

Thoughts of a Hilsha

FARAH MASUD

You know they're coming for you. By now, they've taken most of your siblings. Last time, you managed to slip out somehow. It was pure luck, really. But the big day is getting closer and they are desperate. They need to round up as many of you as they can.

You think about the countless times you wanted to leave this place. You always wondered why your parents had left you and your siblings here, and swam away to the sea. Your older siblings had told you that it was for your own good. They assured you that staying here was important for you. That you needed to grow and become stronger before you could venture out to the sea.

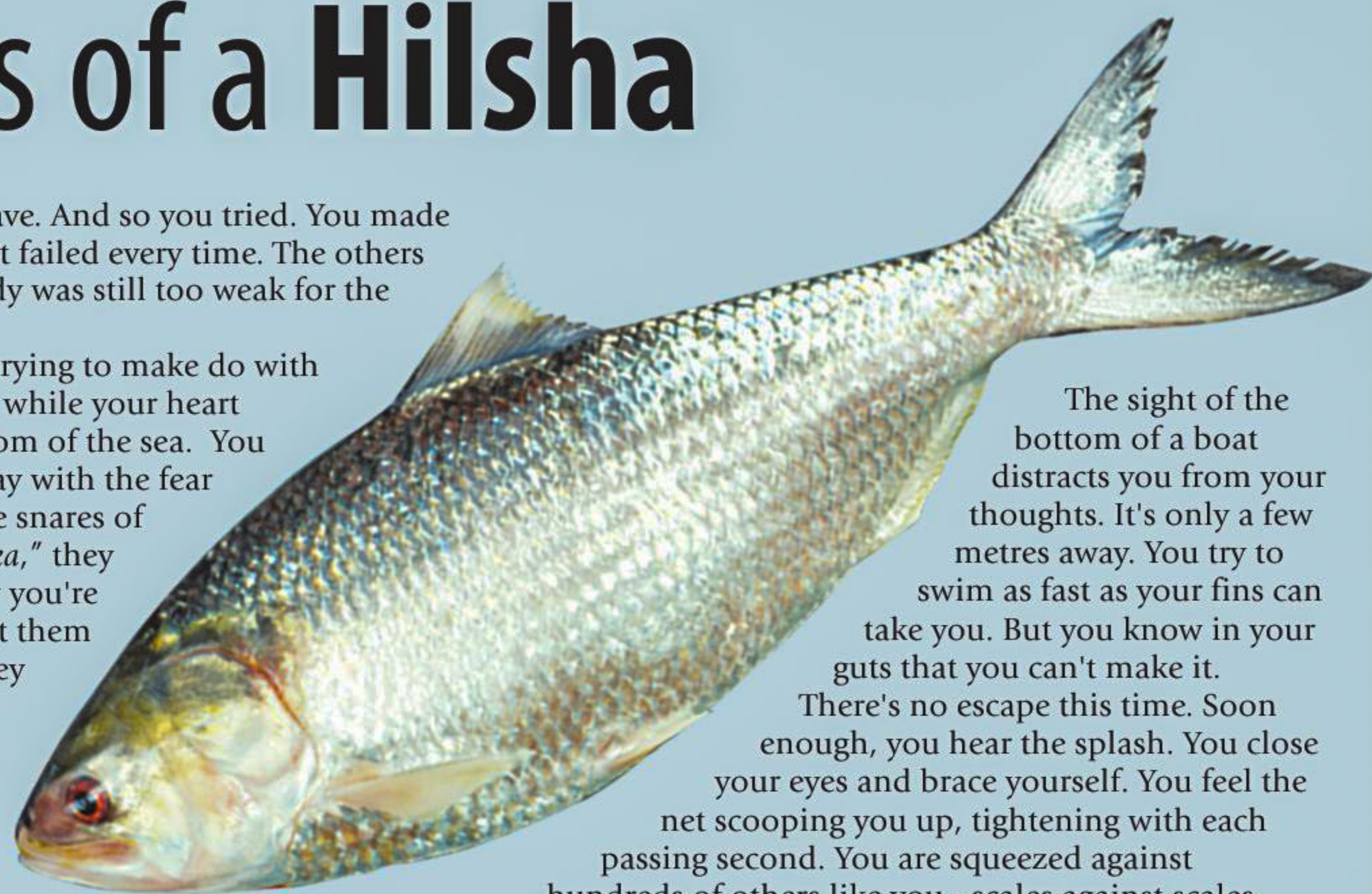
But no matter what they said, you were never convinced. *Get stronger here?* You thought. *How can we get stronger when there is barely enough food for all of us? When the very water we live in is brimming with all sorts of waste that the humans above have dumped on us without second thought?*

