



The Wild Verses

Nature poems on love,
hope and healing

Helen Mort &
Sarah Mangock

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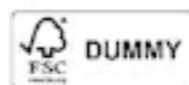
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B P P



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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 Moot





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.



Unfold

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.



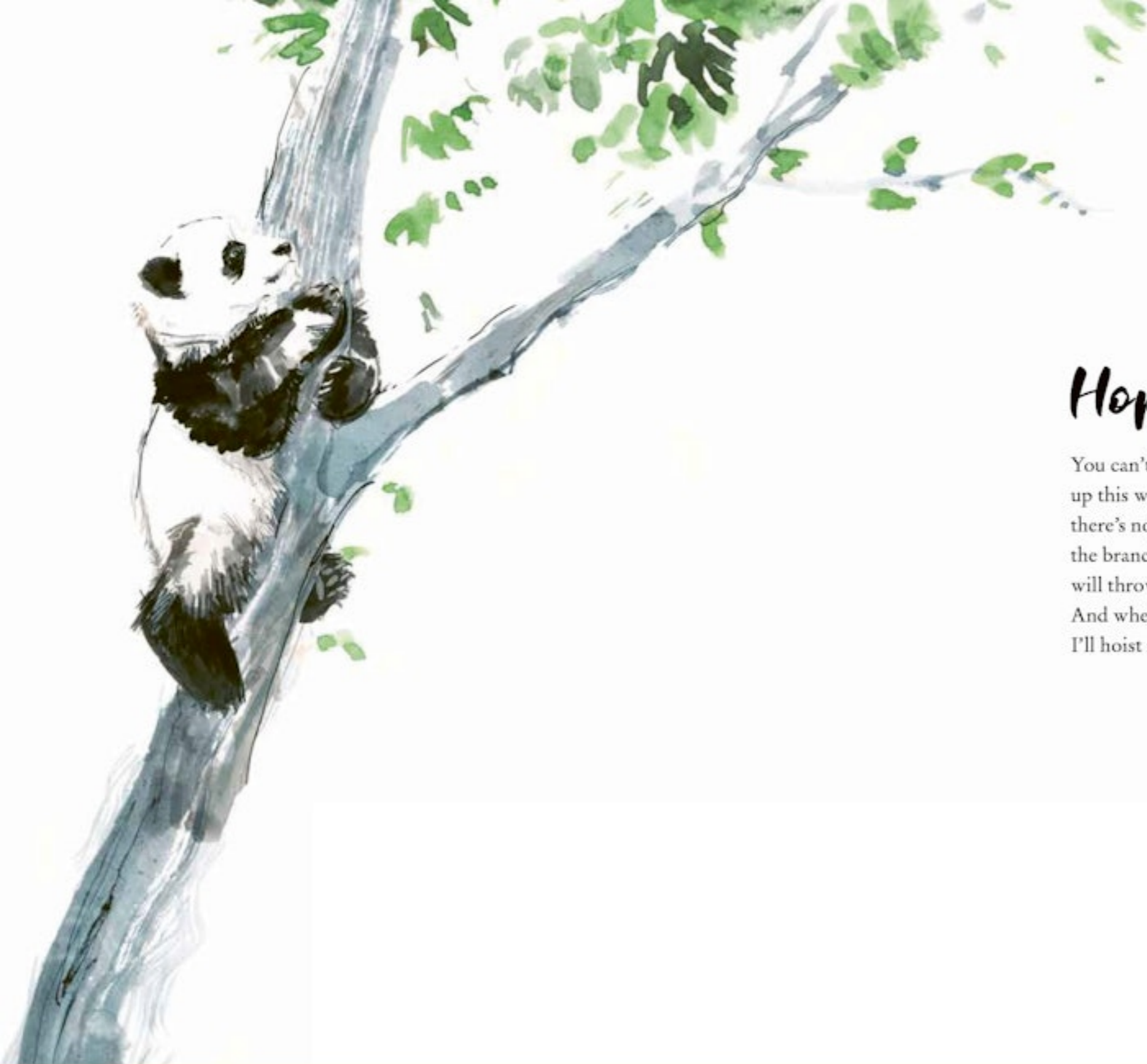


Recharge

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,

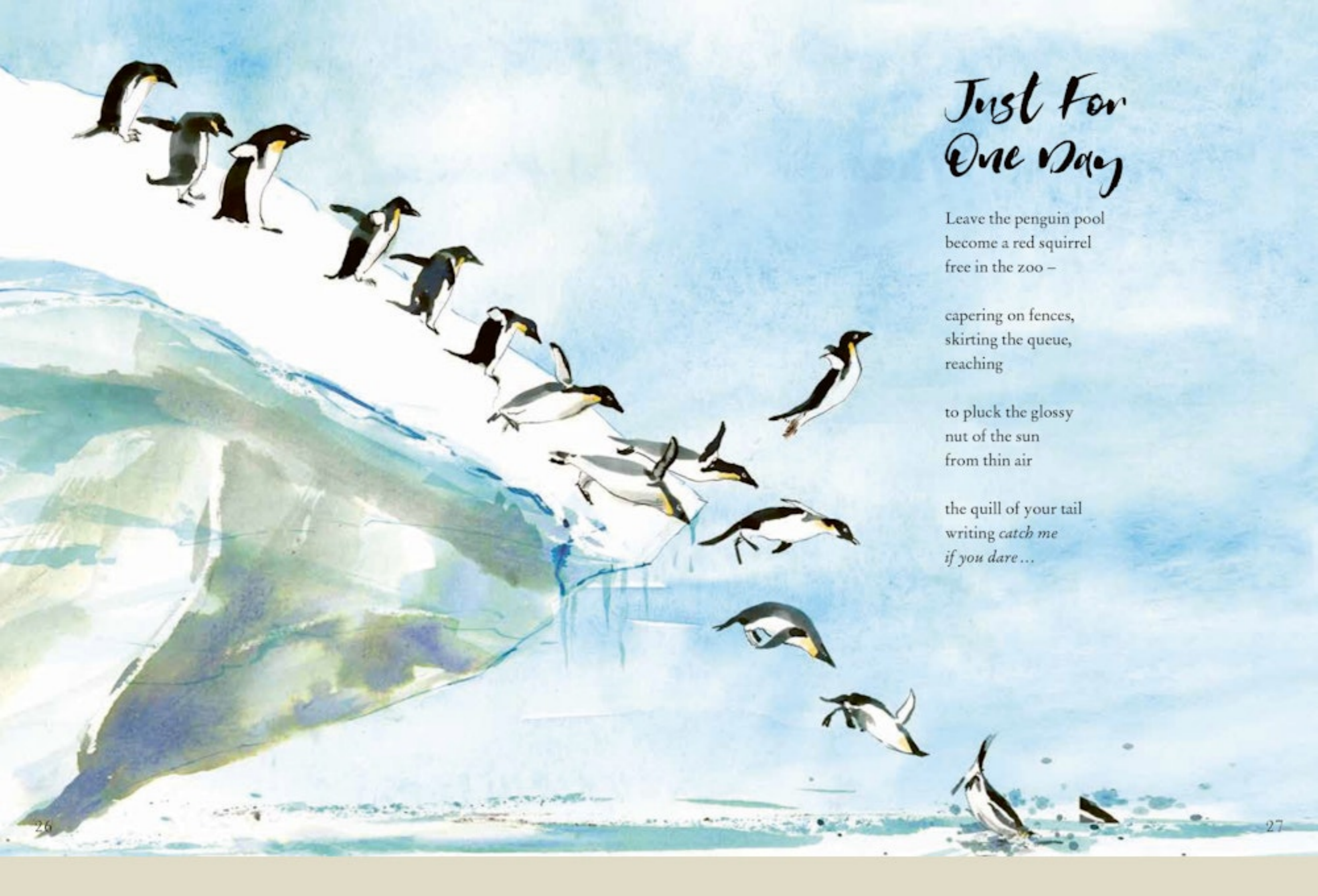
half-hidden birds,
this anglepoise heron

