



INSPIRED BY A STORY-MAKING WORKSHOP WITH HANNAH MORE PRIMARY SCHOOL  
**THE MAN WHO MARRIED**



**A WHALE**  
FLOATING HARBOUR 200 LOCAL JOURNEYS



## The Man Who Married a Whale

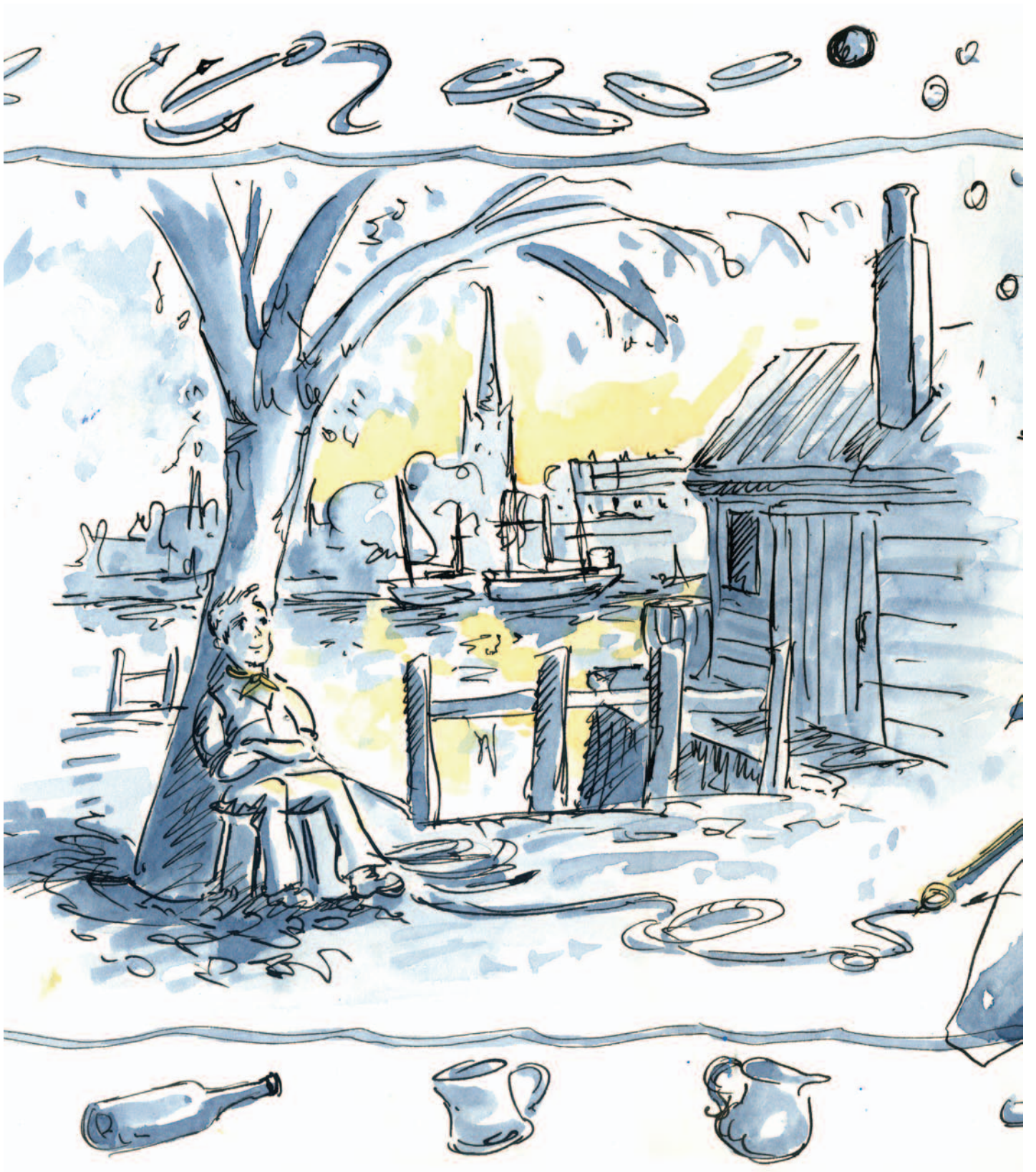
Long ago, in the days when Bristol was still a busy, bustling port, there lived a young man called John Kipperling.

