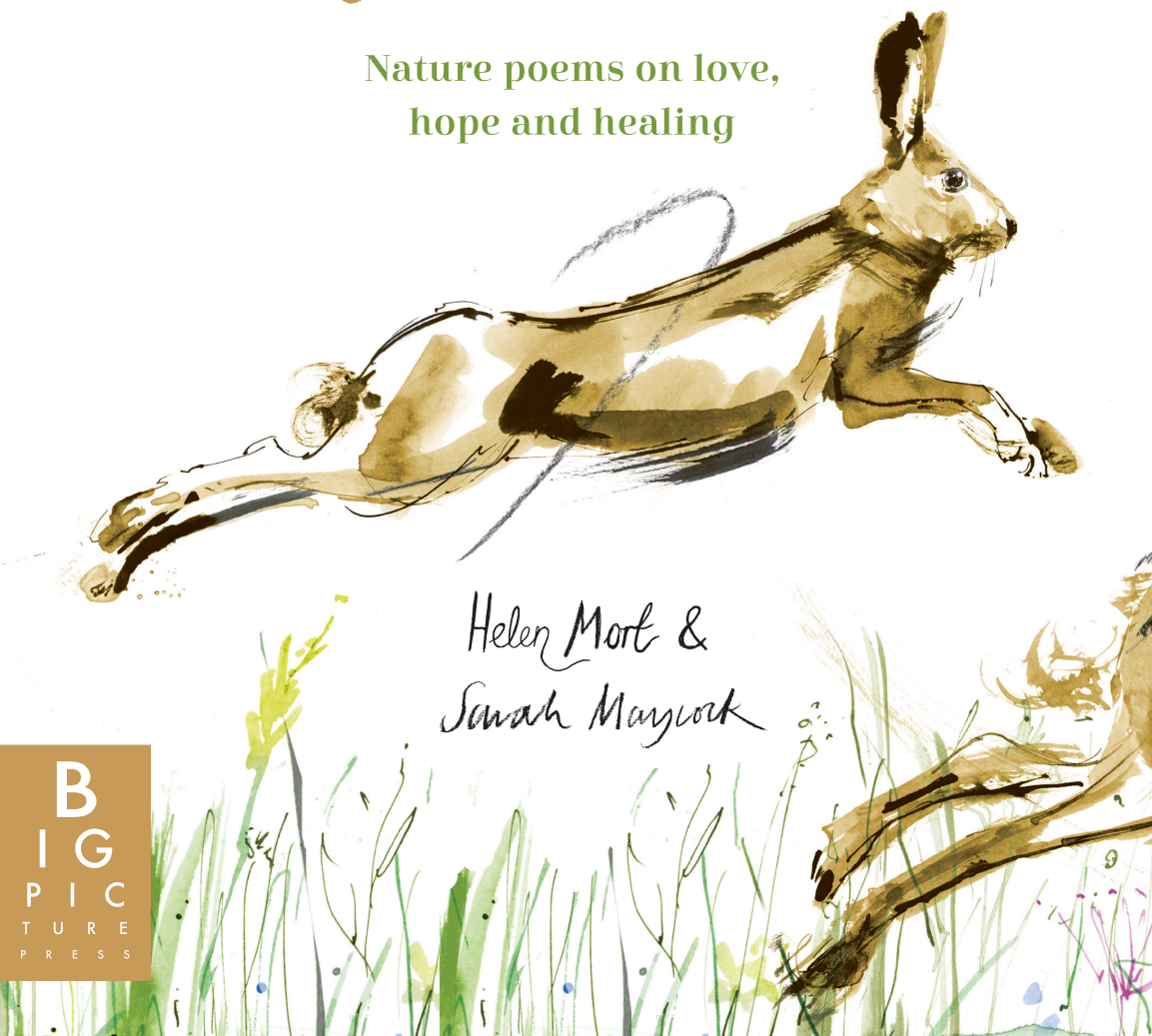




# The Wild Verses



Nature poems on love,  
hope and healing



Helen Mork &  
Sarah Maycock

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BIG PICTURE PRESS

First published in the UK in 2022 by Big Picture Press  
an imprint of Bonnier Books UK  
4th Floor, Victoria House  
Bloomsbury Square, London WC1B 4DA  
Owned by Bonnier Books  
Sveavägen 56, Stockholm, Sweden  
www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

Text copyright © 2022 by Helen Mort  
Illustration copyright © 2020 and 2022 by Sarah Maycock  
Design copyright © by Big Picture Press

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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ISBN 978-1-80078-476-5

This book was typeset in Kindsoul, Stempel Garamond  
and Cabrito Didone

The illustrations were created with watercolour,  
pencil and ink and finished digitally

Written by Helen Mort  
Edited by Isobel Boston  
Designed by Adam Allort and Olivia Cook  
Production by Ella Holden

Printed in Latvia



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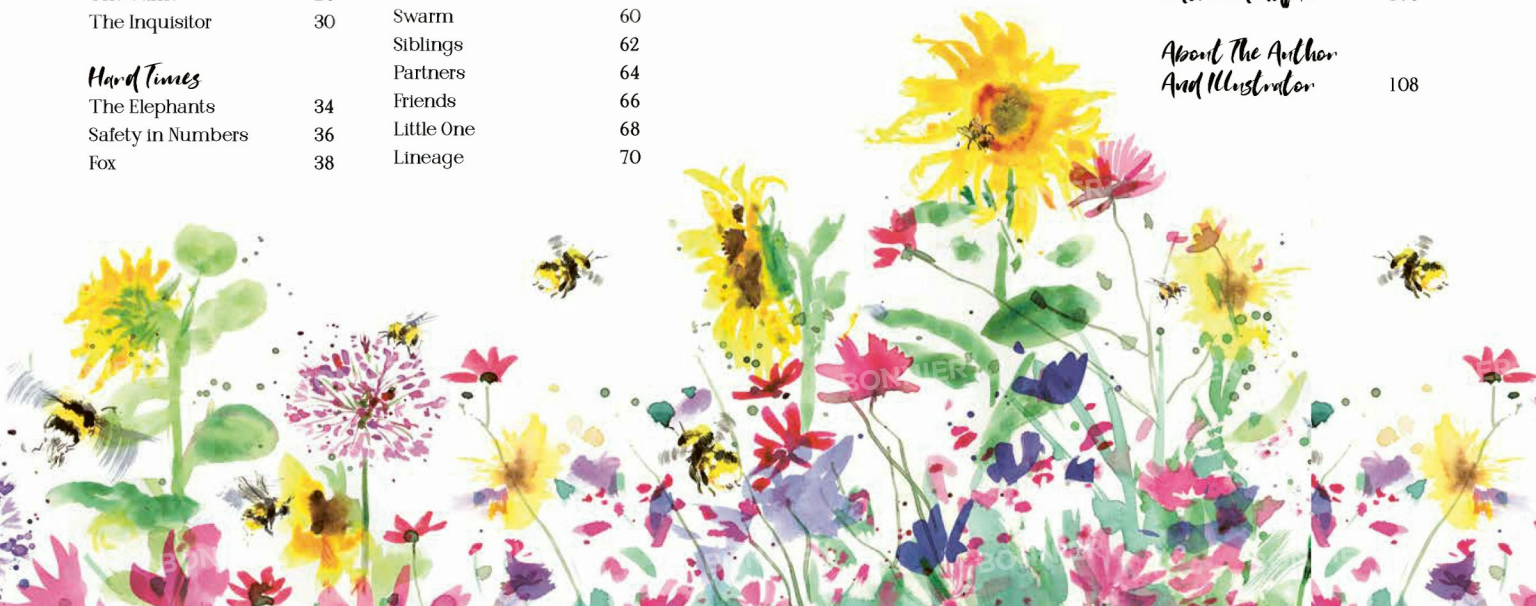
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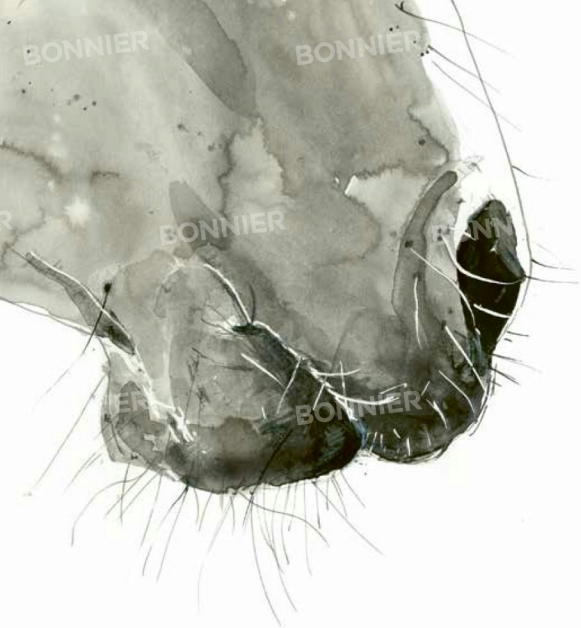
Helen Mort &  
Sarah Maycock



