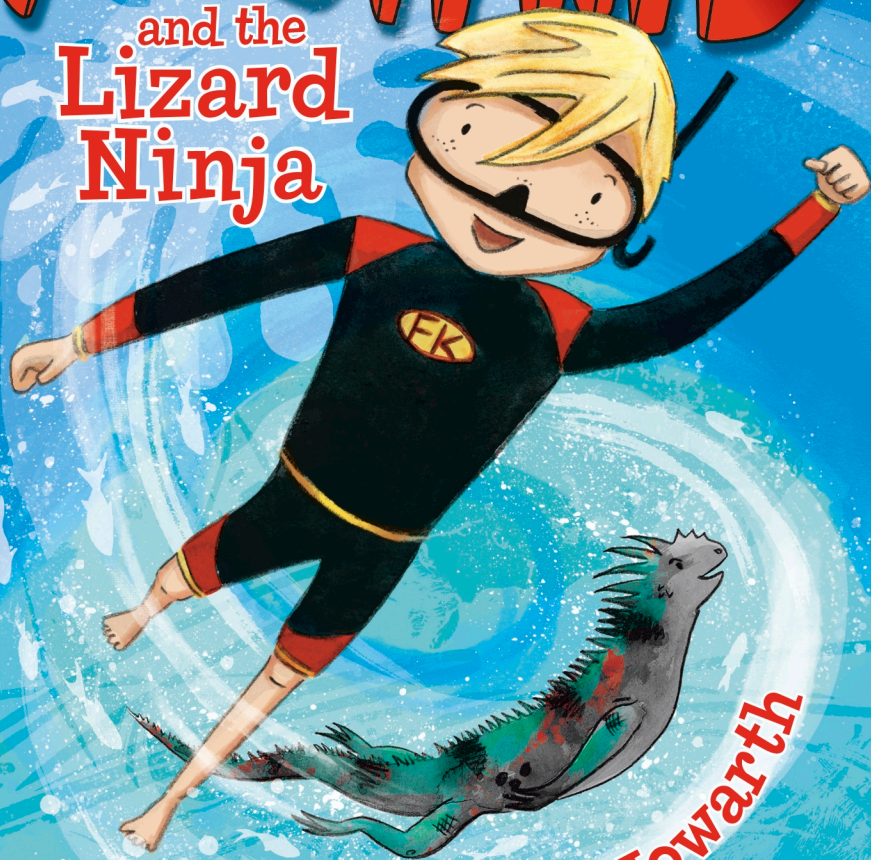


FISH KID

and the
**Lizard
Ninja**



Kylie Howarth

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First published in 2019
 by Walker Books Australia Pty Ltd
 Locked Bag 22, Newtown
 NSW 2042 Australia
 www.walkerbooks.com.au

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A catalogue record for this
 book is available from the
 National Library of Australia

ISBN: 978 1 760650 81 0

For my dive buddy and our two fish kids.

And Mum, thanks for everything.