His home was a small wooden hut by the side of the Floating Harbour near Redcliffe Bridge and his job was to clear the harbour of refuse and rubbish.

So every day he walked the length of the waterside using a grappling hook and a rope to drag out the rubbish and refuse.

It wasn't a very glamorous job nor was it well paid, but nevertheless John was happy - although he sometimes wished that he had a wife to share his life on the docks.





On the day that our story begins, John was clearing the water in Cumberland Basin when his rope went tight as the grappling hook caught something large and heavy. He wondered what it could be - a treasure chest or part of a sunken ship or even a dead body..?

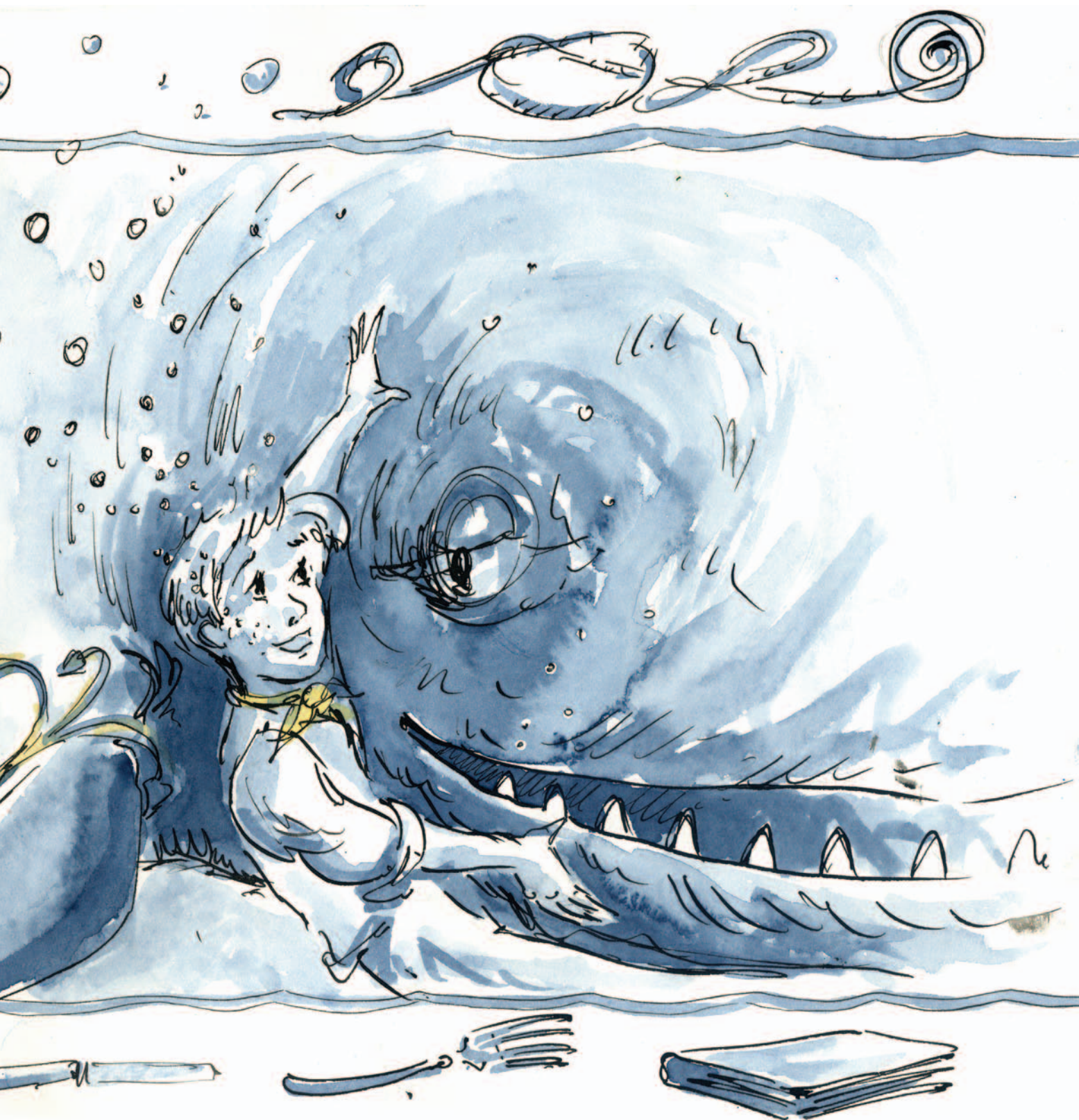
But John Kipperling would never have guessed what he was about to pull from the harbour that day.