B P P

<i>About This Book</i>	10	Regathering	40	<i>Strength</i>		<i>Love</i>	
<i>Joy</i>		Regroup	42	Show Your Teeth	74	Reflections	92
Against Boredom	14	Time Out	44	The Bull	76	Strangers	94
Unfurl	16	Persistence	46	Bravery	78	Halves	96
Flowers	18	Hoarders	48	The Painter	80	Duo	98
Recharge	20	Let Go	50	Small Steps	82	Echo	100
Hope	22	<i>Family</i>		Strength	84	Dive	102
A Message	24	Together	54	One Breath	86	Love	104
Just For One Day	26	Us	56	Empathy	88		
The Game	28	After Loss	58			<i>How To Be more mindful</i>	106
The Inquisitor	30	Swarm	60			<i>About The Author And Illustrator</i>	108
		Siblings	62				
<i>Hard Times</i>		Partners	64				
The Elephants	34	Friends	66				
Safety in Numbers	36	Little One	68				
Fox	38	Lineage	70				





## About This Book

Minds are incredible landscapes. The brilliant and original poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, once wrote that the 'mind has mountains'. He was trying to express his own struggle with depression and saw these peaks and cliffs as 'frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed'. But mountains can also be a vantage point, a high plateau and summit from which we can see things more clearly and gain a new perspective.

In the pages of this book, you'll find a different mind-landscape for every mood, brought to life with words and artwork of animals in the wild. Some of them reflect happiness, love and solidarity, some of them explore difficult emotions and life's challenges. But each poem and each artwork is an invitation to stand back for a moment, to look around, to notice and reflect. Take your time. The poems might seem different each time you return to them. I hope they will offer still moments in your day and that you'll carry them with you.

*Helen Mort*

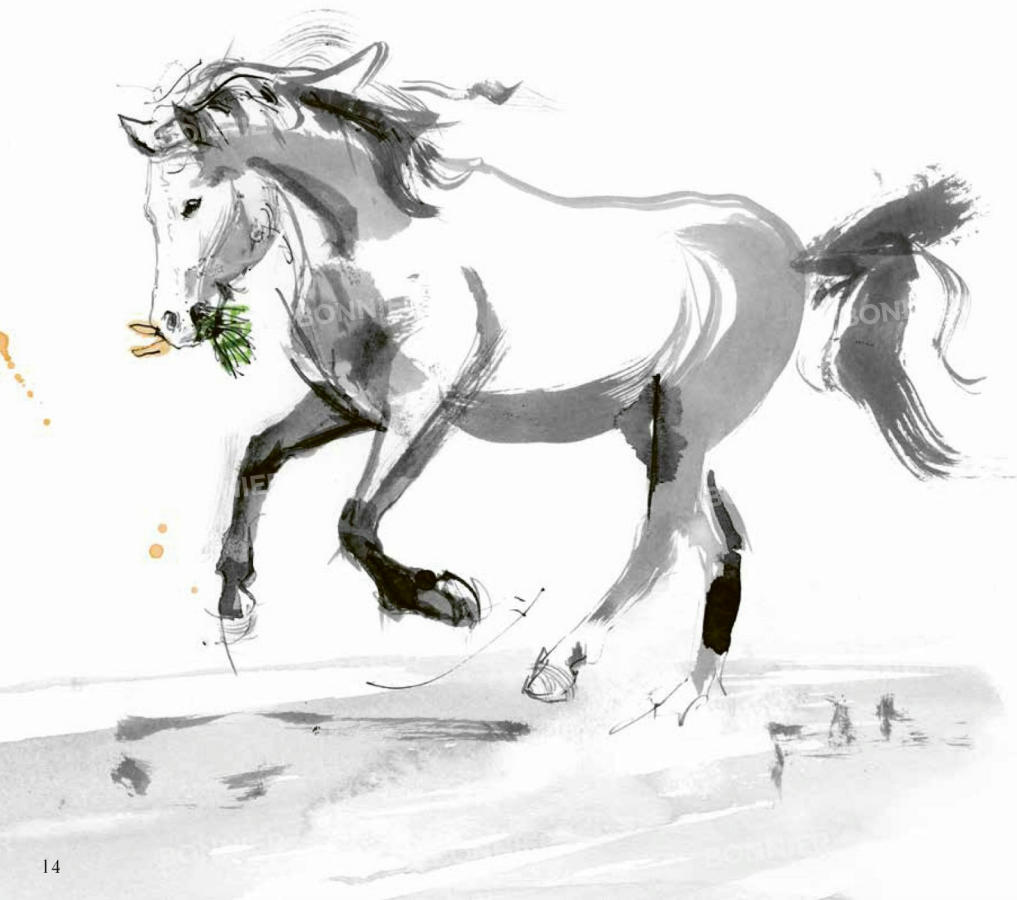




# Joy

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –  
that perches in the soul –  
*Emily Dickinson*