There wasn't enough space to even swim about. And it seemed as though everyday it was only getting worse. The water continued to become murkier and dirtier, making it harder for you to breathe. Some days, you felt as though your gills would burn up. You

knew you had to leave. And so you tried. You made several attempts, but failed every time. The others were right. Your body was still too weak for the sea.

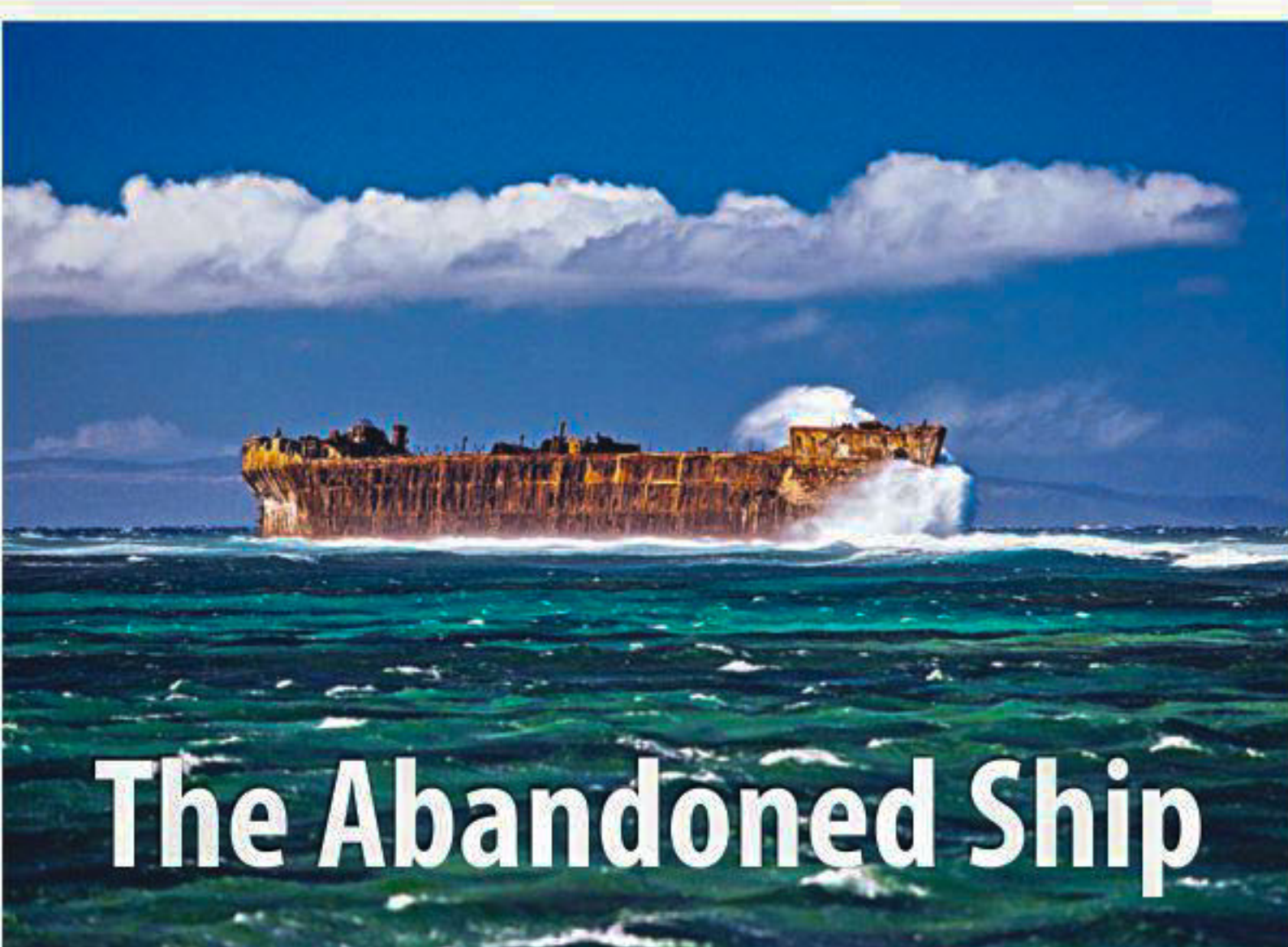
So here you are, trying to make do with the bare minimum, while your heart yearns for the freedom of the sea. You live through each day with the fear of falling prey to the snares of merciless men. "Jatka," they call you. They know you're too young to benefit them substantially. Yet they throw their massive nets unflinchingly, as if catching you all would serve a purpose far greater than your lives ever could.

