

Helping your children choose books they will love



LoveReading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from
Shift

Written by
Jeff Povey

Published by
**Simon & Schuster Children's
Books**

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

Please print off and read at your leisure.



First published in Great Britain in 2014 by Simon and Schuster UK Ltd
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright Ó 2014 Jeff Povey

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.
No reproduction without permission.
All rights reserved.

The right of Jeff Povey to be identified as the author of this work has been
asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road
London
WC1X 8HB

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney

Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

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

PB ISBN: 978-1-4711-1868-5
EBook ISBN: 978-1-4711-1869-2

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either
the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance
to actual people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

www.simonandschuster.co.uk
www.simonandschuster.com.au

L8ERS

Billie and I are walking down the steep grassy hill that leads from the school to the centre of town. I have become a little anxious about my hair colour now and wonder if I've gone too far. Billie, with her spectacular half Indian, half Irish colouring that translates into dark lush hair and blue eyes, has never needed to improve on that, and I'm still not sure what possessed me to do something so crazy. Did I need to be noticed that much? There's got to be something psychological going on here but I have no idea what.

'D'you think Johnson has a special pass that allows him to wear tight jeans?' Billie asks.

I'm not sure why Billie's talking about Johnson. She's rarely, if ever, mentioned him before.

'Was he wearing jeans?' I ask innocently.

'Like you didn't notice.'

'I wasn't really looking.' I lie.

'Must've seen the way he saluted me.'

I know for a fact that he saluted me, but I let it go.

'Did he?'

Billie smiles to herself at the thought. 'Oh yeah.'

We carry on to the bottom of the hill and take a short cut

through the car park and over the tiny river that snakes its way through the town.

‘You really have to meet Kyle?’ Billie asks.

‘I promised.’

‘My bus isn’t for another twenty minutes.’ Billie looks at me hopefully. ‘I’ll buy you an Americano.’

Her big beseeching brown eyes are too much for me and I quickly text Kyle: **Still in detention**. We both giggle like little kids and then I feel bad. I should really be racing round to see Kyle.

We have been so busy chatting we haven’t noticed that the town is unusually quiet. We’re halfway to Costa before Billie comments on it.

‘Look at that,’ she says.

‘What?’

‘The high street.’

I take a moment to register the emptiness.

‘Never seen it like this before,’ she adds.

There are no cars or buses driving past, no people walking around.

‘Bank holiday?’ I ask.

‘We wouldn’t have been at school.’ Billie continues to scan the usually packed high street. ‘And people would still be out and about. Wouldn’t they?’

She’s right, but there doesn’t appear to be another single human being anywhere. Billie gently pushes open the nearest shop door, a health food shop run by the unhealthiest looking man I have ever seen. The door creaks a little as Billie peers in.

I wait for her to look around before she pulls the door shut again.

‘Empty.’

‘What d’you mean?’

‘What d’you think I mean?’

I squeeze past her and take a look for myself. The health food shop is completely deserted.

‘They shouldn’t leave it unlocked,’ I tell her before backing out. ‘Someone should tell them about that – they’ll get robbed.’

We move to the next shop, a key cutter and shoe repairer. Billie opens the door. Again it’s unlocked and again it’s empty.

‘Let’s try another shop,’ I tell her.

We head into the travel agent. There are computer terminals at small desks, a bureau de change at the far end and stacks of travel brochures lying neatly on shelves. But no people.

‘Maybe everyone booked themselves a holiday,’ Billie jokes.

We enter the phone shop next door, which is nearly always packed with people wanting an upgrade on a phone they’ve had less than a week, and the result is the same. No one home.

We emerge from the phone shop and look up and down the empty high street again. I even scan the second and third floor windows of the offices above the shops, but there’s no sign of movement behind any of them.

Billie heads into the next shop along, Boots. I follow her through the automatic doors.

My heart is starting to quicken and I’m getting a tingling sensation in my arms and shoulders.

‘Gas leak?’ I ask. ‘Chemical spill?’

Billie isn’t listening because usually the first thing you see in Boots are the women on the make-up counter who have applied so much product on their faces you’re always surprised there’s any left to sell. But the painted ladies aren’t there today. No one is.

