who claim themselves to be *adults*. Mara hated their ignorance, but she hated herself more for the fact that she knew what they were doing was wrong, but she couldn't do anything. She was helpless, powerless. Oh how she

wished to be someone else, someone of power. But the truth was harsh for the naïve girl.

Mara sat by the shore with a book by her side and her legs folded close to her now-calmed heart. She sat in silence, staring away towards the horizon where the sun was disappearing into the ocean. The clinking sounds of shattered glass matched her heart as she thought how awful the ocean must feel. But then the ocean glistened in the sun, catching Mara's attention as the breeze comforted her heart, as if the ocean were trying to say, *I'm okay*. Tears brimmed in Mara's eyes, threatening to spill out.

Then a voice interrupted, "Mara, stop blanking out! God, this child. You'll be sent off abroad tomorrow for an early start of school. This is for the company's future so you better do as I say," she demanded.

Mara wiped her tears, stood up straight and took one last look at the ocean. Once again, the light reflected in her eyes. She gave a thin smile. *I will return as someone able to help. Wait for me.* She dusted off her clothes, leaving the white sand and said, "Yes, mother."

**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*Indonesia is one of few archipelagic states whose people live and depend on the ocean, but also one of the worst offenders when it comes to taking care of the environment. I applaud the European Union for this Our Ocean Story Contest since it reminds people that ocean is not something that we can take for granted, but a beauty that we should maintain and care for. I also believe in the power of words and stories, because it was through words that I fell in love with the sea and oceans for the first time. Amidst the flood of information, facts and scientific truths alone cannot convince people to care about the ocean and our Earth - and that's where fiction comes in: to knock on people's hearts the way mere arguments can't.*

**JURY'S COMMENT**

*Dying nature, dying humans but a firm determination to protect our ocean...*

*- Rafael de Bustamante Tello*



**Devina Heriyanto**

**Bekasi**

**22 years old**

# WHAT HAPPENED TO THE KIDS?

---



Three kids did not come to my class today. One had not shown up for a week. The rest of the students noticed, but they did not think that it was worrisome. *Maybe they were just sick, I heard one saying. The season is changing, after all.*

I wished it were only the season that was changing.

\*\*\*

The next day, I started my class late because I had a meeting with a parent. Tim's parent, to be exact. He was the first one to fall to this epidemic. It was all normal: The students were at recess and playing some games while I was having my lunch. Sounds of laughter could be heard across the school and we as teachers generally loved it.

And then the scream.

"Miss! Help! Tim fell and... and... and..."

I ran, looking for the tall, sturdy kid who was the star athlete of his year. His reading was slow, sure, but we were so sure he was destined for something else.

That destiny, and whatever faith we had in Tim, was destroyed that afternoon.

Tim broke one of his legs. We rushed him to the emergency unit. The whole class brought fruits and flowers after school, but we have not seen him since.

"Tim is not coming back," said his mother, a respectable woman with rather stoic expression.

"We understand Tim might need some time for his recovery and might not be able to join his class. He can always come back next year. I'd be happy to have him in my class," I suggested. Some parents thought the school and the teachers were rigid and cruel, an assumption I wanted to prove wrong.

"No," she said. "You misunderstood me. Tim is not coming back. Not this year, not the next year. Never."

And then she left.

Just before I entered my class, I could hear that some sort of discussion was going on. One that stopped precisely when I opened the door.

"It's okay kids, you can tell me whatever it is you were discussing earlier," I said, smiling.

Silence. I could see them eyeing each



other, as if they were unsure who should speak first.

Finally a fist shot up in the air.

“We heard that Tim is not coming back, is it true?” asked Rose, the class captain.

“Yes, I myself just heard the news this morning.”

“Then what about Chris and Monica?”

I really did not know how to answer that question. The news about Tim confirmed my suspicion that the sickness was part of this epidemic I had heard about. One, it was rumored, nobody survived.

“I’m sure they will get back to school soon,” I said, still maintaining my smile while choking back tears.

\*\*\*

I first heard of the epidemic three years ago. I was on vacation with my college friends, visiting exotic regions famous for their vibrant landscape. We were drowning in excitement, wondering what we would find there.

And then the trip got cancelled. The tour guide did not give us any reason, just lackadaisically mentioned that we would

visit another, nearby region instead. We did not think about it too much then. It was all the same to us: a vivid, lively, exotic destination. We had fun and stayed for the night.

That night, I could not sleep. I had always found it difficult to sleep in a new place. As I usually did, I took a walk. Just in front of our lodging, I overheard our guide talking to a local.

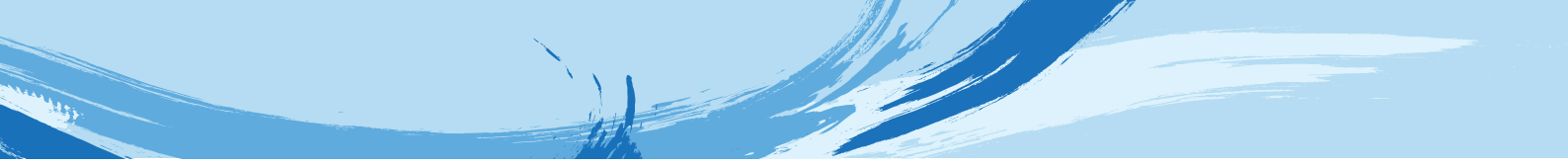
“It was horrible, really. It happened so fast. I myself knew just last night,” he said, “To think that I almost took them there...”

