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For Jane, Hannah and Joe – M.M.  
For Chris – E.G.

# A Song of Gladness



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TWO HOOTS

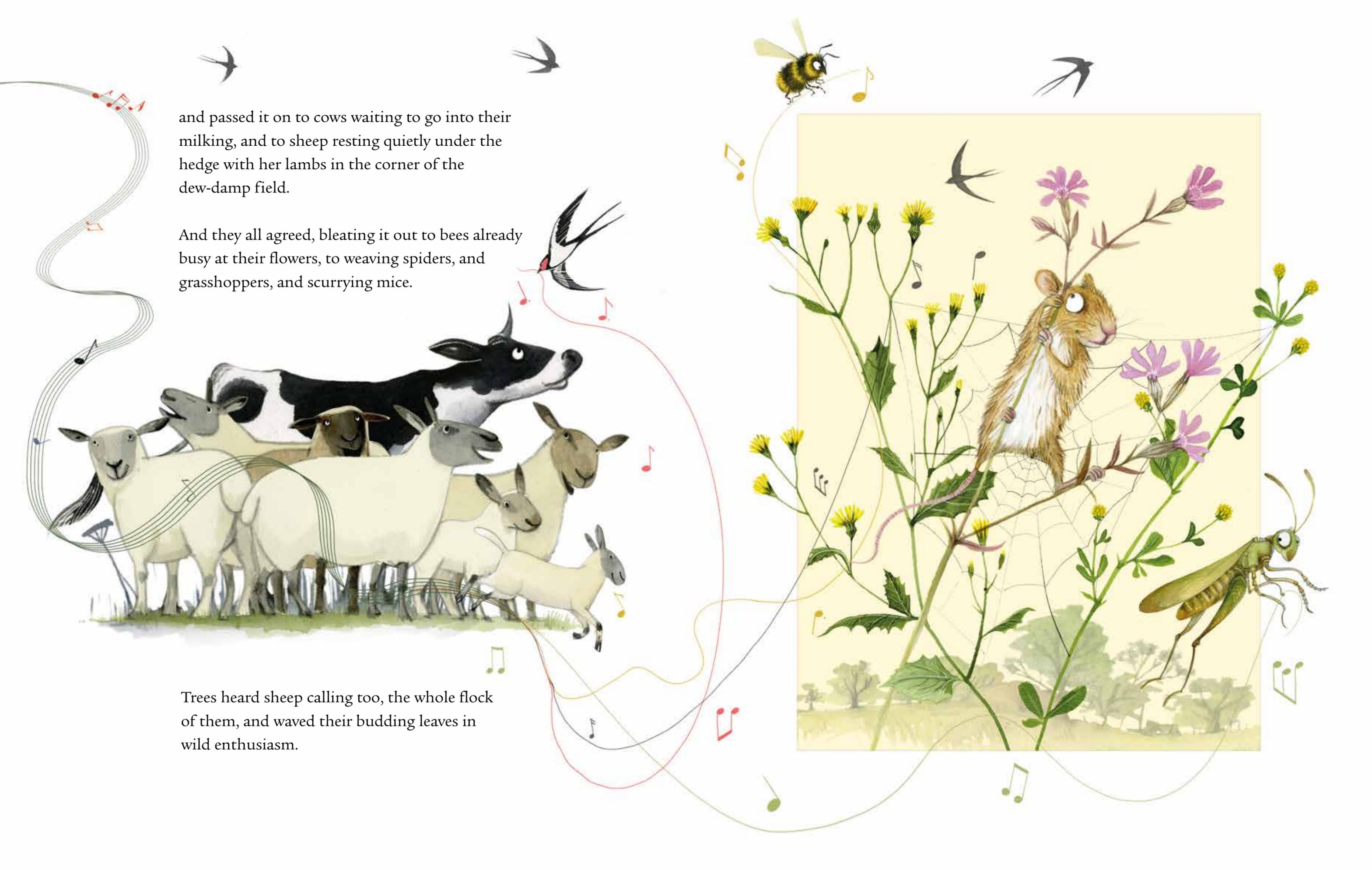
I'VE BEEN TALKING  
every morning to blackbird,  
telling him why we are all so sad.  
He sits on his branch and listens.





