## Ink Blots

## by Matt Quinn

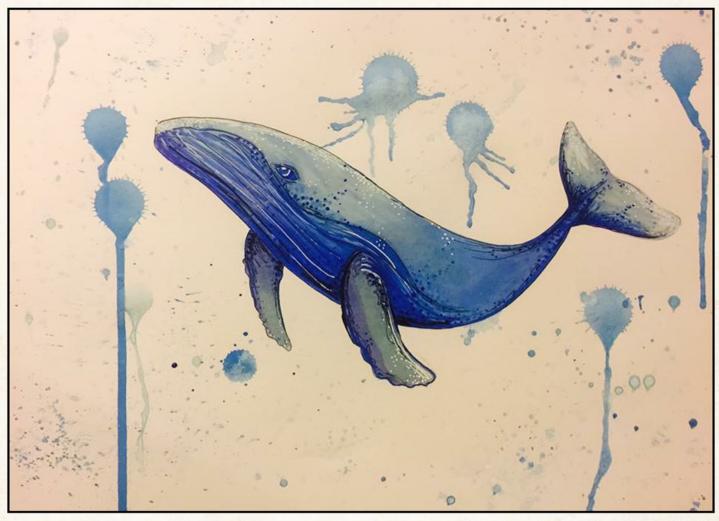


Image: "Blue Whale" by Nikki Zarate. "Ink Blots" was written by Matt Quinn for *Rattle*'s Ekphrastic Challenge, June 2019, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

Perhaps because there were currents swirling within the silence, or because a seagull was shrieking outside the window or in my head, or because in the end I had to

say something, I said I saw a whale.

Go on, he said. A blue whale, then, I said.

Go on, he said. And because it seemed important to start at the beginning, I told him of a wolf

that had grown weary of the shallow society of wolves and had left its pack and drifted out into the deep ocean. *Go on*, he said, and I told him how the salt water had held

the wolf, and how the wolf liked to float, cradled by the blue, and how its legs transformed into flippers and its body became huge and blubbered against the cold, so that the wolf

floated suspended inside that giant body, just as that body floated in the ocean, and how the blue water stained that body blue as if the sea were made of ink. Go on, he said.

n time, I said, it found it could no longer return to the land, and some nights it sang songs of its lost pack, and evermore it wandered solitary in the great ocean. *And what else?* he asked. So I told him of how once a blue whale finally came ashore, how wounded by a harpoon and desperate to breathe, it beached itself near Bragar, on the small island of Lewis,

and how they had planted its jaw-bones as an arch by the side of a road, and had hung the harpoon from it, as a memorial, perhaps, or perhaps as a warning. And I told him of ship-strikes,

and how easy it was to become entangled in the debris of other people's nets, and also of the noise their engines make, and how finally their sonar had drowned the last of my mourning songs.

And these smaller ink blots, he asked, that surround the whale, what are these? Jellyfish, I said quickly, not meeting his eye, spineless companions of the whale, translucent blobs of floating

nothing, drifting along with it. For I knew better than to tell this man the truth, that the blue whale had sought refuge in the basement-womb of the deepest blue ocean,

and that there were depth charges exploding all around it.