“We did not know until some of them came here. We thought they were saying nonsense. They were stressed out after all. And fragile. How can a big city get destroyed overnight? With nothing too?” the local said, “It was not until we checked it out for ourselves that we believed them.”

“What did you see?” asked our guide.

“Nothing. Only the skeletons of what the city used to be. And white. It’s all white.”

“What happened to the survivors? Can I maybe talk to them?”



---

A breath of hesitation, then, “I don’t think you can. They’re all dead.”

\*\*\*

A city dead overnight? All vibrant corals turned white, as if they were just skeletons? People dying of some mysterious disease?

I did not believe that at first. I thought they were just sharing some urban myths. Maybe the people were just careless and did not take care of the city so that it had rotted away. Or probably the local man was just telling a spooky story to discredit the other region.

Whatever. It was so insignificant that time that I quickly forgot about it.

It was just now that I made the connection.

The city certainly did not get destroyed overnight, it happened so slowly that none of us noticed the change. Now

that I knew what to look for, I saw it everywhere. The corals became less vibrant, as if they were losing some essence. More and more people had difficulty walking. First it was the elders, which was not suspicious as we thought it was only due to their age. Then the kids started falling too, with fractures and broken bones and shells. Even the water tasted different.

The epidemic was not only attacking the people, it was attacking the environment too. It wasn’t us or the kids who got sick, it was the ocean.

\*\*\*

The morning light was blinding, but it was a comforting sign that life goes on here. I had made up my mind. I had to tell everyone. Surely together we could do something. Anything.

But first I had to get up.



### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*I joined Our Ocean Story Contest because I wanted to express my thoughts about the ocean's current condition, and because writing fictional stories in English is my passion. I appreciate this contest as a movement to raise awareness on our ocean's condition today. This encourages people to express their thought about the environment in the form of fiction which should be done more often.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*This one is actually one of my favourite stories with an interesting plot. Although the story has an "Oliver Twist" element, the setting of the story reminds me a lot of eastern parts of Indonesia.*

*- Josephine Yaputri*



**Fairuza Hanun Razak**  
**Surabaya**  
**13 years old**

# **CROOKED GOOD**

---

“Hey, you there!” the shopkeeper yelled, pointing at me as I stuffed mangos into my shirt. “STOP!”

“Sorry, buddy, gotta eat to live and steal to eat, I’m afraid.” I tipped an imaginary hat at the angered man, breaking into a light backward run. Deftly stealing a loaf of bread and a whole chicken from one of the shelves, I sprinted across the village’s beach.

“Come back here, thief!” His voice faded as I placed more distance between myself and him.

With an arm securing the stolen goods underneath my ragged shirt, I slid through a gap between the dense mangrove trees on the shoreline. The occasional waves licking my feet as they slowed their steps across the sand, I heard a feeble squeak. Stashing the food under a wooden plank, I followed where the noise was coming from.

My heart felt as if it was being strangled in my chest, but my muscles urged me to sprint toward a murky area of the fishermen beach. Entangled in a nest of fishing equipment and deposited litter was a tiny sea turtle, moving its legs in a vain attempt to wade through the saltwater.

I landed beside the trashed spot, scraping my knees against the coarse sand. “*Shit!*” Softly, I untwined the plastic bag and net that was trapping the turtle. With the swift hands of a person who’d practiced thievery for years, the baby turtle was free.

When it squawked more, I gingerly cupped my hands around its rough reptilian body, clambered to my feet and to a cleaner part of the shore. “There you go, little turtle,” I mumbled, smiling fondly. I placed the turtle down on the edge of the coastline. Pride swelled in my chest I was shaking with happiness as I watched the little green body swim into the ocean.

I was quiet for a moment, staring at the horizon where the turtle had been swept by a sun-gilded wave. I was reminded of ten years ago when a Belgian scientist first came to this beach, carrying expensive-looking instruments in his bag. He’d asked me if I knew my way in the beach, and I’d said yes.

*“Do mangroves grow here anymore?” he spoke in stuttering Indonesian, inspecting a shoreline where mangroves had used to grow on.*

*“No, sir,” I said.*





The scientist laughed harshly. "You drink ground water? Is it salty?"

"They weren't before, but now, yes."

"Well, mangroves provide shelter to marine life, purify water, and protect land."

"Really?" I suddenly didn't want to steal from him. "Why do they take their wood for fire and leaves for their livestock?"

"Simply lack of education perhaps. They don't bother restoring the mangroves." He scowled, glaring at the instruments he held in his hand. "The ocean's acidification's risen." He turned to me. "You live near here, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Good, I need you to help me record some things while I'm staying here."

I gaped at him. "Me?" Who would trust a thief?

He gave me a pocket camera that may be worth lots.