It was blackbird's idea. He sang out this morning at dawn from his treetop in the garden, to fox half asleep behind the garden shed. She thought it a good idea too. It was a wake-up call. Fox was on her feet at once, and trotting through Bluebell Wood, where she barked it to deer who ran off across the stream.

Kingfisher was there, otter and dipper too. They heard, and piped it on, and swallow swooped down over the meadow,



and passed it on to cows waiting to go into their milking, and to sheep resting quietly under the hedge with her lambs in the corner of the dew-damp field.

And they all agreed, bleating it out to bees already busy at their flowers, to weaving spiders, and grasshoppers, and scurrying mice.

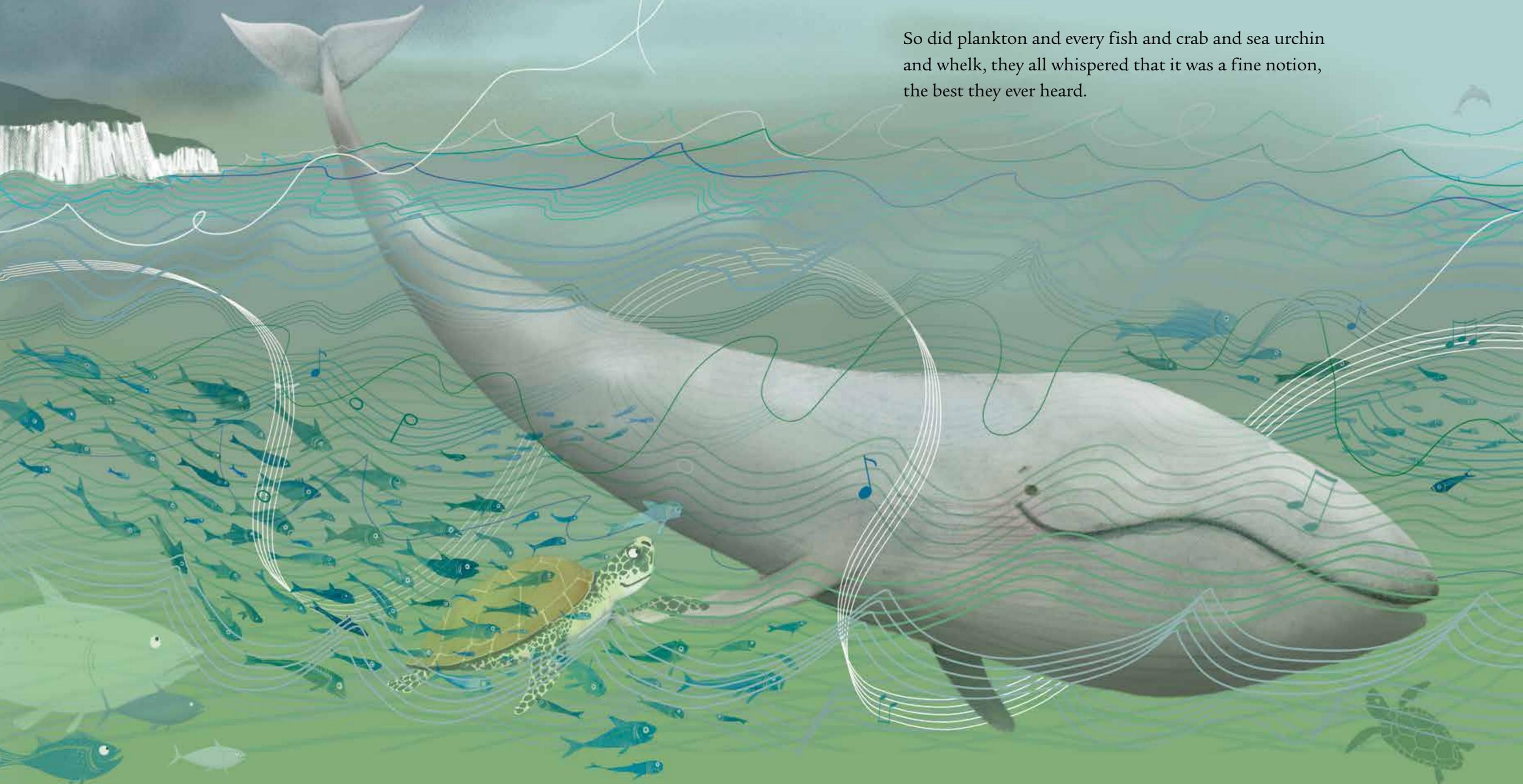
Trees heard sheep calling too, the whole flock of them, and waved their budding leaves in wild enthusiasm.