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

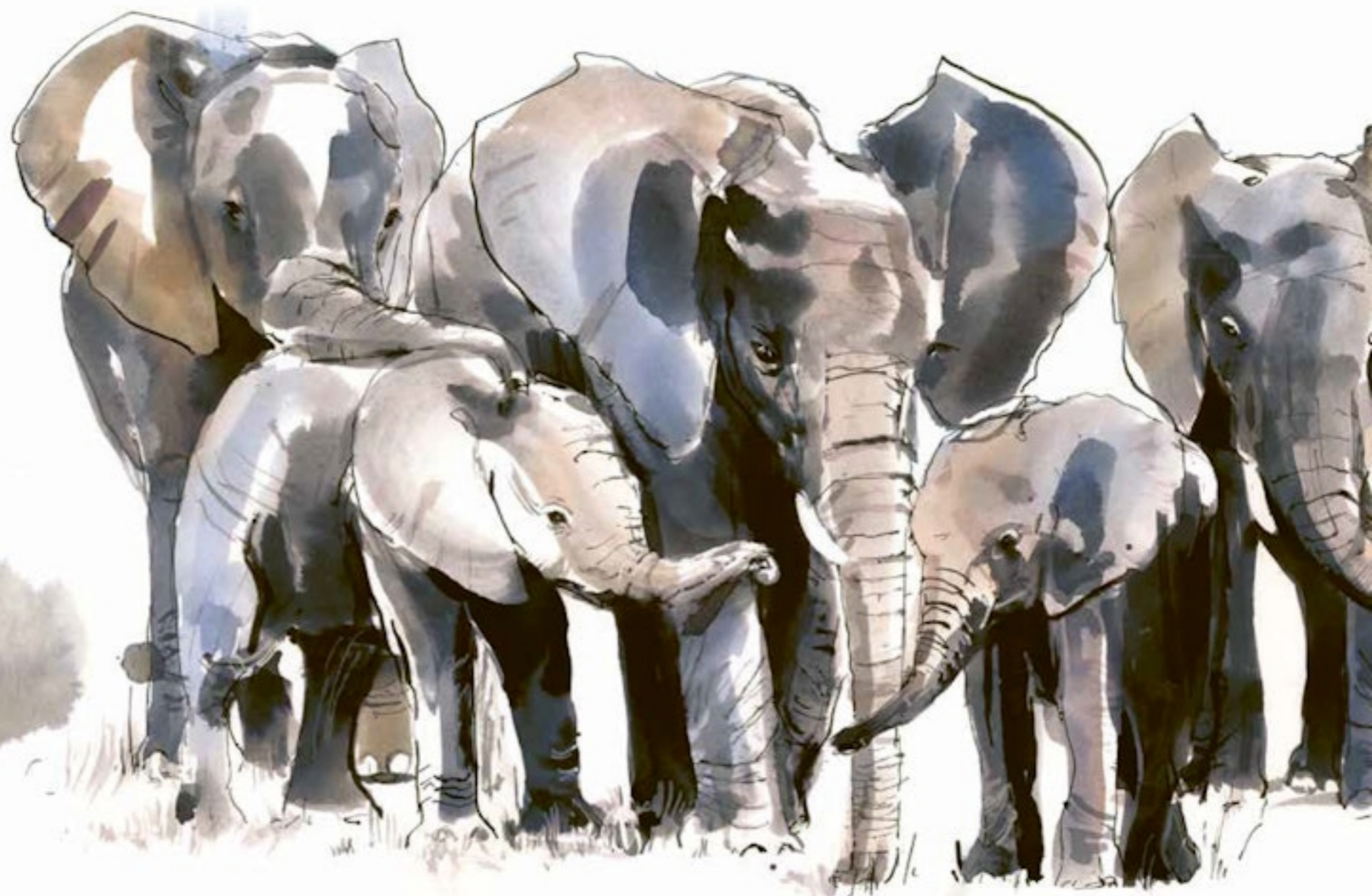
When no fair dreams before
my "mind's eye" flit –