Slowly but surely, as he pulled in the rope, the great, grey shape of a whale surfaced from the water. The whale was still alive and began thrashing around - he saw that the hook had caught around one of its fins.

Instinctively and without fear, John jumped into the water to free the whale. In the water he felt the whale's soft, smooth skin and looked deeply into her dark, shining eyes. In that sweet, tender moment John Kipperling and the whale fell in love - hook, line and sinker!







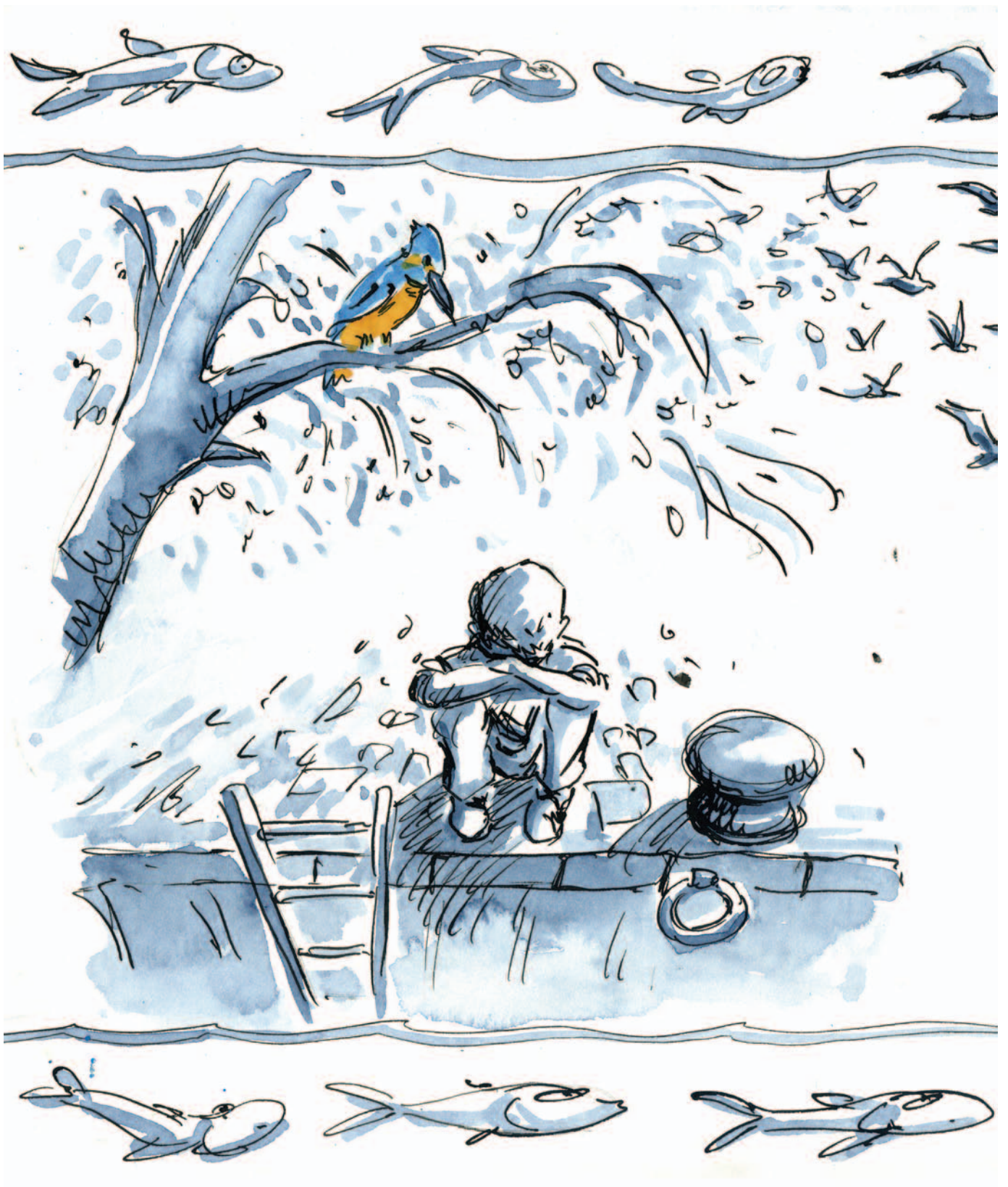
From that day on the whale went to stay with John in the water of the harbour by his hut near Redcliffe bridge. But although they were both happy in their new found love and companionship, there was one big problem: a whale of a problem! The whale was getting hungry.