After three months of accompanying the scientist with his research, he instructed me, "Keep doing what you've been doing with me. I'll be back next dry season."

"A-Are you sure?"

"Your eagerness to learn about nature assures me. You're a good man. By photographing the fish, we'll be able to see how the calcium carbonate deficiency affects the growth of fish here."

The next year the scientist returned, he appeared pleasantly stunned to see young mangroves budding from the ground, spreading five miles from the shoreline. "You planted mangroves?"

I beamed, handing him the camera he'd left me. "Yeah."

Studying the photos on the camera, he grinned. "Thanks." His grin faltered. "My suspicions are confirmed. The fish size and population's growing smaller."

I drooped at the news. "Will the mangroves help them grow better?"

"Yes, it will." That helped me smile again. "Where did you find the mangrove seeds, by the way?"

"I stole it," I said, grimacing sheepishly.

"Oh." He didn't seem pleased that I was stealing, but his eyes softened with understanding. "I'll bring you more

seeds next year, so you won't have to steal."

\*

The latest entertainment for tonight was a newspaper I'd snatched from a local store in the village. To put it lightly, I was enraged by some of its headlines.

I cursed loudly, jumping to my feet, clutching the crumpled newspaper as I took in the disgusting words of a so-called nature-loving journalist. I pulled at my hair in shock. "I can't believe this!"

"A raise in salary for *decorative fish catchers*?! 'High demand for seafood leads to rarity of large fish'?! 'More oil shipments demanded across the country'? Scorching fumes escaped my nostrils as I read the last one. "Oh God, 'Domestic airlines delivering dolphins to traveling circuses'?! Those government shitheads have lost their frigging mind!"

I heard a snap over the warm fire's crackling. I looked over my shoulder; I scowled to find another nasty child trying to steal my mangroves' wood. *Again.*

I snarled and grabbed a small knife. "Go away! Don't you know mangroves

are important?!" I brandished the knife at him, frightening the boy enough to provoke him to drop his bundle of wood.

Gilded in firelight, the waves rushing between the mangroves exposed a school of silver fish. I smiled, because over time, through the reports from the scientist, I knew the fish living in my mangroves were slowly growing in size.

I remembered what the scientist said: "People protect what they love."

Now, feeling the fierce thudding in my chest, I knew it was true.

\*

The scientist's words "Share what you have, no matter the quantity," motivated me to become a teacher. No one would consider me.

Luckily, a businessman was building a library in the village. He, overlooking my unforgivable past, hired me to teach village children about nature.

"If a thief can change and protect nature," I told the kids, smiling proudly, "why can't you?"

**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*When I was a child I was more interested in expeditions to the deep ocean than outer space. Then I accidentally saw the contest during the European Higher Education Fair and I thought that maybe if I joined this contest, I could make other people realize how beautiful and mysterious the ocean and its inhabitants are. In my opinion, a great vision for marine health on earth will not be accomplished without the cooperation and commitment of many people, from decision makers to society, so I appreciated the European Union Delegation for organizing this contest as a small step to realize this great vision.*

**JURY'S COMMENT**

*Great and fresh presentation and narrative techniques together with an interesting story line.*

*- Beatriz Chivite Ezquieta*



**Retno Windradini**

**Jakarta**

**26 years old**

# SUDDENLY ALL IS BLACK

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- Indonesia, 5 May 2017 -

I had been like this since elementary school, a strong, “caring” and perfect class leader, hiding a heart as fragile as glass inside. I’m not weak! I’m only trying to survive.

My friends look up to me, my teachers love me. I love it.

I .... love it?

They said, “There will always be darkness behind every light”.

-

The silent, black night is still enveloping the beach as I slowly count my steps outside. The rhythmic melody of ocean waves slightly smashing the sand fills the beach. The piercing cold wind enters my dive suit. Entering the beach, I feel the coldness of the night on the grain of sands. A full moon illuminates the pitch-black sky, making the stars unseen. I stand, closing my tired eyes, taking my first deep breath.

“I will join the sea tonight”.

-

*“Baruna, you are still a mere child, you can’t do anything, your mother is also to blame”. A loud clashing of objects echoed.*

*“WHY DID I EVEN GAVE BIRTH TO YOU?”, mother cried. “An-answer me!!”*

*“Baruna, you have to achieve good grades! You have to! You are not my child if you achieve bad grades! Understand?”*

*“Baruna, I envy you. You have a wealthy family, good looks, summa cum laude...”*

*“Baruna, I really love you, you are a kind and intelligent person”.*

*“Baruna, can you listen to my story? I’m really sad”.*

*“Baruna, you still haven’t paid your debts”.*

-

ENOUGH!

That little darkness inside my heart, I used to look down on it. “It will soon go away”, I thought to myself. This little darkness has accumulated to become a huge monster in my heart. Behind my smile is a struggle to tame this huge monster inside.

My only friend is the sea because no human has ever listened to me intently.

I can feel the warmth of the ocean’s waves on my legs as I walk closer to the sea. This nostalgic warmth sweeps away my darkness. I love it.

I slowly put on all my scuba-diving gear, then I walk closer to the sea.