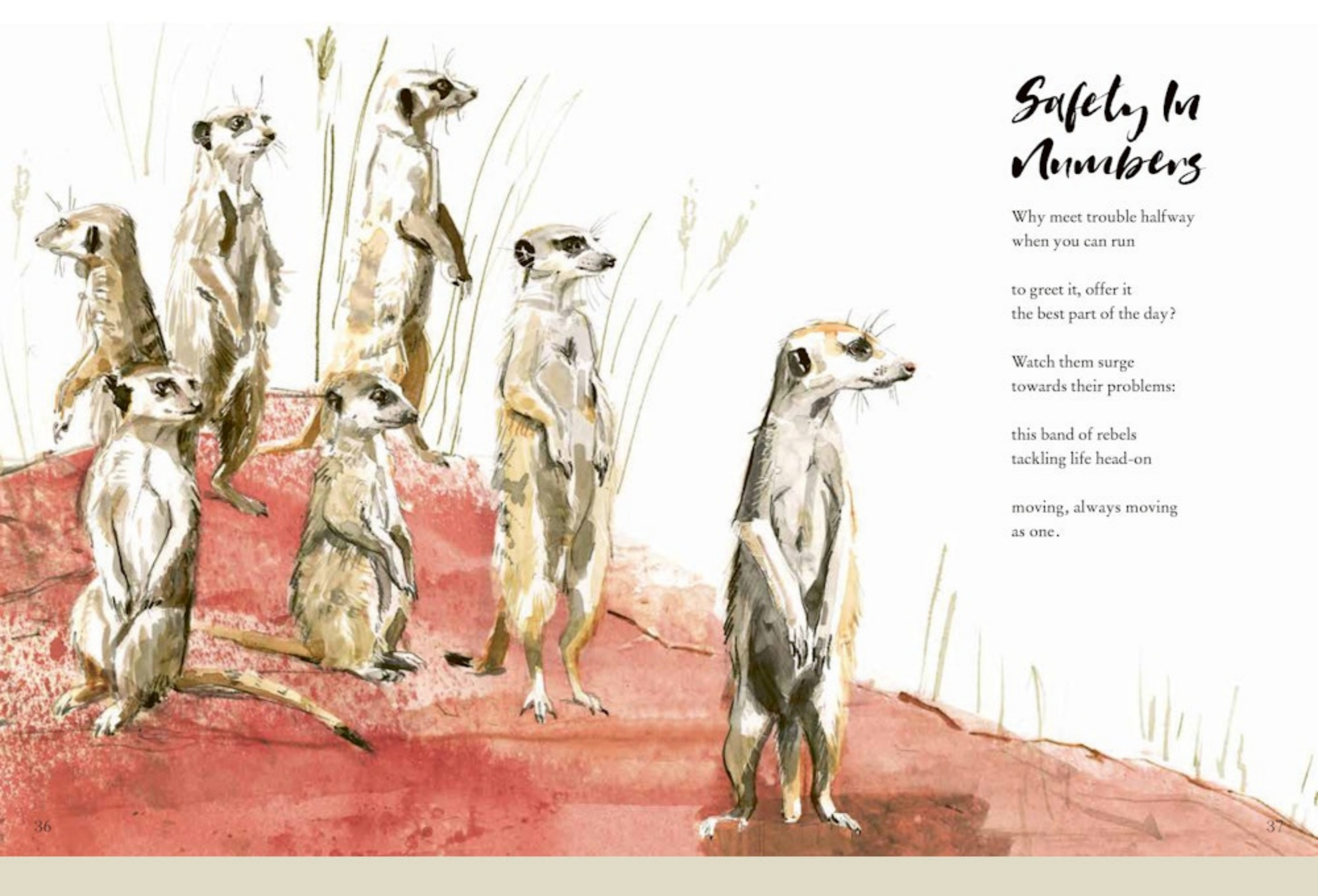
John Keats

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.



A watercolor illustration of a group of whales swimming in a fjord. The whales are depicted in various shades of blue, green, and white, with some showing dark spots and stripes. The water is a mix of light and dark blue washes, suggesting depth and movement. The background shows a hazy, mountainous landscape under a bright sky.