# Extraordinary

Find an ordinary day  
and bridle it, ride

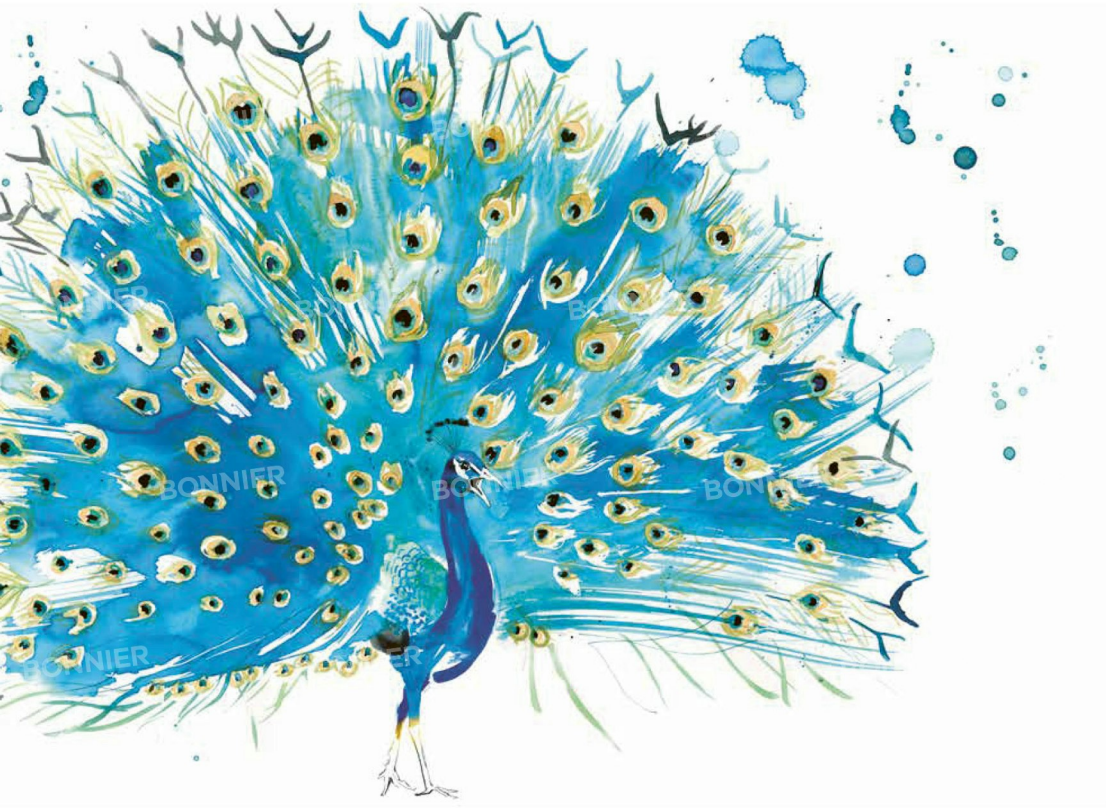
until grit  
gives way to grass

then let the morning  
surge, cantering

into blue distance  
where thought becomes

urge, shaking its mane  
and looking back at you

Every day can be extraordinary,  
if you let it.



## Unfurl

Sometimes you want to hide  
your crimson, teal and green.  
Sometimes you fold.

It's time to catch the light. Be bold.  
You open the fan of yourself  
and you brim with gold.

# Flowers

Hold the morning to your chin  
like a yellow buttercup.

The light touches your skin –  
faint, but it's enough.

Life's not what you find  
but what you forge.

Even the smallest flower  
can be a torch.



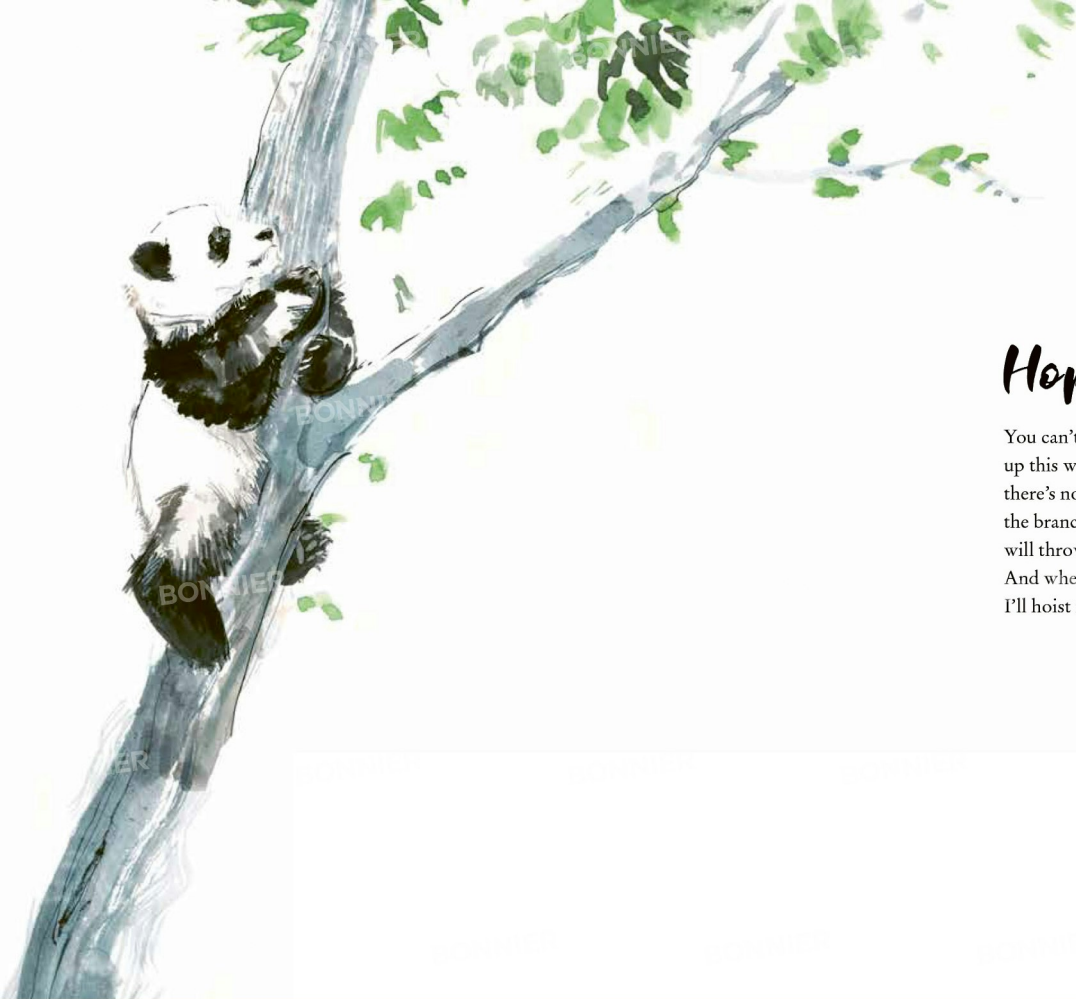


## Recharge

Come, long evenings  
do your worst. Come, rain –

I can still make out  
forget-me-nots, unchanged,  
Their blue ignition

ready for daybreak,  
a new start,  
the sun's flame.



## Hope

You can't stop me. I'm shimmying  
up this weathered bark until  
there's no more tree. And when  
the branches end, the sky  
will throw me down a rope.  
And when the sky runs out  
I'll hoist myself on hope.

