

# Kenai

by Katherine Fallon

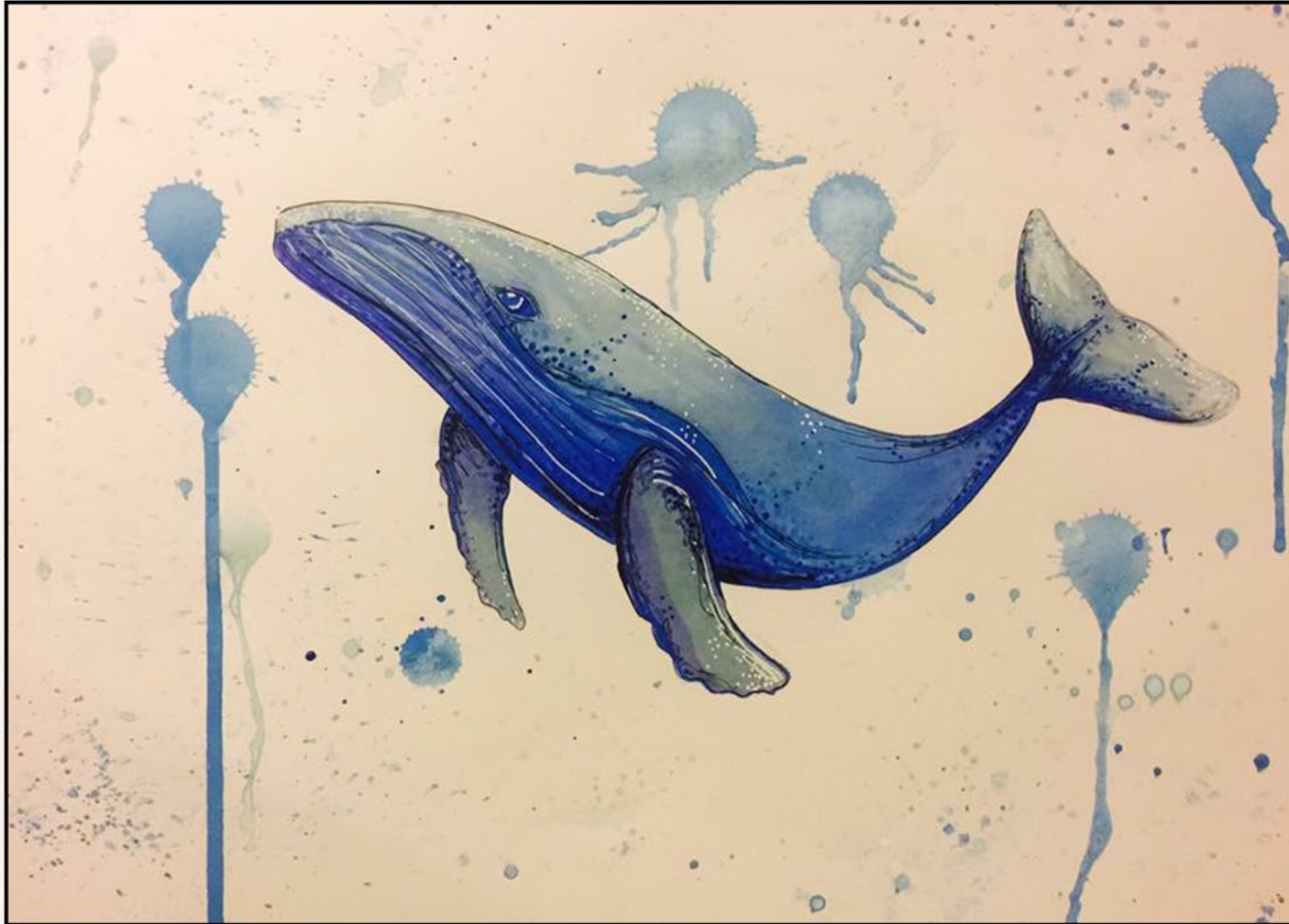


Image: "Blue Whale" by Nikki Zarate. "Kenai" was written by Katherine Fallon for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, June 2019, and selected as the Editor's Choice.

According to the guide, had my photos  
been better, we could have identified

any of the whales as individuals by their tail  
flukes. Lobed and dark as glassen water,

their under-sides were stained white with  
markings peerless as our own fingerprints:

secrets they chose to tell not to us but to  
the sleet, which called them up, which called

for the force of the thrust of an airplane engine  
(understand: we needed something human

to understand). Knowing nothing and never  
having followed anything which could be seen

from far away, difference was lost on us,  
and we couldn't stop shivering, telling ourselves

how strong we were for facing weather.  
We had come so far to see them breach among

the dying glaciers, which growled like predators  
before calving. The whales alone were unafraid

of the ice, though we should have understood  
the violent shed as sensible, effortless, a letting go.

Toothless whales have two blowholes.  
They have to think to breathe.