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

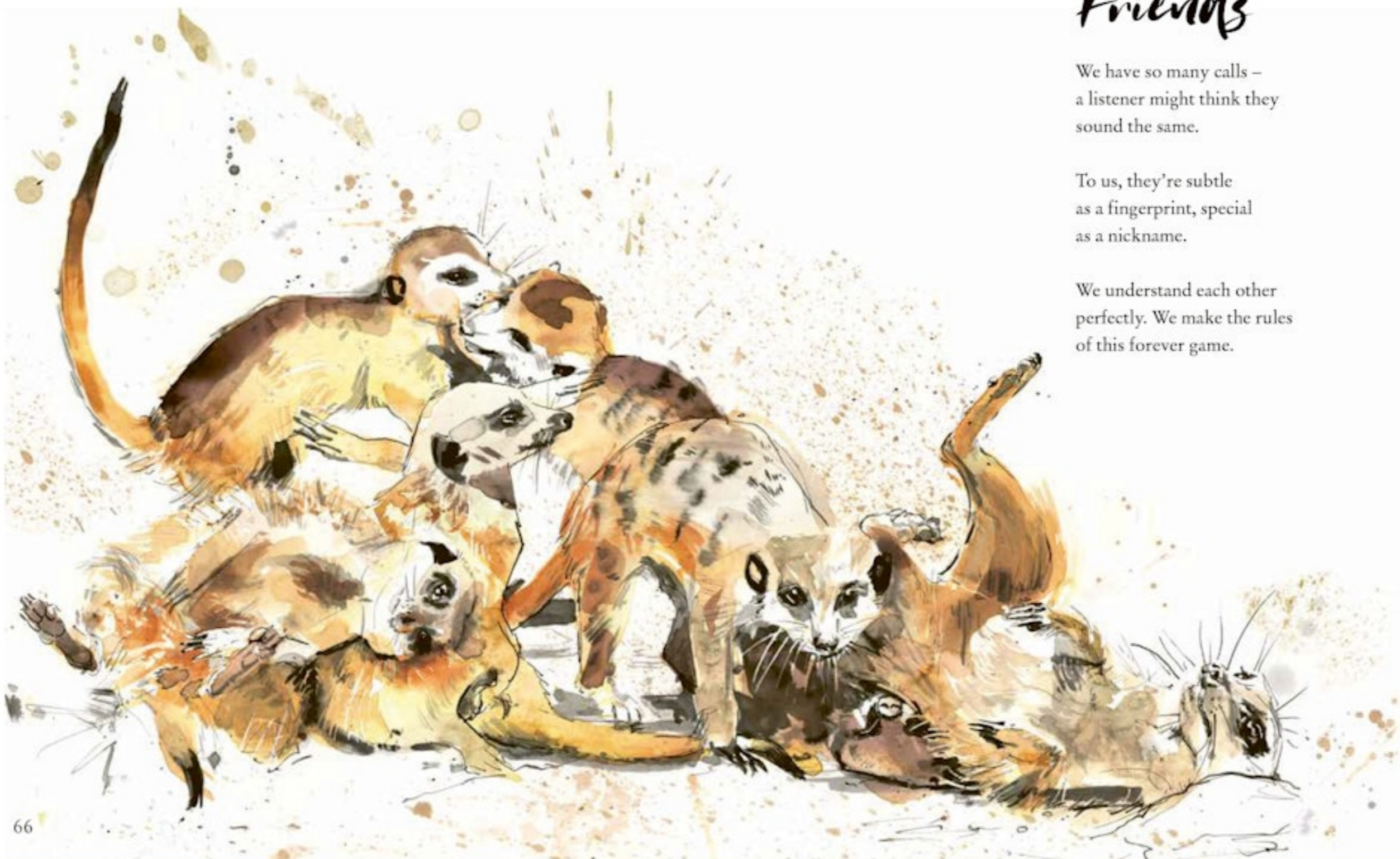
low then high again
until the light fails.

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.