‘Where is everyone?’ Billie asks, but it’s not a question I’m likely to have an answer for. ‘Hey!’ she calls out.

‘What are you doing?’

‘HEY!’ she shouts louder this time.

‘Shh, they’ll throw us out.’

‘Who? Who exactly is going to throw us out?’ Billie is enjoying the emptiness less and less. She breaks into a fast walk hurrying down the aisles looking for a sign of life.

I try to keep up with her as she moves quickly from aisle to aisle.

‘Hey! Hello!’ Billie looks at me, her eyes wide. I know her heart is pumping as hard as mine is.

Billie hurries out of Boots and I chase after her as we race into more high street shops, calling out, hoping that someone is there. But each one is the same. Empty.

There is absolutely no one to be found. Everything looks the same, it feels the same and even smells the same, but without actual people it just isn’t the same.

‘Terrorists? It’s got to be terrorists.’

Billie’s eyes grow even wider. ‘God, Rev.’

‘I’m just saying.’

‘You think there’s been an evacuation? Like they’ve found a bomb or something?’

‘What else could it be?’

‘So where are the soldiers? The police?’ she says, looking more freaked out by the second.

‘Let me try my mum.’ I grab my phone and call home, but it goes straight to answering machine. I try to act cool and casual. ‘Mum, you there? Something going on that I’ve missed? Call me . . .’ I try to say the last bit in a sort of happy-clappy, sing-song voice – as if I haven’t a care in the world – but my voice cracks halfway through and that’s when I hear my heart pounding in my ears, like it has a sixth sense or something. That it’s beating out a warning. I look at Billie and she’s also on her phone.

‘Dad, just saying hi. Uh, where . . . Uh, well there doesn’t seem to be anyone around. Could you maybe . . . well, yeah, could you call me back? Please.’

The pounding is reaching deep into my brain and giving me a splitting headache.

We head for the town square and Billie cranes her neck to study the sky. ‘There aren’t even any birds’. It’s as empty as the streets below it. A few clouds, but no birds or planes.

‘Do they evacuate birds?’ she asks.

‘They do now.’ It’s a bad joke – weak. But I’m trying not to freak out completely.

‘Let’s keep looking.’

‘We’ve been looking.’

Billie looks me straight in the eye. ‘OK. Here’s what I think. There’s been a mass evacuation. There’s a war or something breaking out, and a missile is heading our way. Only they forgot to tell us.’

‘Mum wouldn’t forget me. Your dad wouldn’t forget you either. Neither of them have called us.’

‘What about Kyle – has he texted back?’

‘No. Not yet.’

‘So text him again.’

My fingers jab at the touchscreen. **Where is every1?**

We wait, staring at my phone. Seconds turn into minutes, but no response comes.

‘Call him,’ Billie snaps.

I do but a voice tells me that ‘*no connection is possible at this present time*’. I hang up and look at Billie and she’s as spooked as I am.

‘Why am I not enjoying this?’ She asks.

‘Why would you?’

‘Well, this is a dream right? Having a town all of your own. We can do anything, go shopping, choose the best clothes.’

‘That’s called looting,’ I say.

We carry on towards the town square and Billie slips her hand into mine. It feels cold, like its lacking blood, but I hold on tightly as we emerge on to the cobbled square. It’s usually packed with people. You can sit there all day and watch half the world pass by. But not today. A children’s roundabout, giant cups and saucers, sits idly in the middle. The sign reads *Five years and under* and I know we’re both wondering where all the five-years-and-unders have gone.

‘What about the church?’ Billie says suddenly. ‘People go to churches in times of panic.’

There's an ancient church that dominates the centre of town and if panicked, scared people are going to gather, that's where they're going to go.

We run down the cobbled side road, charge past the war memorial decorated with the names of people who were also here once but aren't now, then burst into the church grounds. I know even before we open the great wooden door that it is empty. It just has that feeling.

Billie's eyes dart everywhere but the nearest thing to a human being is a large porcelain statue of Jesus, and even he has his head bowed and won't acknowledge our presence.

'Jesus,' says Billie.

On the way home I phone mum again, this time not cool, but totally frantic.