There wasn't enough fish in the water of the Harbour for the whale to eat and John couldn't afford to buy enough fish from the market to feed her. After week the whale was looking unwell. John knew that soon he would have to say goodbye to his new friend. He sat down on the harbour wall and began to cry...

John didn't realise, but his sad sobbing was overheard by someone else. Above him, in the branches of an old willow tree growing by the water's edge, was a kingfisher – brilliant blue and orange – listening to John crying about losing his beautiful whale-friend.

The bird cocked its head to one side as if listening, then suddenly jumped into the air and flew away.





A few moments later, John heard the sound of beating wings in the air and splashing feet in the water.

He looked up and saw hundreds and hundreds of birds, all making their way towards Redcliffe Bridge...

swans,

gulls,

ducks,

cormorants,

grebes,

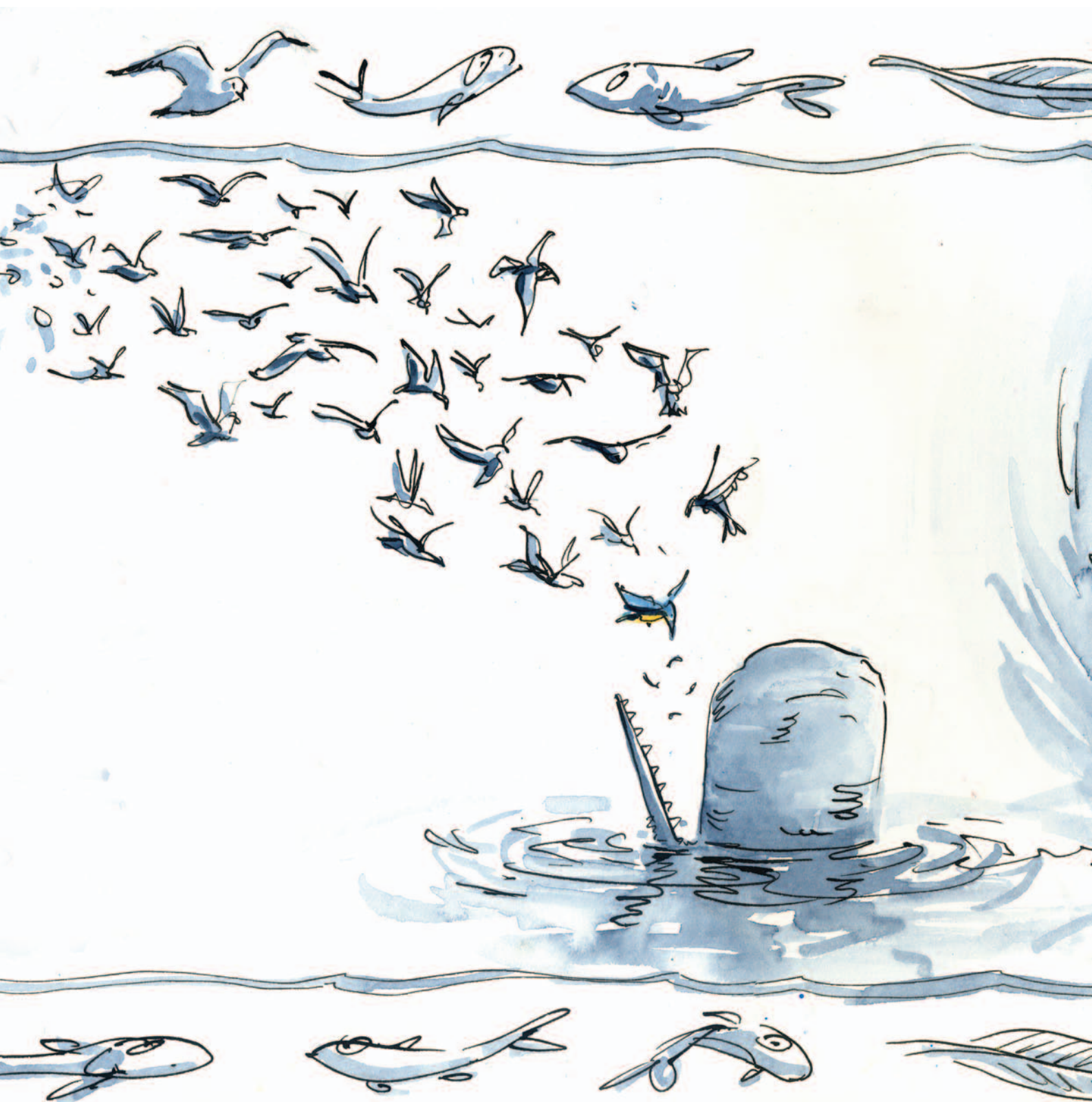
herons,

... and leading the way was the little kingfisher.

In every beak of every bird was a shiny, silver fish.

As they came closer to the whale they each dropped a fish in the water for the whale to eat.





So then, thanks to the birds of Bristol, John and the whale could live together forever in happy fish-filled bliss! They decided to get married: John spent all his savings on a big, golden ring, which the whale wore on one of her teeth.

The celebrations on their wedding day were joyous and loud, with the happy sounds of splashing of fins and flapping feathers.

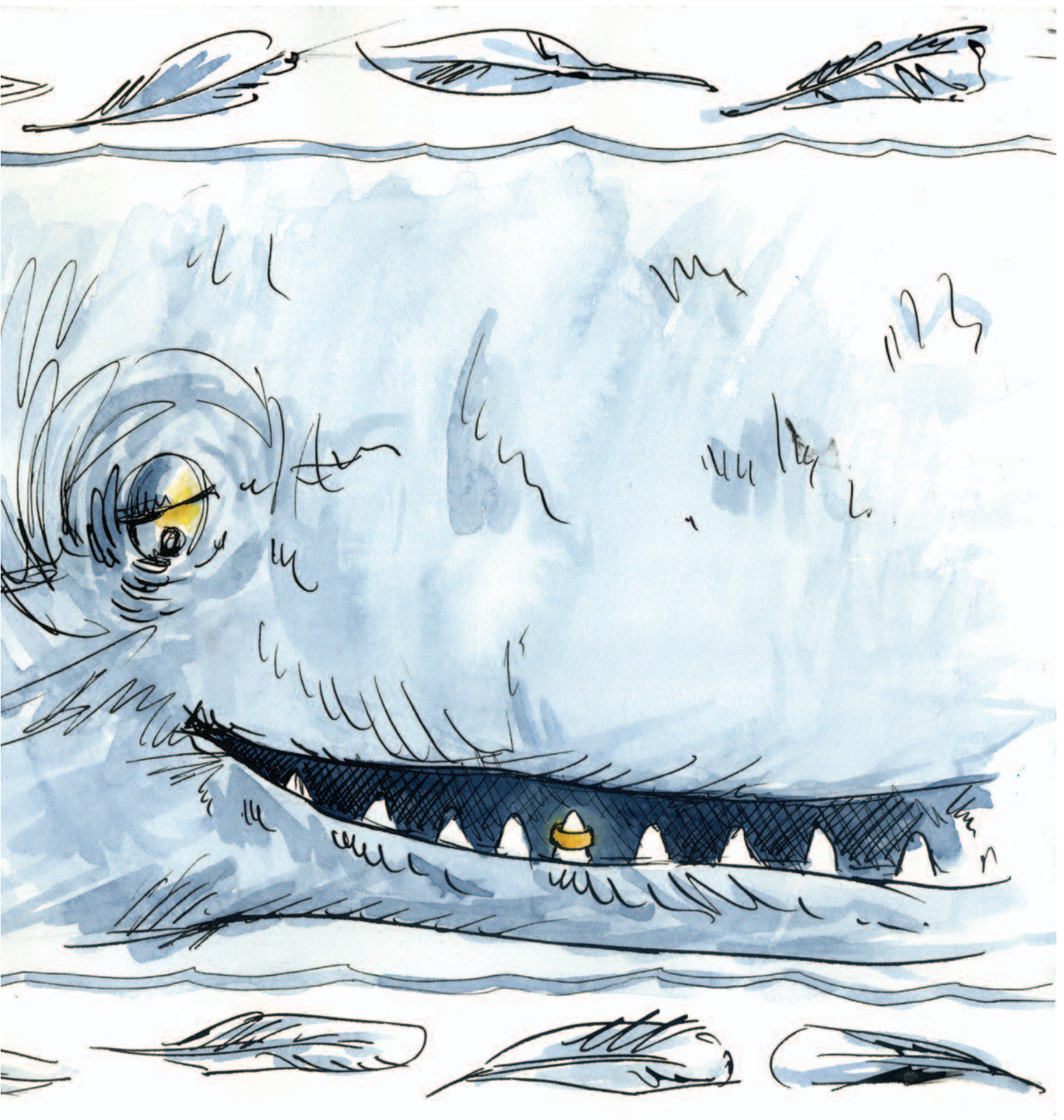
But... Although John and the whale's animal friends were all delighted with the wedding, the people of Bristol who lived near the harbour side were not so pleased.