Such fools! Do they not realise that catching young ones like you is only going to make things worse for them? They act as if they are beyond nature itself. You know you're going to die at some point anyway. You just hope it isn't in the hands of the most foolish creatures on earth.



The sight of the bottom of a boat distracts you from your thoughts. It's only a few metres away. You try to swim as fast as your fins can take you. But you know in your guts that you can't make it. There's no escape this time. Soon enough, you hear the splash. You close your eyes and brace yourself. You feel the net scooping you up, tightening with each passing second. You are squeezed against hundreds of others like you - scales against scales, glistening under the ruthless midday sun - a silvery nightmare. Your gills are clogging up, you're gasping for breath.

You realise it's futile and give up. During your last few seconds, you notice your captor. The folds on his forehead and the agony in his eyes are enough to tell you that he too is prey to the snares of merciless men.



The Abandoned Ship

SHAIKH SABIK KAMAL

I sail on this abandoned ship
 Which sails no more,
 The wind stops its howling
 And the ship already left the shore.

No communications, no captain
 I march on in this sea,
 Proudly blowing the trumpet
 Only for the flares to be seen.

The ship itself is nothing
 But a crack of my careless memory,
 The only hope I have—
 To break the loneliness in me.

But I understand that
 This ship will sink,
 But hope is poison,
 And poison is my last drink.

I sail on this abandoned ship
 Searching for this addiction I have—
 The greed for hope, search of pure water
 My last chance to break my abnormality.

The writer is a class 7 student at Dhaka Residential Model College.