My mind has never been clearer than this. The last thing I want before I die is to say hello to my sea friends. I entered the sea, which engulfs my whole body. Although warm, I can feel cold and strong waves sweeping me farther from the shore.

*“The bridge has been burned”.*

I allow myself to be carried by the waves. It was pitch black, so I turn the underwater flashlight on.

The sea and her inhabitants were fast asleep tonight, no fish on the coral far below or any marine mammals swimming around. I can only hear the sound of my underwater breaths.

*“kkkkrrrrr.....hhhhhhhhuu.....”*

Suddenly came an eerie low moan that sounded like nothing I had ever heard in all my life, followed by continuous strong waves big enough to pull me farther. As the voice disappears, several enormous black-winged object appear and move gracefully around me. I point my flashlight at this black object. Was it what they call “manta ray”?

As I shift my gaze downward I remember my true purpose here, my last exploration. I decide to swim down approaching the coral. It’s majestic, millions of snow-like, minuscule objects float above huge coral beds. I try to enjoy this spectacle while it lasts.

*“KKKRkkkkrrrrrr.....HHHHuuuuuuuuuu.....iii.....”*

A second low moan came, this time louder and longer. The sea vibrates along with the song.

“What was that?” I grew scared.

It was scary yet beautiful, a sound I have never heard my entire 23 years alive.

In a sudden realization, I see my oxygen bar is reaching zero and I am 25 meters down, exceeding my maximum diving depth. I have to ascend slowly to avoid decompression sickness. I take a deep breath to conserve what I have left. I’m not planning to go back anyway.

*“Krrrrr.....hhuuu.....”*

The mysterious sound reaches me again and an enormous creature approaches me.

All I can see of that creature is a warm and understanding eye gazing at me.

I smile weakly. Weirdly, it smiles back.

I want to shout, her song accompanied by words comes into my mind.

*“Are..... you.....okay?”*

Time seems to slow down.

Is it talking to me? Can it communicate with me?

Everything around me except the creature is blurred, only us and a continuous flow of the song. We exchange our thoughts. It seems she is trying to listen to me.

*“Tell ..... your ..... story”.*

The next thing is all blurred. I can only feel warmth enveloping my whole body.

Did I die? Somehow I feel all better now, almost like all my burdens disappeared.

Suddenly all is black.

- Indonesia, 9 May 2017 -

*"Wake .....up".*

"Baruna, wake up!" said a heavy voice.

*"Was that a dream?"* I opened my eyes slowly.

"Baruna, you are extremely stupid!" shouted a man beside me. "I told you to dive with me".

"Where's my phone?"

"We found you stranded on the beach wearing full diving equipment and zero oxygen!" the man explained. "You slept for 4 days after the decompression chamber"

"My phone, please?"

"NO, and i have bad news", he said. "We found a huge monster stranded on this shore just yesterday".

*"A huge monster?!"* my heart suddenly raced.

“People said it was a giant squid from...He-, HEY WAIT!!!”

I raced out of my room, hoping to see this “monster”.

The shore was crowded and I couldn't care less. I push through the crowd just to see this “monster”.

*“Is it alive?”* I grew scared.

Then I found what I was searching for: that all-too familiar gaze, this time lifeless.

I cried.

- Scotland, 5 May 2020 -

*“That was the reason I took an interest in researching marine mammals, sir”.*

*“I see”.*

*“A bit sentimental, yes. But I need your guidance”.*

*“Okay, shall we begin our research then?”*

-







### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*I love the ocean. My favourite place to visit is Bali with its beautiful beaches. Sadly, we can find trash here and there. It gives negative effects to the sea creatures. This contest had an awesome theme, I had a good time writing my story and reading other's as well. By participating in this contest, I hope that people can be more aware of the problem and do something to protect our ocean.*

### **JURY'S COMMENT**

*This emotion-packed, gripping story navigates swiftly between a magical universe undersea and an appealing environmental truth. By doing so, it conveys a sense of urgency for each and every one of us to act. Just like Meredith.*

*- Rafael de Bustamante Tello*



**Mustika Kusuma**  
**Jakarta**  
**21 years old**

# **LA SIRÈNE D'ALARME DE L'Océan**

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Le coup de foudre est bientôt suivi d'un coup de tonnerre. De petites gouttes tombent du ciel et rendent l'asphalte humide. La pluie va être lourde. Je gémis d'agacement. Je me demande si je vais pouvoir faire ma course quotidienne avec ce temps. Je ne l'ai jamais manquée en quatre ans, depuis que je suis au lycée. Mais mon lit me semble si tentant... Je détourne rapidement les yeux vers la fenêtre où les gouttes de pluie font la course l'une contre l'autre. Quand la plus petite goutte atteint le sol, je me décide.

Ma vision est limitée à cause de la pluie et mes mains tremblent un peu. Je regrette déjà ma décision. Je veux vraiment retourner chez moi et me cacher dans mes couvertures, mais la plage est à seulement quelques centaines de mètres.

En moins d'une minute, mes pieds s'enfoncent dans le sable. Je souris. J'admire toujours l'océan. Regarder les vagues rouler, en courant aussi loin que possible sur la plage, ou simplement recueillir les coquillages...