When the merchants, and dockers, and sailors, and fish salesmen heard about this marriage between a man and a whale they were outraged:

*“It's disgusting! Disreputable! Despicable! Dishonourable! Disgraceful!”*







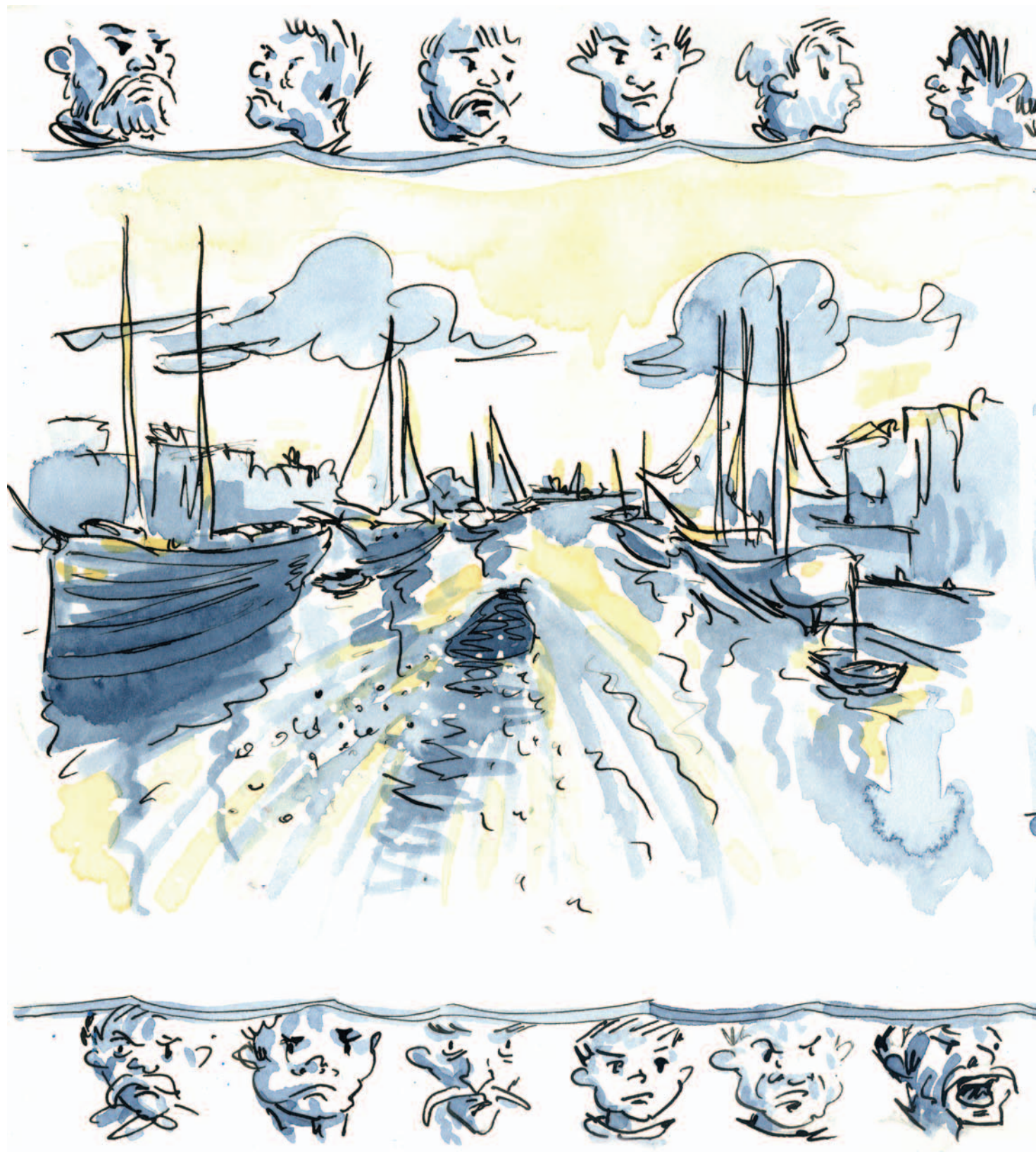
Soon there was an angry mob of humans on the harbour side by John's home, shouting and jeering and waving their fists furiously in the air. John was terrified that the angry mob might harm his beautiful whale wife, so he begged her to swim away to safety.