# A Message

I want to share  
the best parts of each day

with you. I'll send  
a rose-garden at dawn,

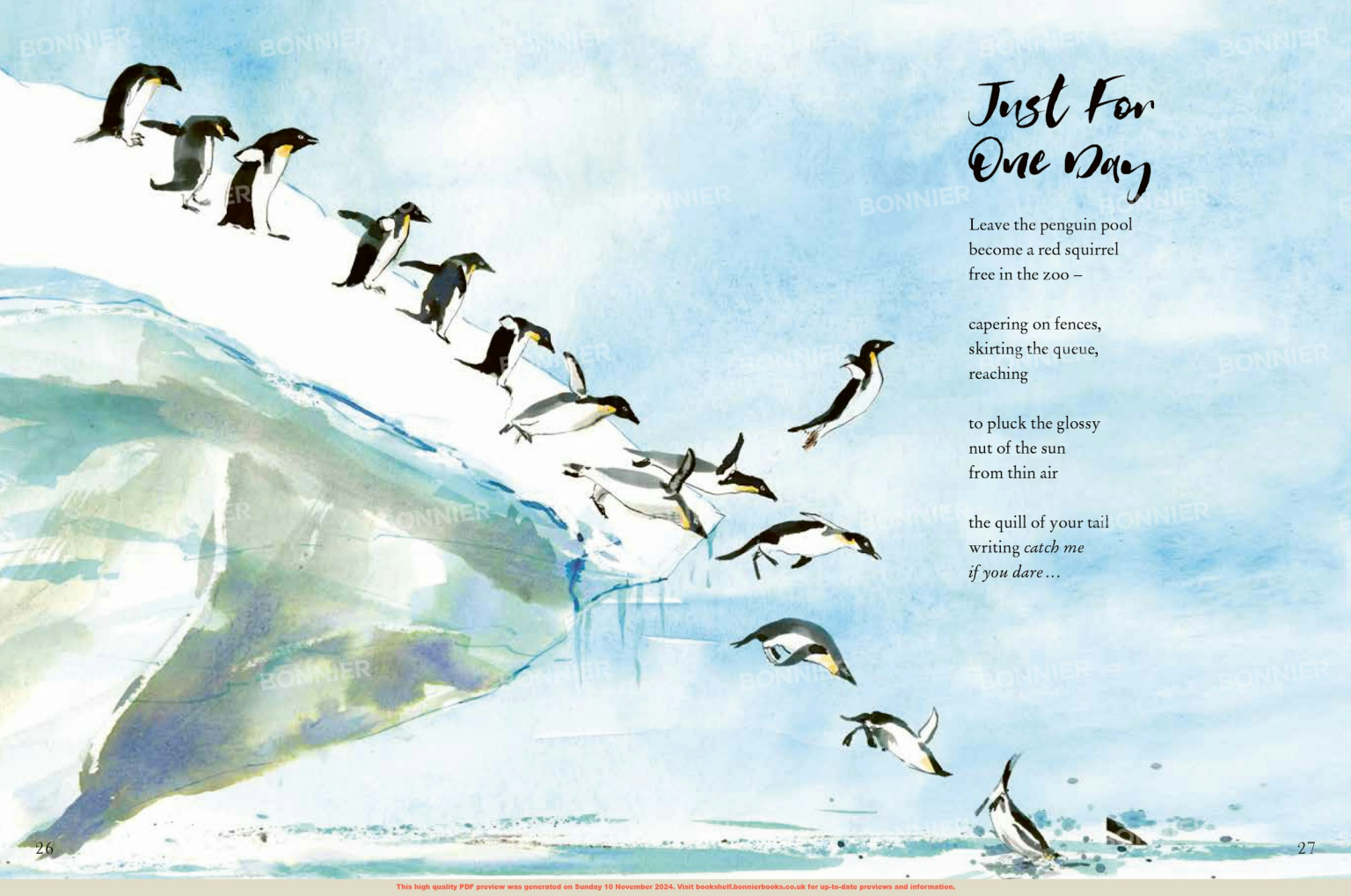
half-hidden birds,  
this anglepoise heron

how its song  
makes language absurd

as it shuns the camera  
flying over my head,

and – stooping  
to the water –  
eats my words.





# Just For One Day

Leave the penguin pool  
become a red squirrel  
free in the zoo –

capering on fences,  
skirting the queue,  
reaching

to pluck the glossy  
nut of the sun  
from thin air

the quill of your tail  
writing *catch me*  
*if you dare...*

# The Game

Evening window. A cat  
trying to hook the moon with her paw.  
But if she catches it – a galaxy  
in tangles on the floor –  
she'll just unravel it:  
joy lives in the game  
the hunt for more.







## The Inquisitor

Be curious in life. Be  
the toddler who plays  
at being a bird –  
all beady eyes  
and poised wings.

He stomps round  
pecking everything,  
a life-hungry bird,  
mop-haired and joyful,  
trying to eat the world.



# Hard Times

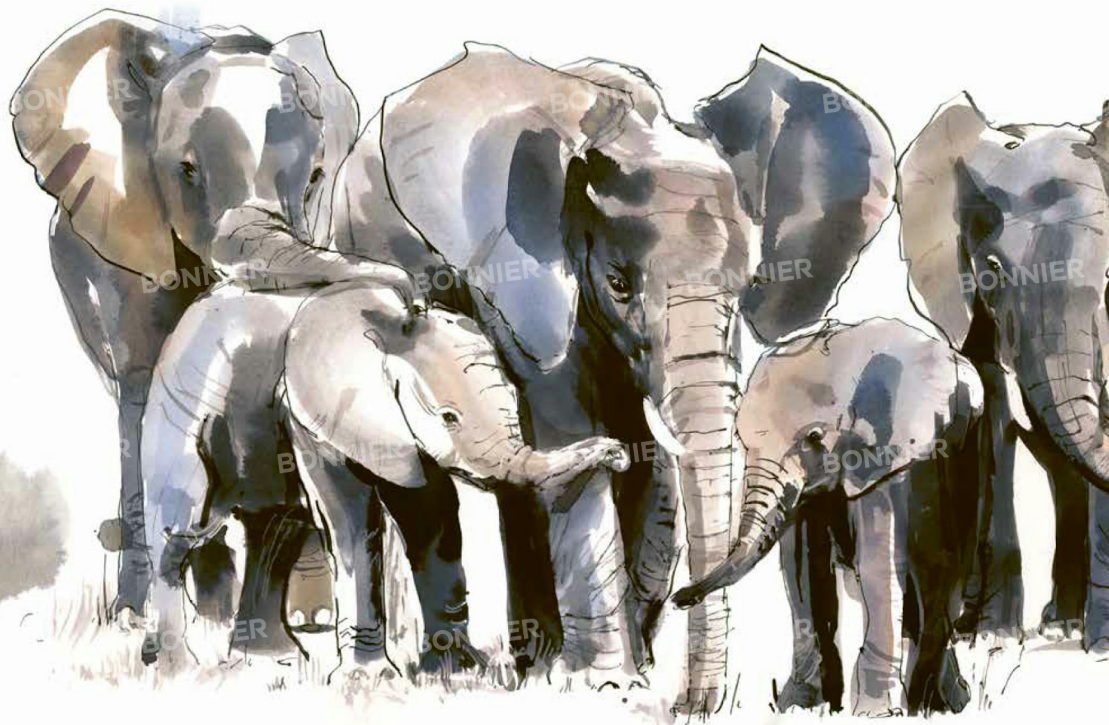
When no fair dreams before  
my "mind's eye" flit –