'Mum? *Where are you?* I'm scared. Mum! Mum, pick up! You there? Mum!'

Billie and I aren't talking. We are locked in our own dark thoughts as the fear spreads through us. No cars pass by – there's no movement anywhere.

We walk towards an empty bus, parked at a bus stop. Its door is wide open and for some reason it looks almost inviting. Before I know it, I've crossed the road to take a closer look.

'Rev!' Billie hurries to catch up with me. 'Stay close.'

I stop at the open door and I'm sure I can hear voices.

'You hear that?' I whisper to Billie.

'Hear what?'

'Voices . . .'

Billie takes a moment. 'Voices? Seriously?'

I take a step forward, listen harder. The voices are there, I'm sure of it, but they're too faint and I can't quite make them out.

'Rev, don't get too close.'

I hold up a hand to get Billie to be quiet and take another step

towards the open door. There's a strange heat emanating from inside. 'You feel that?' I ask her.

Billie remains static – doesn't come any closer.

'Wait, it's not voices. It's *a* voice. There's someone on the bus,' I say. 'They're saying my name – I think.'

Billie takes hold of my arm to pull me back. 'Rev, please, this isn't funny.'

I shake Billie off and start to step aboard, but the second I do the bus doors slam shut.

Billie screams and my heart nearly breaks a rib it leaps so hard in my chest.

'Christ!' I yell.

I look at the shut door and realise that the heat and the voice have disappeared. I peer inside trying to see who closed the doors, but I can't see anyone. I jog along the side of the bus, jumping up to get a better look. But I can't see anyone on board.

'You sure you didn't hear a voice?' I ask her.

'Let's get to your mum's. Like now.'

My mum doesn't trust me to not lose my front door key, so she always hides it under one of eight plant pots that sit in full bloom on our window sill – it's the closest we've got to a garden. I lift the third pot along and retrieve the key. But when I try the door, I can't get the key to fit. It won't go in.

'What is this?! She's changed the lock!'

'Let me try.' Billie takes the key from my trembling hand and shoves it hard into the lock. It turns easily. 'You had it upside down.'

We burst inside and I start calling for mum as Billie goes from room to room in the tiny two-bedroom council flat.

'Mum! *Mum!*' She should be home because she works evenings, waitressing in a restaurant. Money is tight, so I know it'd be unusual for her to go out shopping or to see a friend. Most days she stays in and watches telly.

‘She’s not in,’ Billie says, coming back to where I’m standing, having searched the entire flat.

I stop in the hallway and don’t know what to do next. Our ancient answerphone on the table flashes with messages and I hit *play*. My voice echoes down the hallway ‘*Mum? Where are you? I’m scared . . .*’

‘Dad, could you call me, please.’ Billie is back on her mobile calling her dad’s office again as I look around, hoping that Billie may have missed something.

The lounge is pretty much as I left it this morning. The tiny kitchen is the same. Even the bathroom is the same.

But when I look closer I can see that the bath has been filled recently. I put my hand into it and the water is still hot so Mum must have been running herself a bath. Which makes me think she must have been in the flat very recently.

‘Dad’s not picking up,’ says Billie. ‘There’s no service for his mobile either.’

‘It looks like Mum was going to have a bath,’ I offer quietly. ‘She was here. Can’t have been more than five minutes ago.’

‘So why didn’t she answer the phone?’

I have no idea, I think.

‘You tried Kyle?’ Billie asks.

‘I already did. You suggested it, remember, when we were on the high street?’

‘I did?’ Billie puts a hand to her forehead. ‘I’m losing it.’

I phone Kyle again anyway, but get the same ‘*no connection possible*’ message. I try it once more just in case, but it still won’t put me through.

Billie sits down beside me on the edge of the bath. She’s in most of the top sets at school and right now we need her brains.

‘The TV!’ She exclaims.

It seems so obvious – why didn’t we think of it before? I jump up and charge into the lounge. Billie is right behind me as I grab the remote and switch it on.

Nothing. I flick through the channels, but there is nothing but static.

Billie has already started the battered computer that sits on a tiny second-hand table in the corner of the room under the window.

‘Anything?’ I ask her.

‘It’s still booting. How old is this thing?’

‘Was my dad’s.’