Reluctantly, and with tears in her eyes, she dived down into the water and began to swim - away from Bristol and out to the sea. John ran along the harbour wall following the trail of her air bubbles on the water's surface.

On John ran. Behind him he could hear the shouts of people getting closer. He came to the lock that opens into the river Avon that flows into the sea, and there standing on the harbour wall was the lock-keeper wondering what all the commotion was about.

There was no time to explain but John begged the lock-keeper to open the lock to let the whale through...



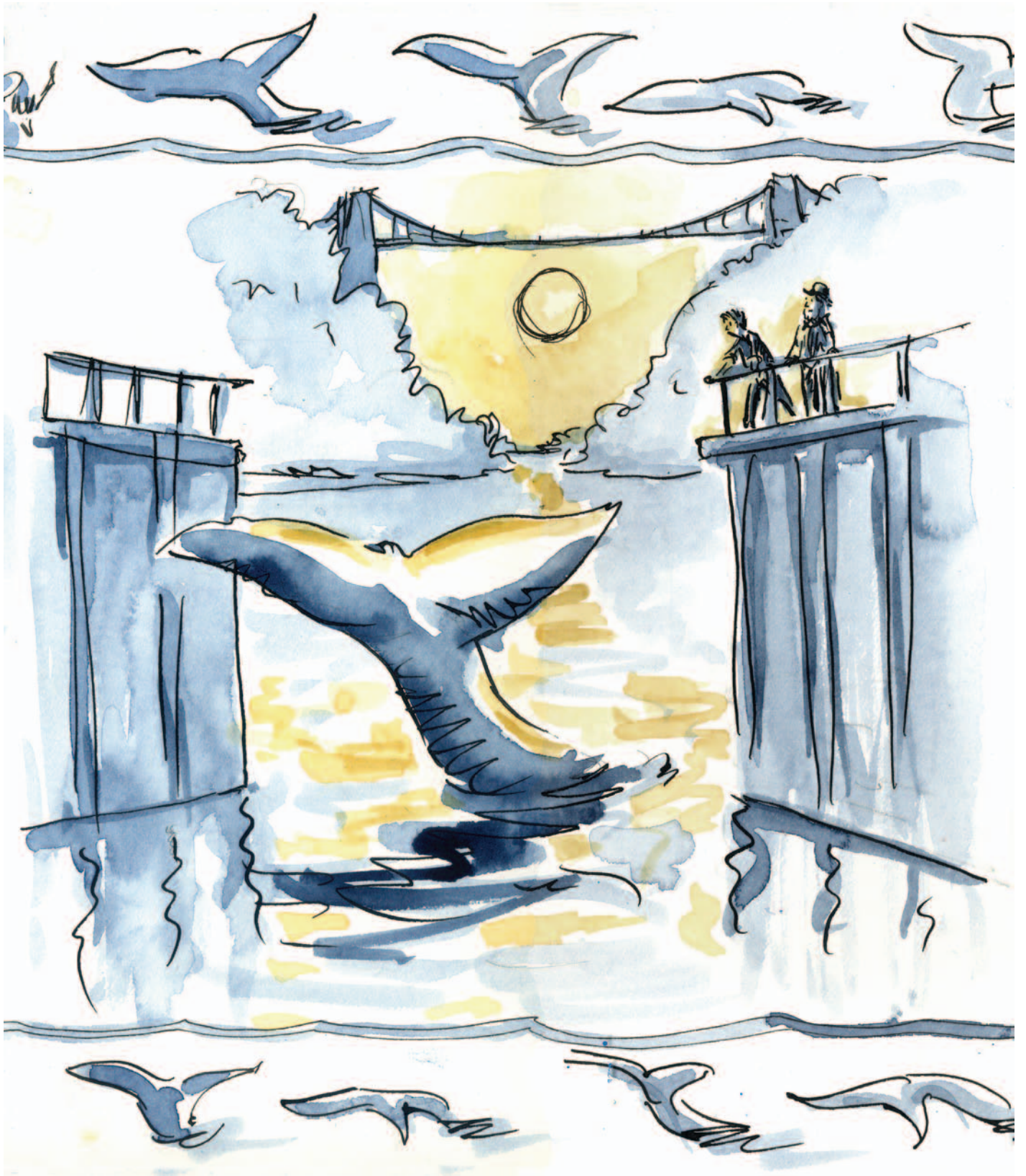


Well, the lock-keeper was a kind man who had often passed the time of day with John. He saw the desperation in John's eyes, and agreed to help.

The lock gates were already open and the whale swam into the lock. As quickly as possible the lock gates were closed behind her – the cogs were turning and the sluices opened. Water rushed and roared.

Water levels inside and outside of the lock became equal and moments later the second gates were opened. And with a giant wave of her huge tail fin the whale disappeared.