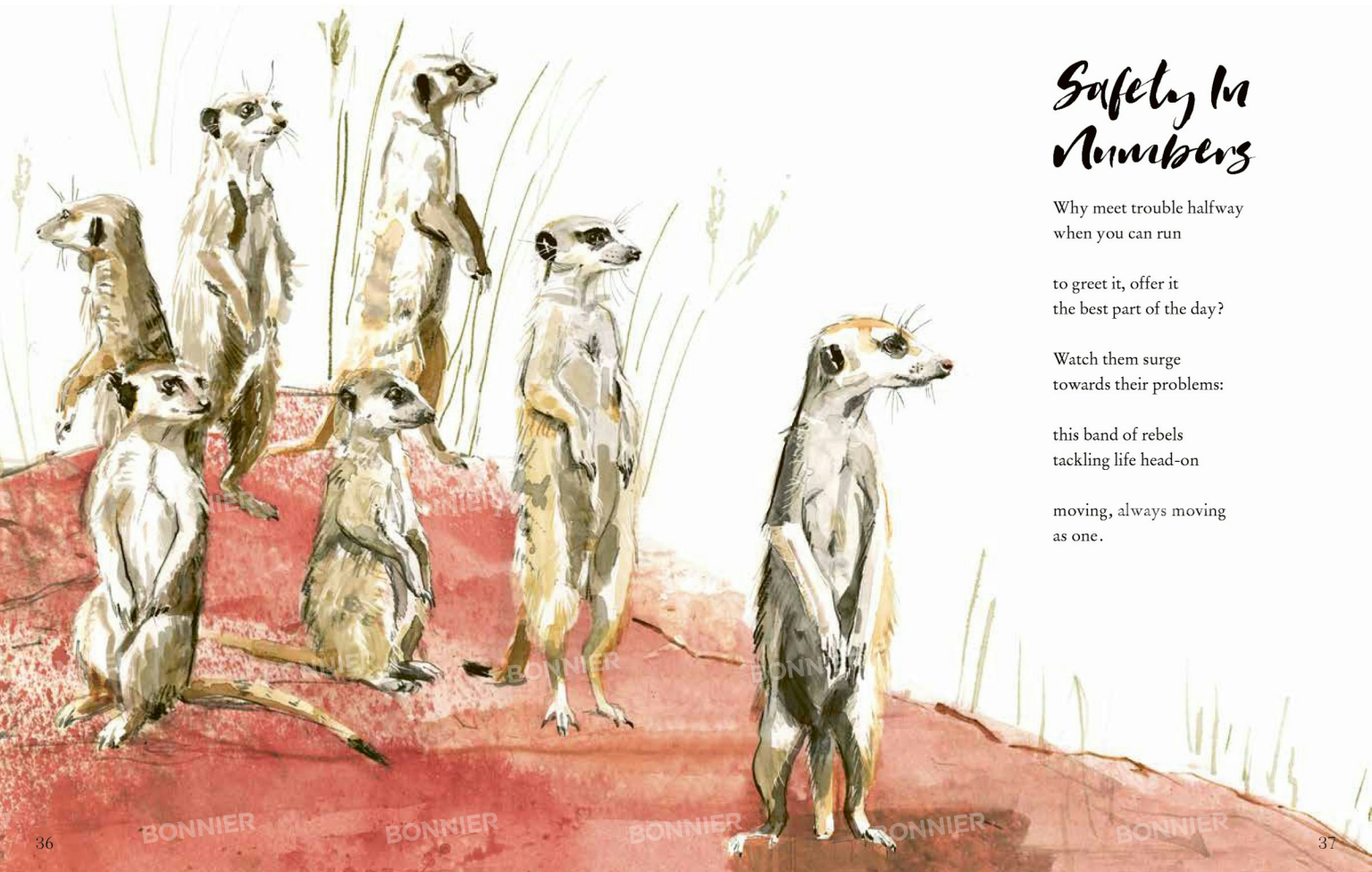
*John Keats*

# The Elephant

At night, regrets of various sizes  
come trampling from the gloom –  
one lumbers in  
and the whole herd follows.

Relax. They're only travelling  
through your room,  
lifting the bugles of their trunks,  
bypassing the stars  
to reach the moon.





## Safety In Numbers

Why meet trouble halfway  
when you can run

to greet it, offer it  
the best part of the day?

Watch them surge  
towards their problems:

this band of rebels  
tackling life head-on

moving, always moving  
as one.



## Fox

She is a fire-starter  
setting hearts  
alight, burning  
a new trail  
from fence to field.  
Don't blink –

you'll miss her blaze  
that smouldering look  
that asks  
*why fuss?*  
*Why care*  
*what people think?*

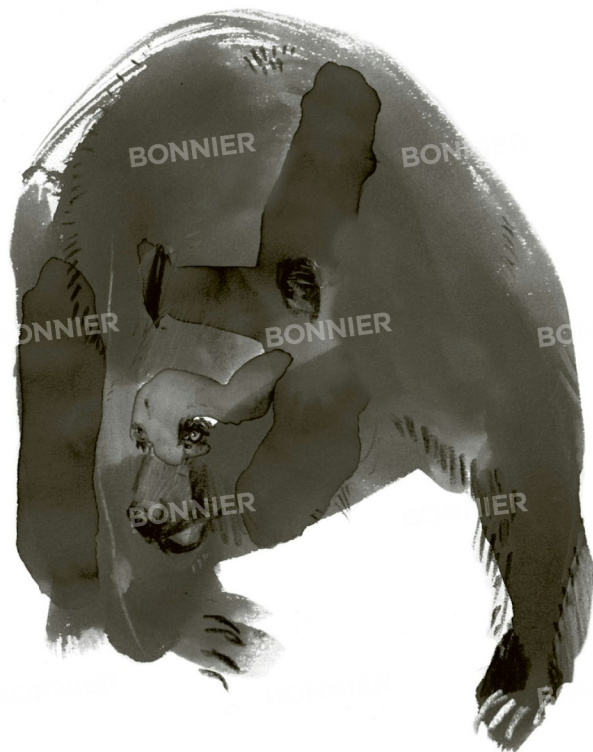
# Regathering

Your sadness  
is heavy as a bear skin.

Don't try  
to shrug it off  
because you should,

hide from the world  
as long as you need  
remembering the shadow-shape

of bear alive, eyes flickering,  
gathering its strength  
with each bright deed.



# Regroup

Together, we'll catch  
autumn's bad side – here  
among the heather  
the faulty cameras  
of our faces angled  
at weather,  
summer's torn flag  
still proud on the hill.  
This is how we endure –  
steadfast, through grouse  
skittering, winter, coming  
for the kill.



# Time Out

Now rest. If anyone asks  
tell them you've built  
a bed in the frozen earth

and you're wintering here,  
resting,  
becoming stalactite

until the sun coaxes you,  
opening the snowdrops  
of your eyes to morning light.