MEANDER

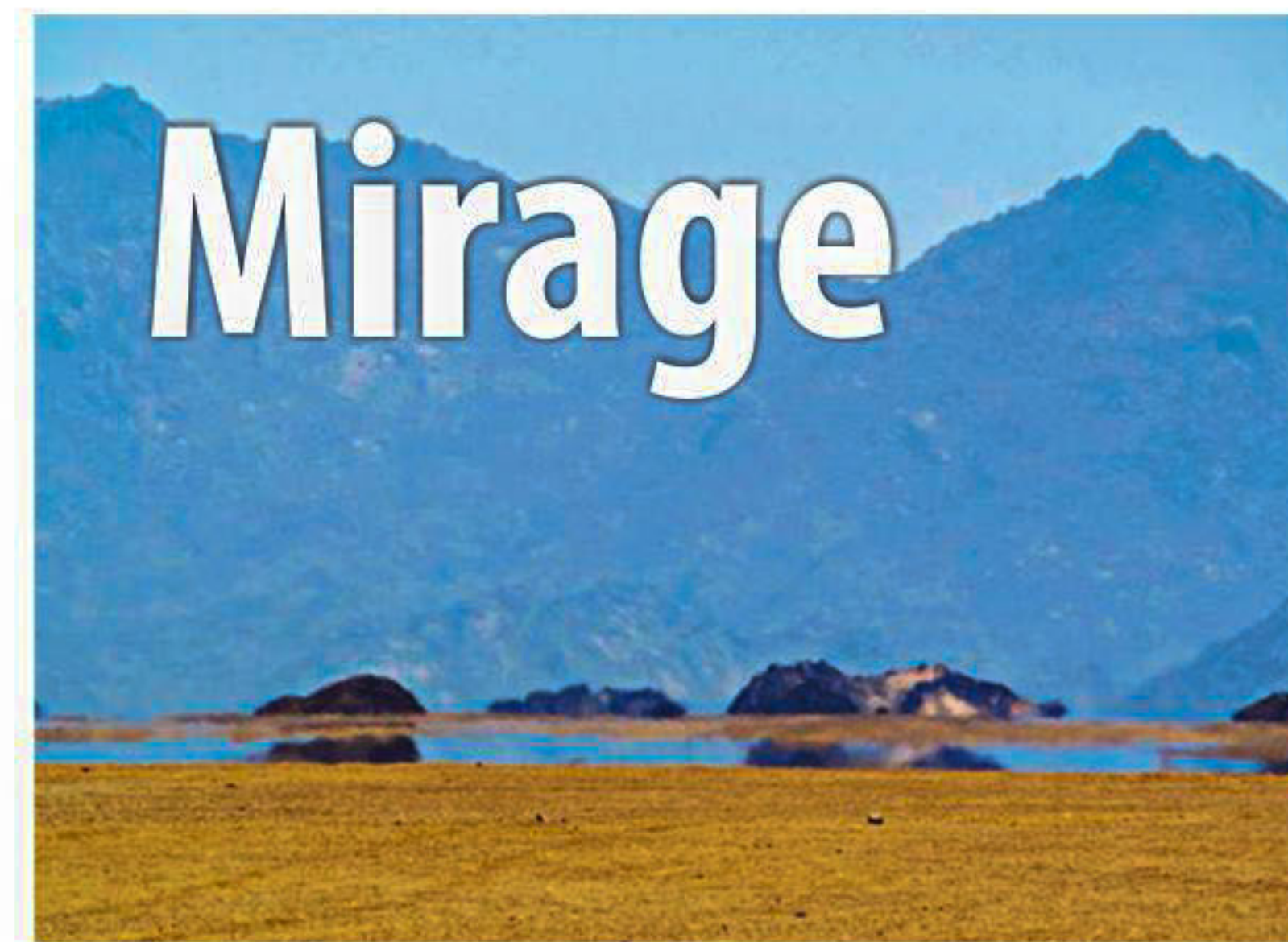
TASNIM BINTE ZULFIQAR

We set letters on fire,
 Paper catching flame like melting volcanoes;
 Watch the blue as it bleeds dry,
 Holding onto roses that expire.

We speed through highways,
 Zooming past the places we lost;
 Grasp onto the clouds that float by,
 Brushing away rust off of frozen lakes.

We step on the pedals as they slow,
 Stars suspended in time where they run away;
 From the sunset painting the sky,
 And then we let go.

The writer is a class 9 student in SFX Greenherald International School



MASABA MUSKAAN MEHEDI

Darkness engulfs me
 Heart screaming with pain
 Frantic head looking for a coup d'oeil of hope
 When I realised, wasn't I always chained in this maze?

In the mesh of failures and pandemonium,
 Achilles was my companion and
 Moros the cure to my ache.
 But all I failed to decipher was that there is no escape to this plague.

Who are you to judge me?
 Do you know me behind the veil of flesh?
 Who are you to cage my pneuma inside the restraints of shame?
 Do you know me from when I was still a fetus inside my progenitress?

No one is perfect.
 That's what I believe,
 Life is a surahi of un-accomplishments,
 It's you who needs to make the most of your transience.

Never wear the shackles of doubt.
 Never let anyone cower you down from being unbound.
 The swarm of breathing entities knows your exterior illusion,
 But you ken yourself the best inside and out.