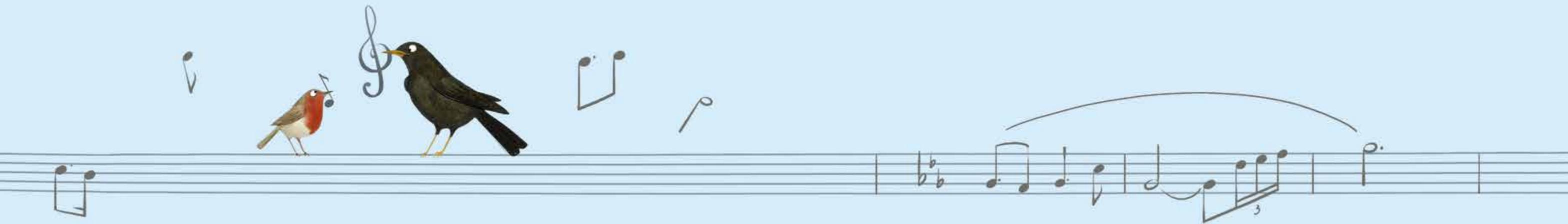
High above in the skies,  
clouds gathered, driven by wind,



and wind took blackbird's idea over the cliffs across heaving seas,  
where gulls and albatross cried it out, and whales and dolphins  
and porpoises heard it, and wailed and whooped it down into  
the deep, where turtles listened. And they too loved the idea.

So did plankton and every fish and crab and sea urchin  
and whelk, they all whispered that it was a fine notion,  
the best they ever heard.





For some years now I've been going out early every morning into the vegetable garden to pick kale or spinach, raspberries or gooseberries (my favourite). I was out there one lovely bright morning in March 2020, the year all of us will remember for the rest of our lives, a time of such sorrows.

There was not a cloud in the sky and all about me a silence so intense that I could hear it. The world seemed to have stopped. I felt I was alone on the planet. There was such beauty all around me, such peace. I should have been happy on such a morning, but instead I was overwhelmed with sadness.

Then a blackbird began to sing.

I knew at once he was singing to me, that this was personal. Sensing his welcome, I sang back, echoing his song. We had a conversation. It sounds fanciful. At first, I thought it was fanciful. But when he was there waiting for me, singing for me, every morning, I knew he was trying to get to know me, to tell me something, something important – urgent even.

He was telling me a story, singing a song he wanted the whole world to sing, every living creature on the planet.

As I stood there listening, I felt he wanted me to write it down, to pass it on. I wrote it the same day and read it out to him the next morning. He sang me his applause. I sang back my thanks. We had done it together. I have never felt a closer sense of belonging to the world about me.

It is a world that generations of us have been, and are still, destroying, with our speed and our greed. It is up to us change that, the future of the planet depends on us. But first we have to care, to feel that each one of us is part of this earth, that this earth is precious and fragile, that every plant and creature matters as much as we do. But we will not care unless we feel we belong, and to do that we need to know the wild world about us at first hand, to walk in it, breathe it in, marvel at it, to know we are all part of the same earth. This song of gladness is for everyone, to bring hope, and to cheer us on our way as we learn to care together for our planet.

By the way, the blackbird is back. I heard him again this morning. I told him that he was here in this book, singing his song, and he flew off to tell all his friends in the garden. But tomorrow morning he'll come again, and I'll still be here waiting for him, listening for his song of gladness.