

Jellyfish

In a graceful arc, I leapt into the water. Splashing everywhere, I plunged through the surface, into a different world, an artistic splash of color, full of liveliness. Clownfish glided in and out of their untouchable homes, schools of fish bustled about, having no specific destination. The hectic life beneath the surface reminded me of why I started to dive. To see nature, to experience it, not just to know it's there. A yellow tang fish floated towards me, curiosity in its gaze. The lemon yellow figure apprehensively came closer and closer to me. My eyes watered with the struggle of not blinking, for fear of scaring this critter. Finally, my nerves gave in. I blinked, making the yellow tang scurry away. The rest of the coral reef barely noticed me, since I visit often. Careful to avoid the stinging parts of the coral, I dove further into the reef.

I glimpsed a flowing strand. I made a double take, staring in awe at the jelly-like form. A jellyfish. The first time I had ever sighted one. Its tentacles glared at me, though they did not look harmful, I seemed to sense the venom. I backed away, imagining myself in a hospital bed, writhing around, helpless, dying, all because I came too close to this medusa. I thought about it for a moment. Realizing it meant no harm, I timidly edged forward, feeling reassured that this would not be an encounter that I would not regret. I gazed at it, enchanted by its beauty. Some people call jellyfish the oceans' tears, but in its graceful movements, the billowing bell of the jellyfish looked like a heart beating. Billowing one beat after another, never stopping, everlasting beats. The light orange, transparent, umbrella-like bell glistened in the sunlight beaming through the seamless surface of the calm water. The tentacles flowed through the blue, ceasing only for seconds at a time to hover over the reef, apparently feeling the surrounding environment with no brain or touch. I went deeper into the water, determined to follow the jellyfish, to find out where it was going, to find out if it was going anywhere, anywhere but nothingness. The jellyfish glided deeper still, not disturbing anything in its wake. I swam faster, trying to get as close as possible to this wonder. It hovers for a moment too long, and I almost don't stop in time, making a tentacle almost brush my skin. But I did not have the same feeling of fear of jellyfish that I had come into the reef with. The glistening, transparent

jelly with the tentacles like a wave of thick hair had changed my mind about the animals under the sea. Deciding it was time to leave, I swam away, with a new found respect for jellyfish. Just because a creature has stings or sharp teeth, doesn't mean that it is fiercer or worse than an animal that does not. All it means is that it has a more complicated role in nature.