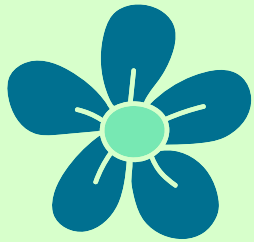


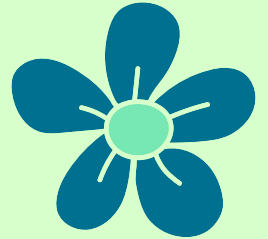
ISSUE #19

JULY 1ST, 2026



Wildflower Post

Newsletter



TODAY'S WRITER

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Zhuoqiao Zhu (Amelia) is a 13-year-old international student at BASIS Bilingual School in China. English is her second language. She writes about the cold spaces in apartments and the things people keep for no reason.

The Smoke Alarm Needs a Battery

AMELIA ZHU

The smoke alarm needs a battery. It beeps every forty-seven seconds.

I have not changed it in eleven months. The beep is a friend now.

Beep. The sound of not dying in a fire. *Beep.* The sound of not living either.

I bought a nine-volt battery last April. It is on the bookshelf behind a novel I will never finish. The novel is about a woman who climbs a mountain. She finds herself. I hate her.

The smoke alarm needs a battery. It beeps every forty-seven seconds.

I called my brother. I said, the beep is driving me crazy. He said, change the battery. I said, the ladder is in the garage. He said, get the ladder. I said, the garage has a wasp nest. He hung up.

Beep. The sound of a family that communicates via beep.

My therapist says the beep is a metaphor for avoidance. I say the beep is a beep. She says what are you avoiding. I say heights. She says the ceiling is eight feet high. I say the ceiling is full of Ohio. She makes a note. The note is a beep in a different key.

The smoke alarm needs a battery. It beeps every forty-seven seconds.

Last night I dreamed the beep stopped. I woke up in a panic. The beep was still there. I have never been so relieved to hear something so annoying.

The beep is my pulse. The beep is the metronome of a song I am not playing.

Beep. The sound of one hand clapping. *Beep.* The sound of a joke I forgot the punchline to.

I will change the battery tomorrow. Tomorrow is a country I do not have a passport for. The smoke alarm beeps. The smoke alarm is the only honest thing in this apartment. It does not pretend to be fine. It just beeps.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.