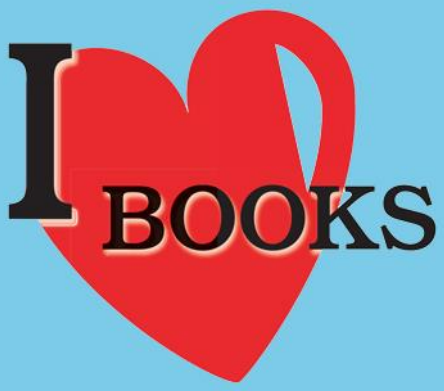


Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Fish Boy

Written by

Chloe Daykin

Illustrated by

Richard Jones

Published by

Faber & Faber

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

First published in 2017
by Faber & Faber Limited
Bloomsbury House
74–77 Great Russell Street
London, WC1B 3DA

Typeset by Faber
Printed by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY
All rights reserved
Text © Chloe Daykin, 2017
Illustrations © Richard Jones, 2017

The right of Chloe Daykin and Richard Jones to be identified as author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–32822–2



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1





CHLOE DAYKIN





FABER & FABER



In the Zone

Since 1914 over one thousand people have disappeared in a 500,000-square-mile zone into nothingness, nowhere, off the radar, off the earth. The zone got called 'The Bermuda Triangle' and the name stuck. I think we call it that because we feel better for calling it something. Like names make us feel in control, like we understand stuff we have no idea about at all. It could be called the Goopatron or the Shidozzle Pyramid. It could be a black hole, a portal to another galaxy, an alien force field. The only truth is that we're just guessing, that we don't actually know, we don't know anything at all.

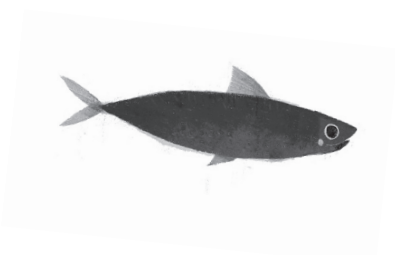
This is what I wrote in my *Unexplained Mysteries of the World* report in black Berol Fineliner in Mrs Ahira's

humanities class at 2.24 p.m. And this is what I'm thinking right now, in the sea, when a *THING* swims up to my face, blows bubbles into my Vista clear mask goggles and says . . .

Kezdodik

Kezdodik

Kezdodik



Run

What do you do if you find a talking *THING*?

You leave it and run.

And then you feel bad and come back.

But then it's gone and you don't know if it was real at all, or if maybe you imagined it?

And now you're standing on the beach and there's no one else around. The sun's going down and your towel's gone missing, and your clothes and your new Nikes. Maybe Jamie Watts took them – or maybe it was the *THING*. All these questions make your head hurt. You want to run back into the sea to make them go away cos the water's like a plunger on your head and sucks them out, like carbon dioxide into trees. But you can't because tea'll be ready, cos the sun's gone

and it's Sunday, which means pie and chips night and who would want to miss that?

I'm Billy Shiel and these are my questions cos this is me. Right here, right now, on Stepson beach. You can see me through the cliff railings. I'm the one with the goosebumps. The speck on the sand with the blue trunks. People call me Fish Boy. My skin goes up and down like the waves. My mind goes in and out like the sea. They say I've always got my mouth open, but what's wrong with that? Did I say they call me Fish Boy? Ha ha that's just a joke. Actually fish have really good memories, even goldfish. They can remember sounds for up to five months. You can train a fish to swim back to you for its dinner, from upriver, from the sea. You just play the sound and it comes right back like a boomerang.

So now I've got to run, before my chips get cold, up the cliff path, past Zadie Eccleston from class 7RH's house, through the hawthorn hedge with spikes like razors, over the 'Look Out For Frogs' sign and into the back door like the wind, like lightning, like the fastest no-shoes-and-practically-naked boy you've ever seen.

Hover

I'm in the kitchen in exactly eight minutes twenty-seven seconds. My second best without-shoes-on time. I can tell cos of my National Geographic watch, which is accurate above and below water up to ten metres. Dad's standing at the table looking at me in my blue trunks.

'You know the rules,' he says.

'But the chips, Dad?'

'No trunks at the table.'

'Can I just put them in the oven?'

'What, the trunks?'

'The chips.'

'Right, I mean no. I mean get a towel.' He's already got the sauce on his. He's picked his knife and fork up.

He's on a hover. I wish I was on a hover. I'm not even on a sit down. I'm on a drip and shiver.

'What about a tea towel?'

'I'm not having your never-you-mind on my tea towel.' Dad takes a pride in his tea towels. He gets them for his birthday, for Christmas. His favourite one says 'I'm too sexy for this tea towel'. It's hung up in the kitchen, next to the one from the Heavy Horse Centre that says 'Keep calm and eat cupcakes'.

'Where's your clothes?' he says.

'I don't know.'

'Where's your shoes?'

'I don't know.'

He looks at me right in the eyes.

'Where's Mum?' I say.

'In bed.'

'Again?'

He looks away. 'I'll get your dressing gown, son,' he says and ruffles my hair. He goes upstairs and gets my grey fleecy one. I've got three dressing gowns but the grey one is my favourite. I'm twelve and it's actually size thirteen to fourteen but I like the way the extra length covers my hands. Sarah Collins says that fleece is really made from plastic bags and I wonder how plastic bags can be so cosy. I can feel the heat prickling

down my arms. Fleece is the best, it's like putting on a radiator.