# Persistence

The white-necked raven  
screaming *oi oi oi*  
into the cliff,

is daring a truth  
to poke its neck out  
into open air, unblinking.  
The people  
ignore her



but she holds fast: angry  
prophet, screeching  
what we're all thinking.

# Hoarders

When I see vultures  
making tarpaulins of their wings

or bats swaddling themselves  
in midnight, or hedgehogs

becoming pincushions  
I wonder if they're hiding

or if they're smuggling  
memories under their skin,

keeping the world out  
and the good things in.

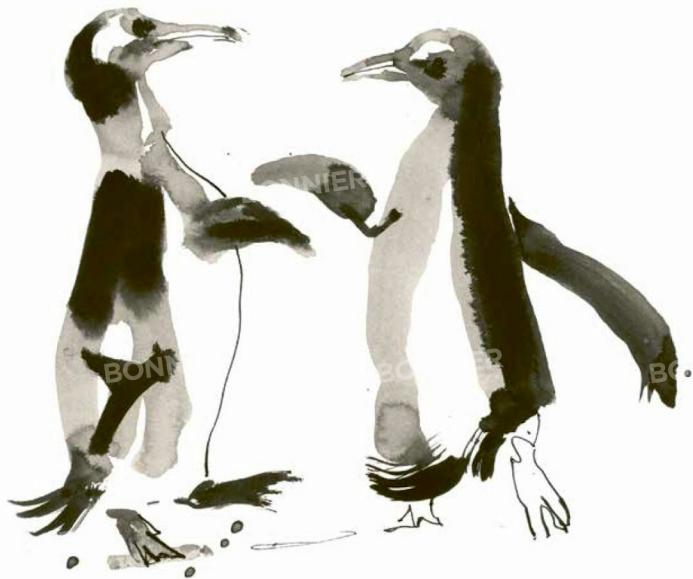


# Let Go

Don't try to catch  
your jealousy. It knows you  
better than you know yourself.  
Watch it scamper on the larder's  
highest shelf, convince it

there's a better world outside.  
Now face yourself. Fling the door  
wide.





# Family

What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices? –

*Robert Hayden*

# Together

When you think  
we've gone as far  
as we can together

and the light  
softens every summit  
we can name

you lie down  
and I'll do the same  
and we'll doze  
safe in our twin dreams

until the distance  
isn't what it seems.





Us

Wrap your small limbs round me,  
dreamer, soft under your night-skin.  
We are a ball of yarn. I end  
where you begin.

## After Loss

The climb is water shucked off stone,  
your heart plodding  
alone. But at the top

you'll see the corrie and the loch  
and your heart will gather  
its old wings

and even if they fail  
your heart can swim.








# Swarm

The ones who know you best  
are summer bees:

they don't plant seeds  
but they help stems grow

and if the flowers  
stand in shadows flung by trees

they carry specks of sun to them  
and spread their glow.





# Siblings

Play-fight with me  
until we know each others'  
strength. We both think  
we're so tough. Together  
we're immense.





# Partners

The fjord is swelling darker  
with the ink-shape of a whale

then the surface ripples  
with the prow of another tail.

They dip and crest together  
for a lifetime

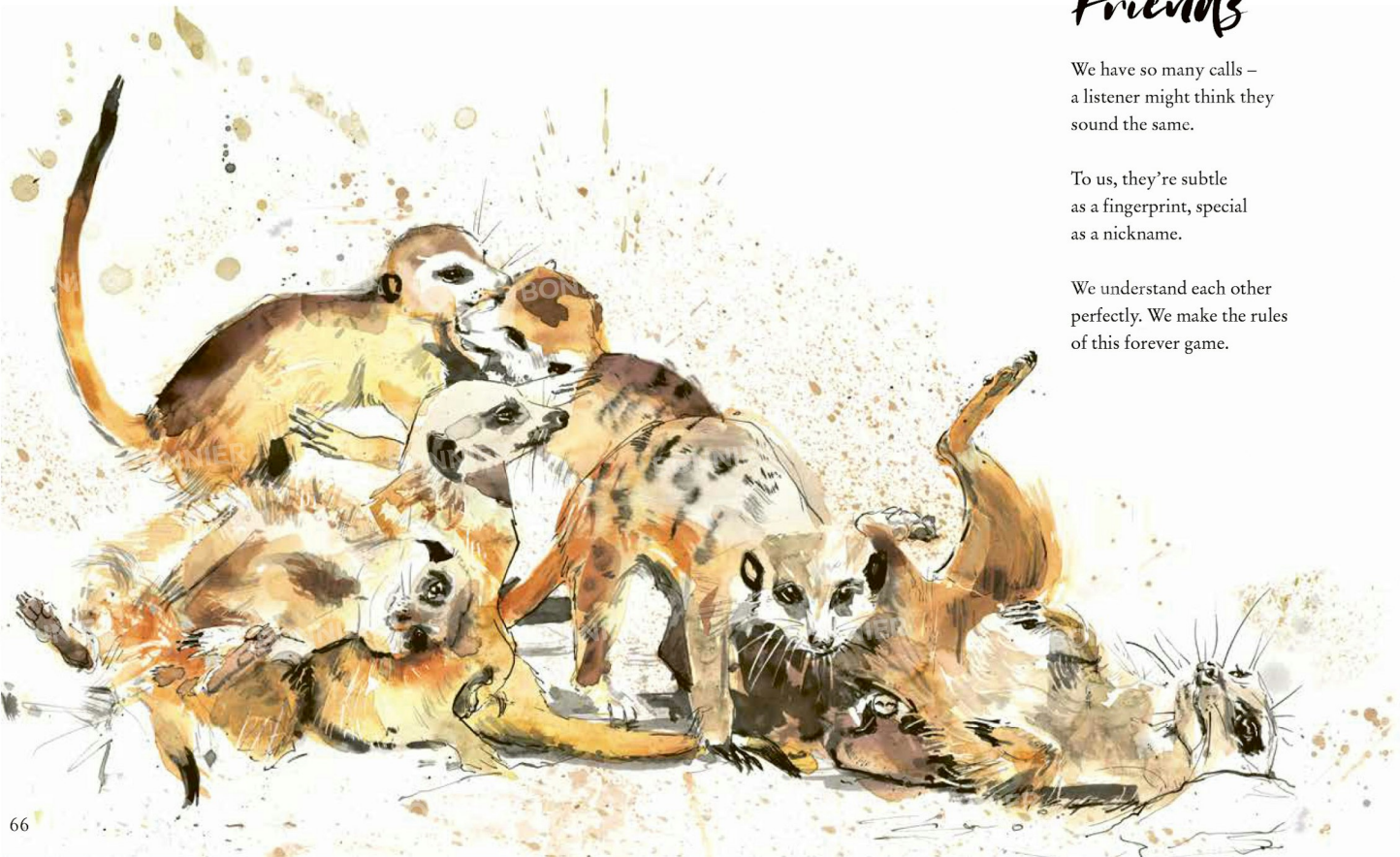
low then high again  
until the light fails.

# Friends

We have so many calls –  
a listener might think they  
sound the same.