Je commence à courir vers le gros rocher.

Ce rocher n'a rien de spécial, bien que certaines personnes aiment prendre un selfie dessus. J'avoue que la vue d'en haut est vraiment cool. Mais aujourd'hui, une scène déchirante se passe devant moi. Là, un dauphin gît, inconscient. Je m'accroupis et l'examine. Je ne trouve pas son poul.

"Il est mort, laisse-le," dit quelqu'un derrière moi.

Je me retourne et j'ai presque une crise cardiaque. Une fille. *Une sirène*. Elle nage vers moi. Mon corps semble paralysé. Je suis impressionnée. Pas par sa beauté mais par ses longs ongles pointus.

"Bonjour humain," me salue-t-elle d'une voix profonde.

"Aaaa..." Je tombe sur les fesses.

"C'est vrai, tu devrais avoir peur de moi."

Elle me montre ses ongles et les traîne autour de mon cou. J'essaie de déglutir.

"Regarde ce que tu as fait ! Humain, tu tues mon pauvre pote." Elle libère mon cou et caresse le dauphin.

Je tousse. Son étreinte était tellement forte ! La sirène, maintenant sous forme humaine, me lance un regard noir. Une



voix intérieure me hurle de *courir* mais mes pieds sont collés au sol.

“Je ne l’ai pas tué, je le jure,” je me défends.

Elle secoue la tête. “Je ne dis pas que c’est toi spécifiquement qui a tué mon pote, je dis que c’est un *humain* qui l’a tué. Tu es un humain, n’est-ce pas? Donc, tu l’as fait. Maintenant, tu vas payer pour ça.”

Les larmes coulent de mes yeux. Encore une fois, elle enfonce ses ongles dans ma peau. Le sang commence à tacher mes vêtements. Je regarde le dauphin. Je ne sais pas ce que je lui ai fait de mal, mais mes lèvres laissent s’échapper ces mots: « *je suis désolée* ».

“Ça suffit, Marina.” Un homme apparaît soudainement.

Marina parle à cet homme dans une langue étrangère. L’homme inspecte le dauphin. Puis il verse un liquide bleu sur son corps. Après un certain temps, il secoue la tête.

“Puis-je connaître votre nom, jeune fille?” me demande-t-il, en français cette

fois.

“Meredith,” je réponds.

“Beau nom pour une personne mauvaise,” Marina se moque de moi. Je l’ignore.

“Permettez-moi de me présenter. Je suis Irwin, le roi des *merfolks*. Je suis aussi le chef de la FCM, la « Fédération des Créatures Marines ». Ma priorité est d’assurer la sécurité de toutes les espèces marines.” Je hausse un sourcil. “Il existe donc une telle chose?” je me demande.

“On dirait que tu as échoué” dit Marina, avant de continuer pleine de colère : “Montre du respect envers le roi, petite idiote. Grâce à lui mon estomac est plein de viande fraîche.”

“Je-je suis tellement désolée,” je bégaye.

Le roi ne montre aucune émotion. Cependant, ses yeux laissent transparaître du chagrin, de la douleur et de la colère. Il regarde ma main droite et examine mon bracelet. Il y a un charme de dauphin attaché. “Je vais t’emmener dans le monde souterrain bleu et profond.”

“Pardon?!” je panique. “Je ne peux pas retenir mon souffle aussi longtemps.”

“Suis-moi simplement.”



C'est incroyable mais terrifiant. Je vois beaucoup de poissons de différentes formes et couleurs, des méduses, des tortues, des raies, et plein d'autres. Quand un requin passe devant moi, je crie. Marina trouve ça drôle. Elle imite mon expression faciale.

“Ça a l'air si beau ici, je veux vivre ici,” je dis à Irwin.  
“Tu n'as pas tout vu,” marmonne-t-il.

Nous nageons un peu plus et les choses changes drastiquement. Le plastique est partout. Comme il ne peut pas se décomposer, il reste ici, dans les eaux profondes, loin du regard humain. Autour de moi, tout est mort : les grands et les petits poissons, les crabes et les tortues.

“Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé?” je demande.

“Ils ont mangé du plastique.” Il fait une pause. “Quand le plastique flotte sur la mer, les créatures marines pensent que c'est de la nourriture et le consomment. Notre hôpital est plein de patients qui ont le même problème : plastique dans leur estomac. Nous, les *merfolks* développons un médicament pour les guérir mais ça ne marche pas. Pas

vraiment. »

“C'est le liquide bleu que tu as donné au dauphin?” je demande.

Marina acquiesce.

Le roi me regarde. Ses yeux bleu foncé regardent dans les miens. Je suis conscient que son trident est pointé contre ma poitrine. L'eau autour de nous commence à frémir et il fait chaud. Je crie de douleur, mais mes ravisseurs ne réagissent pas.

“Je vois qu'il y a du bien en toi, Meredith. Est-ce que tu nous aideras, nous créatures marines, à protéger l'océan, notre océan?” plaide Irwin.

“Comment?”

“En ne faisant pas de l'océan votre poubelle !” commande Marina.

“Je vais vous aider,” dis-je sincèrement.