‘That makes it over twelve years old!’

‘Mum can’t afford a new one.’

Billie watches the screen come to life and we wait for it to make the Internet connection. I managed to hook up the Wi-Fi all by myself. Mum told me that Dad would have been very proud.

But there is nothing on the Internet either. In fact there is no Internet. The connection just fails and fails and fails again.

Billie tries connecting to the Internet using the 4G on her phone, but the same thing happens. No Internet connectivity.

‘The radio!’ I sprint into the kitchen, banging the ‘on’ button on the old radio Mum listens to every morning. We wait for it to come to life but it doesn’t. It just sits there spraying static into the room.

Billie slumps down at the formica kitchen table.

‘It’s not your birthday is it?’ She tries to joke. ‘Maybe everyone’s waiting to jump out and shout “Surprise!”’

My phone beeps loudly with a text. After the amount of silence we’ve just endured it makes us both jump. I grab for the phone, manage to drop it and watch it land on the floor. The casing springs off and the battery spills out.

‘Christ, Rev!!’

‘Sorry, sorry, sorry.’

We get down on our hands and knees, both of us crawling under the kitchen table to retrieve the scattered phone parts. But every time I pick a piece up, it seems to slip from my jittery hands.

‘Jesus, get a grip,’ Billie mutters.

‘Like you’re Mrs Calm,’ I snap back.

Billie snatches the battery from me, slams it into the back of the phone and switches it back on. I never knew that waiting for a phone to reboot could take so long. It feels like we are under the table for hours before the phone finally lights up.

The text message flashes up.

Seen any1 l8ly?

We both stare at the phone, reading and re-reading the text.

‘Who’s that from?’ Billie asks me.

‘No idea,’ I say. The number isn’t one I recognise.

‘Text back,’ she says.

‘Saying what?’

‘That, no, we haven’t seen anyone lately.’

I try to compose myself. My hands don’t seem to be trembling so much any more. This sign of life seems to have brought a slight sense of calm.

No. Have u? I write.

We wait for the reply and almost give up when the phone pings with a response.

Duh!

‘Duh?’ I say to Billie. ‘*Duh?* What does that mean?’

‘Ask them who they are.’ She tells me.

Who r u

The text comes back quicker this time.

Dazza.

Billie and I hesitate at this.

‘Who’s Dazza?’ She asks me.

Who’s Dazza I text.

FFS! Is the abrupt reply. We leave it for a few more moments, putting the onus on ‘Dazza’ to text again. A few seconds later the phone beeps.

Stupid ho

‘That’s nice,’ says Billie, ‘We’ve found Prince Charming.’

FU I text back.

‘What are you doing?! You’ve just told the only person we’ve had any contact with to F off!’

‘Well, he didn’t need to call me that,’ I say. I don’t care if the whole world has vanished. I don’t need some psycho I don’t even know texting me abuse.

FU 2 he fires back.

I’m about to get into a text war when Billie snatches the phone from me. ‘Everyone’s gone who knows where and you’ve got anger issues?’ She says, still glaring.

This is Billie Evitt. I’m with Reva Marsalis. Who and where r u? Billie texts, her thumbs moving like lightning across the tiny virtual keyboard.

Told ya. I’m Dazza

‘We must know a Dazza, otherwise how would he have your number?’ Billie starts to rack her brain. ‘Dazza, Dazza, Dazza.’

I’m in Tesco. A new text from Dazza pings across to us.

‘He’s shopping?’ Billie looks completely bemused now.

U the only 1 there? I text back.

☺

‘He texted a smile? Who texts a smile at a time like this?’ I say. Then it dawns on me. ‘It’s the Ape!’

‘The Ape?’

My spirits are already plummeting. ‘Yes, someone in detention called him Daz, I’m sure they did.’

Billie looks at the smile on the text and slowly shakes her head. ‘How come he has your number? You been seeing him behind Kyle’s back?’ Even if the only sign of life is some gross primate, it appears to have lifted her spirits.

‘Excuse me if I don’t laugh,’ I tell her.

‘Text him back. Tell him we’re coming.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Who else is there? We don’t have a choice.’

We’ll be there in 10 I write.

Then for good measure I add, ☺