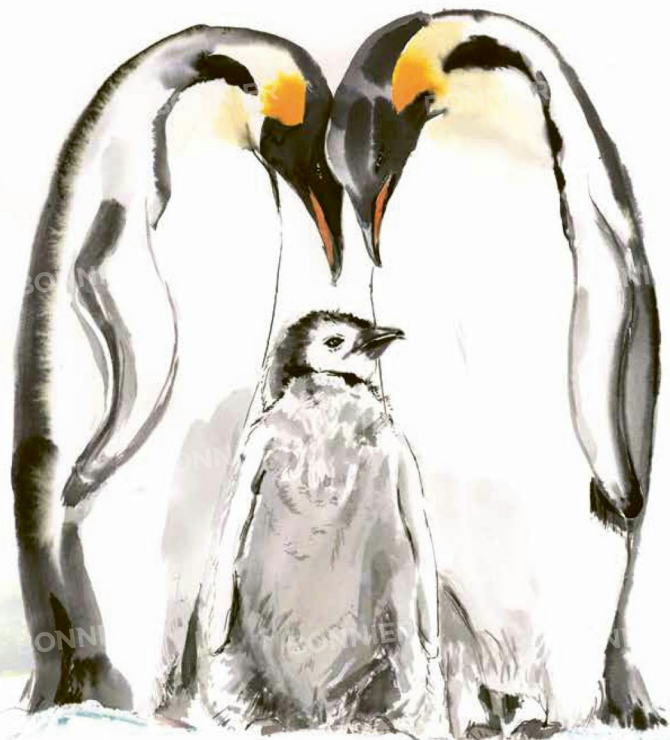
To us, they're subtle  
as a fingerprint, special  
as a nickname.

We understand each other  
perfectly. We make the rules  
of this forever game.



## *Little One*

I will stand all season  
to guard the egg of you  
storm-altered, steadfast  
until life cracks through.



# Lineage

Your grandmother  
is three leaps ahead,

ribboning through corn  
and smoothing the path

you've scampered on  
since you were born

following the prints of your  
ancestors, proud, careworn.





# Strength

Resolve to be thyself; and know that he,  
Who finds himself, loses his misery! –

*Matthew Arnold*

# Show Your Teeth

When the world is too startling,  
show it pearl teeth.

If the days seem shallow,  
peer underneath.

When the year is too quick,  
pad with slow paws.

If the nights are too deafening,  
– go on – roar.





## The Bull

Today, you want  
to stomp outside and face  
the day bull-strong.

Stand firm  
and snowstorms  
cannot make you stop.

Stay proud. Zip up  
your stubbornness  
right to the top.





## Bravery

Sometimes it's braver  
to risk the day – to sense  
the brewing argument,  
the simmering thunderstorm  
shout skywards  
anyway, aiming too high  
or rig your diamond kite,  
trusting it will fly.

## The Painter

If I could paint the world  
I'd choose endurance, which is yellow:  
bronze for the tenacious sun,  
bee-colours for getting-things-done,  
lemon for sharpness, pure gold  
for every star that thrives in darkness.



## Small Steps

All praise the power  
of outstretched fingertips  
and grainy orange pips,  
of mouse-small shifts  
and slow, deliberate sips,  
the power of sycamore  
and rosehips, the newest  
buds, the biro's tiny,  
mighty nib.





# Strength

*You don't know  
your own strength*

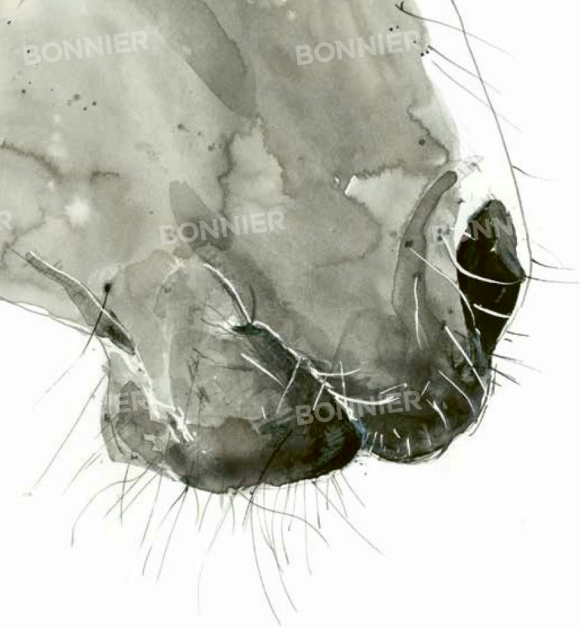
he tells her as she stands  
apart, half-smiling,

clears the avalanche  
rubble of his heart

with one soft brush  
of her open palm

the iron  
shining

through  
the charm.



## One Breath

Standing on the lip  
of the cliff, I let out a breath  
sending it above the treeline  
to slip into mist-inverted fields  
and I changed the whole  
day, touched each oak leaf  
without the morning noticing.



## Empathy

Don't judge me by feathers  
littering the path, or pre-dawn  
shrieks, blood-shrill.

Remember the cubs who played  
in your neighbour's garden,  
the reason for the kill.



# Love

Thou, sun, art half as happy as we –

*John Donne*

# Reflections

A train is carrying your compact mirror  
into dusk. You check your pockets,

note the loss. It's busy without you,  
showing the dance of carriage shadows  
the face of a stranger, grey-haired,  
lovely, as she stoops to sit.

Beauty's not your perfect  
image, held,  
it's letting go  
of it.







## Strangers

Nothing much awake  
tonight, just hares  
and unrequited love.

Your restlessness  
turns into moonlight  
on an empty street

and miles away,  
someone opens the sash  
and that silver falls on them

and they smile: inexplicably,  
briefly complete.

# Halves

They all mean love: this mackerel,  
butter, tiny trees of broccoli, olives  
in brine. Prize the halved things,  
the not-all-mine. This broken bread,  
this yolked sun rising in the east,  
this salt-frost, this sweetness,  
the whole damn feast.





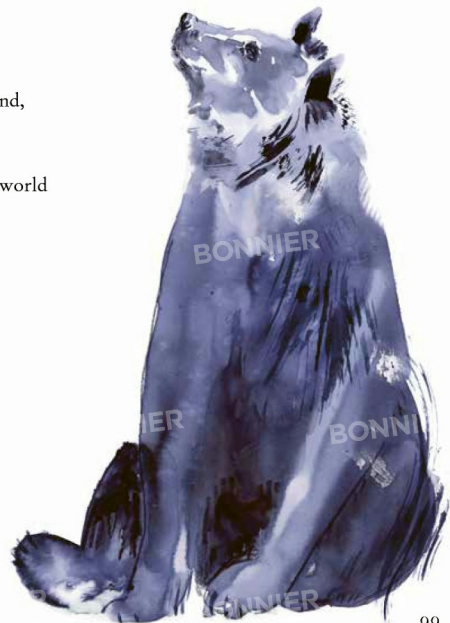
## *Duo*

Let nobody say  
we aren't a pair:

you are the truth  
and I'm the dare.

You map the ground,  
I'll chart the air,

grab pieces of the world  
and we'll share.





## Echo

Sing me your fears  
and I'll echo them back.

Throw your voice feather-light  
and I promise I'll catch.