“Pas par peur, mais parce que je vois de mes propres yeux les dégâts causés par les humains. Il faudra du temps pour ouvrir les yeux des humains sur la pollution marine. Et plus de temps encore pour changer leur comportement – afin qu'ils ne jettent plus de déchets dans l'océan. Mais je vais commencer par changer mon propre comportement. Je vous le promets.”



### **Acknowledgement**

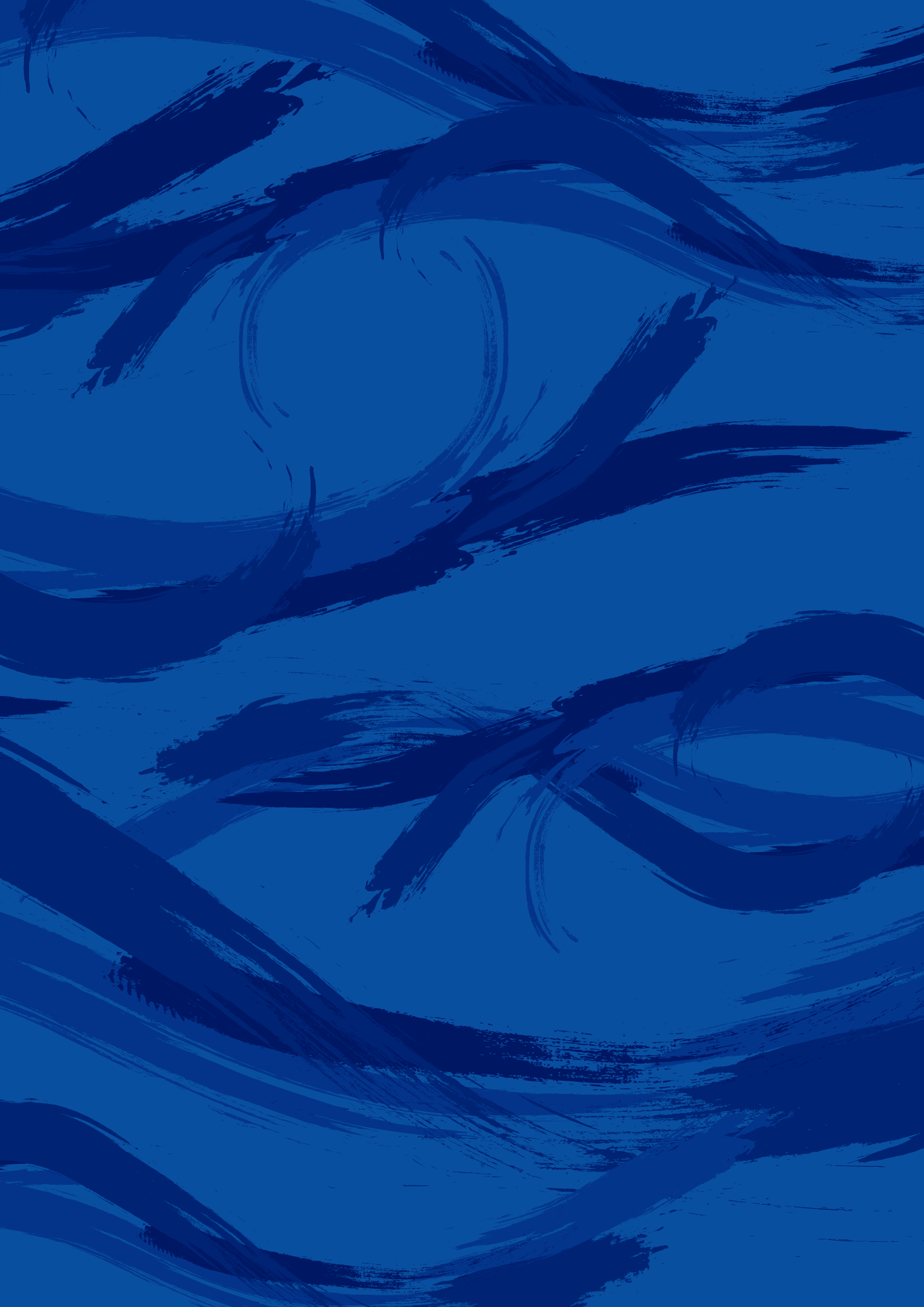
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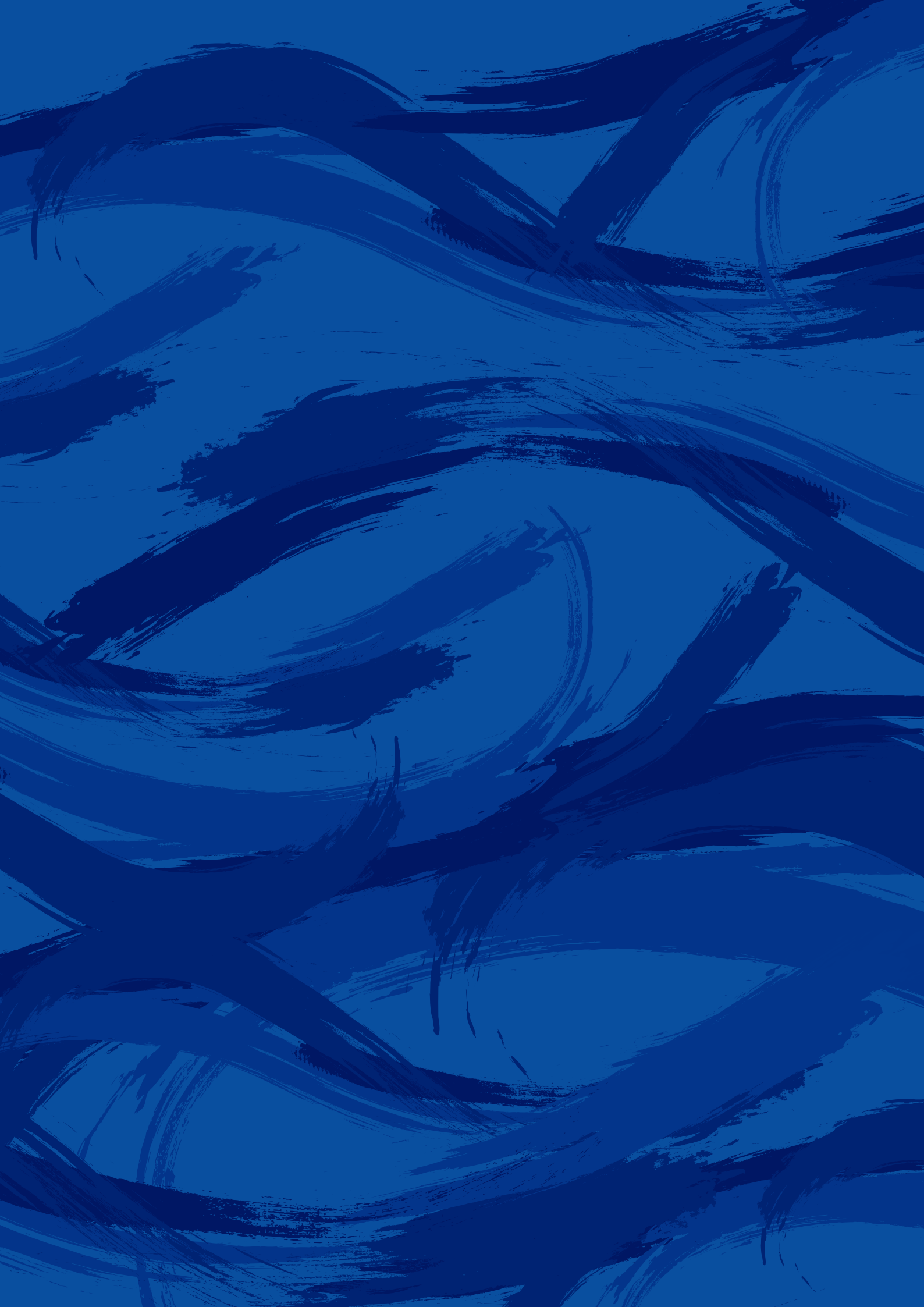
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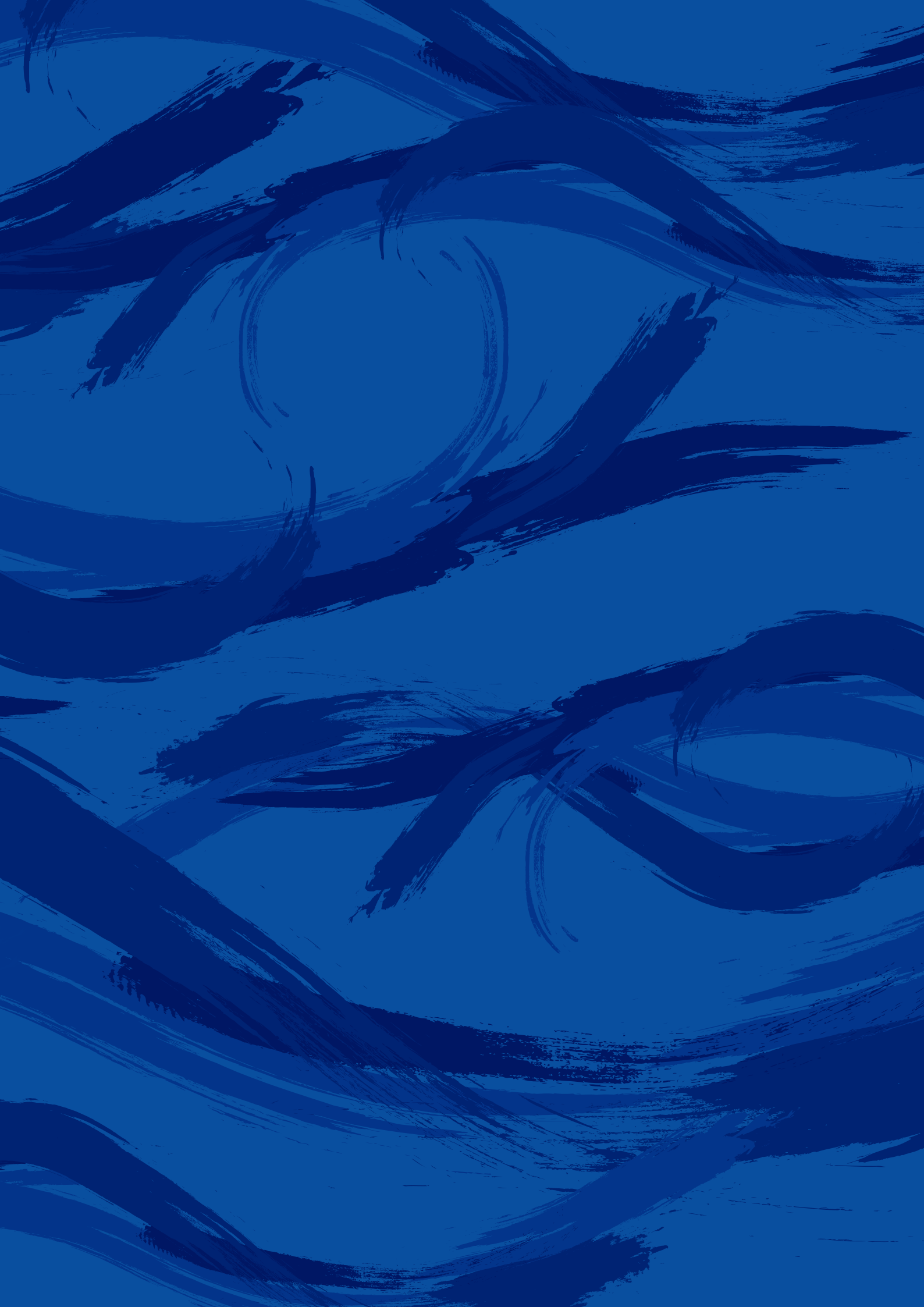