Well some people say that John never saw his whale wife again. And there were some who say it should never happened in the first place.

But don't believe them, because a little bird (perhaps a kingfisher) told me that once a month, by the light of the full moon the whale swam back to the lock of Bristol harbour where John was waiting to joyfully meet her...





‘The Man Who Married a Whale’ 2009

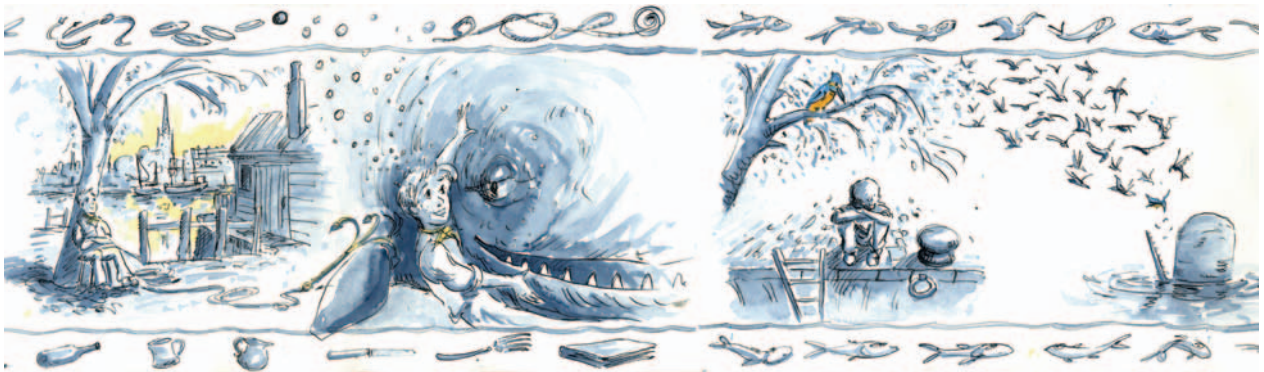
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This tale was commissioned by Local Journeys cic as part of the Floating Harbour 200 celebrations. It was inspired by story-making workshops with year 6 at Hannah More Primary School, St Philips, Bristol.

These workshops were a collaboration between Local Journeys, Bristol Museum Education Service and the Bristol Ferry Company.

If you would like to know more about the project and story-making workshops with Hannah More go to [www.localjourneys.org.uk/project/hannahmore](http://www.localjourneys.org.uk/project/hannahmore)

Find out more about Bristol’s Floating Harbour and the Floating Harbour 200 celebrations by going to – [www.bristolfloatingharbour.org.uk](http://www.bristolfloatingharbour.org.uk)





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