Fly to the roof slates,  
scattering stones.

I'll store them 'til morning  
and make us a home.

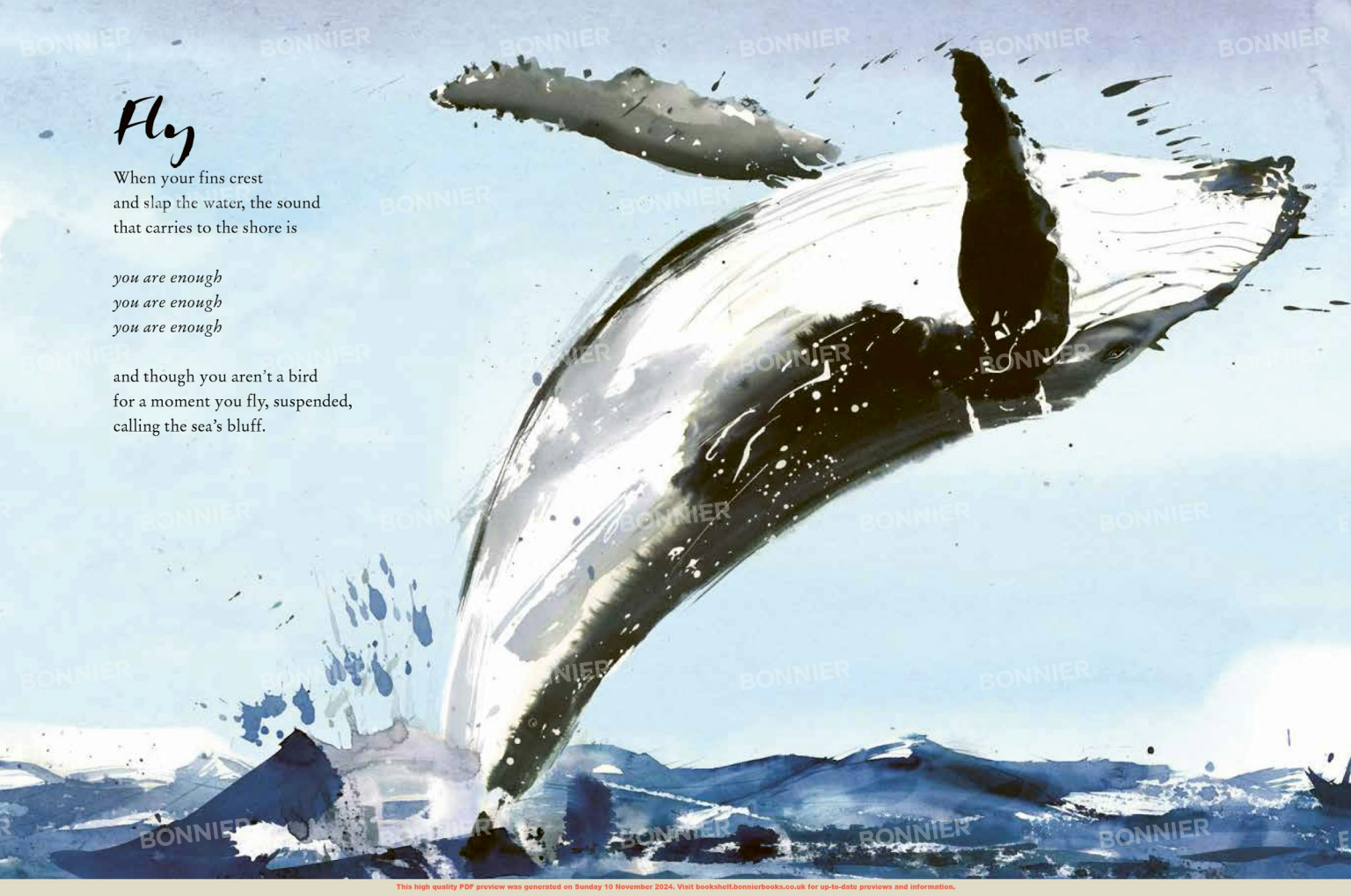


# Fly

When your fins crest  
and slap the water, the sound  
that carries to the shore is

*you are enough  
you are enough  
you are enough*

and though you aren't a bird  
for a moment you fly, suspended,  
calling the sea's bluff.





## Love

It is the sea's soft fireworks

sky tucking sun  
under a duvet of clouds

stars winking  
across light years

and us, leaning  
on each other

knowing  
we'll be held.

# How To Be More Mindful

Being 'mindful' means being conscious and aware – living in the present moment. It might sound obvious, instinctive even, but in a world where we're constantly accessing information, communicating at speed, travelling through busy spaces, bombarded with images and ideas from others, it can be elusive.

Finding a mindful state might take practice and that's ok.

## Tuning In

When there's a lot going on around you and you feel overwhelmed, it can help to think of yourself 'tuning in' to a frequency, the way a radio might. Ask yourself: what's important right now? Not what other people are telling you is important. Not what's going to be important tomorrow or next week. A lot of things that seem pressing can wait.



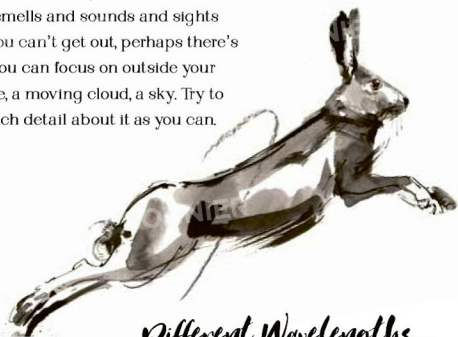
## Mindful Books

Reading or listening can help you focus on the present moment: can you find a space in your day to listen to a song from start to finish, or read a single page or a short poem? Challenge yourself to read differently: for instance, try to not to think about turning the page or scrolling until you get there.



## Return To Nature

Try going outside into nature. You might be able to find a still place where you can spend a few moments focusing on your surroundings, naming the smells and sounds and sights around you. If you can't get out, perhaps there's something you can focus on outside your window: a tree, a moving cloud, a sky. Try to notice as much detail about it as you can.



## Different Wavelengths

'Mindfulness' won't be the same for everyone. If you've tried particular techniques and they haven't worked for you (yoga, meditation), that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong, it just means you haven't found an approach that suits you yet. There's nothing less mindful than feeling stressed about your attempts to be mindful. **Trust yourself – you will get there.**





Helen Mort was born in Sheffield. A stand out poet of her generation, there was a buzz around Helen Mort even before she published her first collection *Division Street*. The collection was shortlisted for the 2013 Costa Poetry Award and won the respected Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and in 2010 she became the youngest poet in residence at the Wordsworth Trust. Her second Poetry Book Society Recommended collection is called *No Map Could Show Them*.



Sarah Maycock studied illustration at Kingston University and in 2011 was selected as an It's Nice That Graduate. Notably, in 2018, she was commissioned to create a series of illustrations for London Natural History Museum's 2018 Whales exhibition. She trained herself to draw animals from nature documentaries. Her unique ability to capture a creature's characteristics or the forces of nature in just a few swoops of ink is incomparable. Sarah's book *Sometimes I Feel* won the ALCS Educational Writers' Award in 2021.