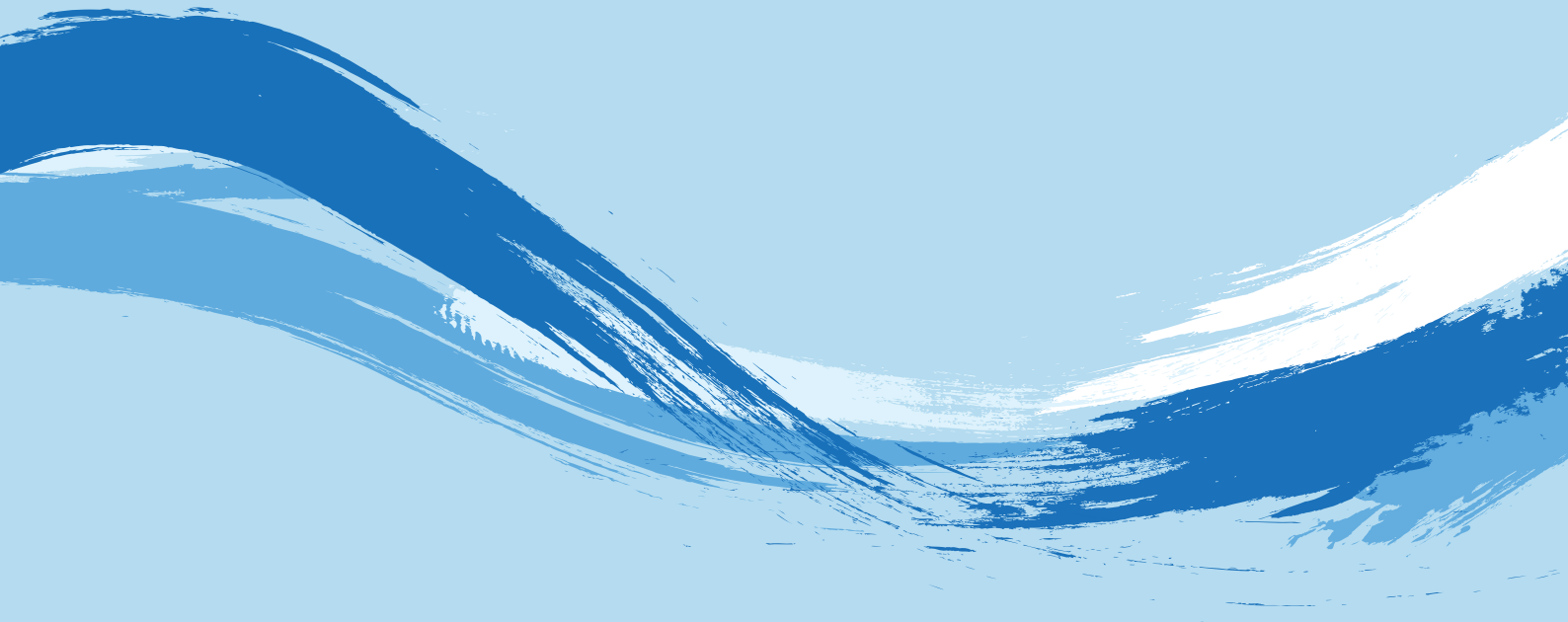
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*Federica Mogherini*  
*EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*

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