Dad makes me a little table, with a knee tray. We eat the chips and pies. They've gone a bit cold. Neither of us says anything. I eat mine like Sir David Attenborough, award-winning broadcaster and naturalist. Everyone loves Sir David. He's the best. He knows what needs to be known. He's asked all the questions and got all the answers. He knows what to be scared of and what not to be, when to get in the water and when to get out. My fork ducks under the pastry like it's going into a bat cave, through the rock crack, into the cathedral chamber, like it's exploring for the first time. The bats fly out and away. My fork becomes the red-tailed hawk, my knife the prairie falcon.

From a chopper David shouts against the wind: 'The hawk needs all of its aerobatic skills and powers of concentration to snatch one of the confusing multitude.' I prepare for the kill. 'Don't play with your food, son,' Dad says.

'I'm not playing, I'm exploring.'

'If you discover any meat, let me know.'

I think, if my fork finds a piece of steak first no one will ever know about the *THING* and it'll all be okay and Jamie Watts will give me my Nikes back. In my

head I ask Sir David what he thinks and he whispers in his dead calm voice, 'And now the female is leaving the nest.' He's always switched on to nature is David. He's a professional.



Fingers of Steel, Strength of a Bear

So now here I am and here is Jamie Watts. I didn't think I had anything in common with Jamie. Not even shoe size.

Now I know I do.

He's standing in the school yard with Archie Longdon and Oscar Pierce. They're doing keepy-uppy with Archie's Man-U ball by the electricity hub. The sign by Jamie's head says 'DANGER: RISK OF DEATH'. There's a picture of someone falling backwards, a big stabby arrow poking him. If there was a speech bubble it would say 'aaaargh', but there isn't. He's just falling down and down into nothing. Jamie looks up. I feel my breakfast move in my stomach.

‘Nice shoes, man,’ Jamie says. I look down at my old lace-up gym shoes, my toes pressing up against the ends. I look at Jamie. He’s wearing my Nikes. My mouth opens but there’s no sound coming out. It’s dried up like a rock pool in the sun.

Oscar laughs and does something I can’t see behind my head.

‘Nice one,’ says Archie.

Jamie kicks the wall. I watch the ends of my Nikes get scuffed. I hate scuffs. I think, what would David Attenborough do? What would David Attenborough do? Sir David wouldn’t jump off the boat with his diving gear on into this. He’d send down a camera on a stick. Or he’d just give the nod to start the engines and get out of here. In my mind I ask him and he says, ‘The lead male in a pack may attack at any moment,’ and bumps off over the Serengeti in a Land Rover.

So I turn and walk away. I picture the yard as a seabed, my body in fish mode. I wish I was a mackerel. Mackerel have excellent communication and move-as-one skills. They’re the socialites of the deep. Unless you’re from a different shoal and then they might eat you. If I was a mackerel I’d be looking for a kelp forest, so that’s what I do. I go for safe ground, move into the shadows. What I find is Becky Ramsden showing

everyone a YouTube video on her iPhone of a cat driving a JCB. She’s in the middle of the watching gang. I duck under and in between and people say ‘ow’ and ‘oi’ and ‘sod off’ but I get right next to Becky and that’s when I hear them.

‘Can anyone smell that?’

It’s Jamie.

‘What?’

Archie.

‘It smells like . . .’

And Oscar.

‘Fish fingers.’

‘Fish brain.’

‘Fish Boy.’

They’re across the yard, circling us. I look around and think this is not a kelp forest, it’s a fish swarm, a bait ball. This is how dolphins get mackerel. They put us in a cyclone. They go round and round, turning us tighter and tighter. Then they burst through with their mouths open and shearwaters dive at us from the air with cormorants and gannets. It’s a feeding frenzy and we’re in the middle. We’re the bait, the prey, a sitting target. That’s when Archie’s PE bag with a water bottle in flies up and on to my head. That’s what makes me fall on the ground. Jamie Watts charges

through everyone and they all scatter. It's just me and him and he sticks the Nike on my chest and comes right close up to my face and says, 'Don't you like my shoes, Billy, don't yer?'

I'm lying there waiting for the bell, for Mrs Curtis on morning duty, for Jamie's jaws to open and swallow me. I close my eyes and wait, but nothing comes. I open them and see him going backwards. He looks all weird and he can't move his arms or legs. There's a finger on his neck, another pressing into his shoulder.

'Leave him alone,' says the voice behind the fingers. It's a small voice. They let go and Jamie drops and backs off. I see a new kid standing there in a blue checked puffa jacket and dark-rimmed glasses. He's shorter than me, shorter than anyone else in the yard.

'I'm against violence,' he says and offers me a finger, his best right-hand middle. I pull myself up off the ground. I think his finger will pop out of its socket, but it doesn't.

'I'm Billy Shiel,' I say. 'People call me Fish Boy. My skin goes up and down like the waves. My mind goes in and out like the sea.'

'I'm Patrick Green,' he says. 'Fingers like steel, strength of a bear.'

'Brown, black, polar or koala?' Technically koalas

aren't bears and although people think they're very cuddly they're actually quite vicious.

'Technically koalas aren't bears,' he says and our eyes meet. 'Grizzly,' he growls. His growl is less impressive than his mighty hands. He holds one out and I look at the fingers of steel. I imagine them crushing mine. He sees me looking and puts them away. We shake thumbs. Even his thumb feels superpowered.

I see the blood flowing back under my nail. It goes from white to pink again. I look at Patrick Green and think where did you come from? I think about comings and goings and timings and life. I think of tribes and herds and straggly ones catching up from taking too long at the water hole, caribou and swallows crossing continents just to be at the right place at the right time. But I don't think about it for too long because the bell goes.