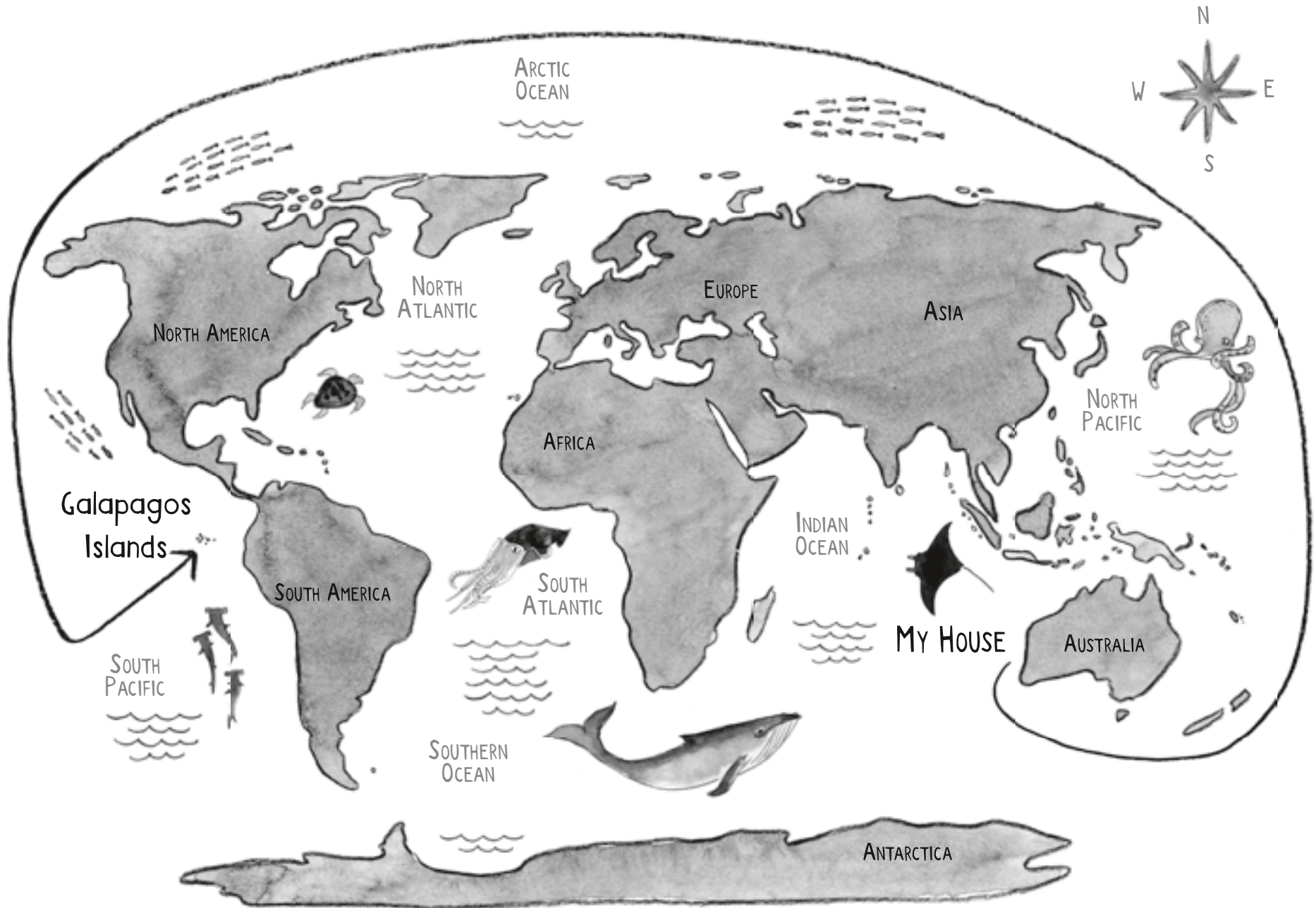
The illustrations for this book were
 created with pencil and ink
 Typeset in ITC Mendoza Roman and Papercut
 Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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CHAPTER 1

Fishy Family



I spat salt water all over the deck. I was like a human fountain! A giggle came from the skipper's cabin.

"YOU!" I yelled, then dragged my salty tongue across my sleeve. "Yuck!"

That was the second time Emely had filled my drink bottle with seawater. I had no idea why she kept doing that. I hadn't done ANYTHING to her. I didn't even know her.

We had been on the boat for three days. Mum and Dad had dragged me out here on their new work project – to collect more weird sea creatures.

"Climate change is a very serious issue," said Dad. "The world's oceans are warmer now than they've been in fifty years."

"That's a good thing," I said. "It's always way too cold in the ocean for me. Brrrrr." He shot me one of his disappointed Dad looks, like the time I got caught sneaking my dinner to the cat. How was I to know crayfish was so



expensive? Tasted like rotten chicken to me.

We were in a place called the Galapagos Islands, a world away from home and my friends.

Dad is a marine biologist, which is a fancy name for someone who stares at fish a lot. Mum is an underwater photographer. We have so many pictures of fish at our house, there's not a speck of white wall left. Fishy eyes stare at me from every room. Barracuda watch me eat, whales watch me sleep ... and penguins watch me poop!

When people come to visit they think they ARE under water. Or in a museum. We have bottles of freaky old fish on every shelf. Most people have a smart TV in their family room. We have a

DUMB flounder stuck to the wall.

It totally creeps out my friends.

I emptied my bottle, tipping the rest of the seawater overboard. A cloud of bubbles boiled on the ocean surface, and a black alien-looking creature emerged through the middle. Its breathing sounded like Darth Vader.



CHAPTER 2

Endangered Cucumbers

The sea alien turned and looked straight at me. It reached up one arm ... then it waved.

“Hi, Bodhi,” it said.

“Hey Dad,” I replied. He handed me his catch bag and I pulled it aboard. There were three long sluggy things inside. “Eeeuw, what are those?” I asked, poking at one through the mesh.

Dad pulled the dive reg out of his mouth.

"Isostichopus fuscus," he said.

"Octopus whatsits?" I asked.

"Isostichopus fuscus – Galapagos sea cucumber."

The skipper helped Dad and his gear out of the water.

"Aren't they amazing?" said Dad. He reached into his catch bag and pulled out the biggest. "Take a look at this beauty," he said, holding it up like a prized sausage at the Royal Show.



"Your dinner," said the skipper.

"What? That's disgusting!" A tiny bit

of spew jumped up the back of my throat.

"No, no," said Dad. "These are my test specimens. Although they are called sea cucumbers, they're not fruit or vegetables."

"But you CAN eat them," said the skipper.

"Gross!" I said.

Dad went on to explain how they are actually important animals. Something about balancing the ocean, blah blah blah ... and eating fish poop! Basically, sea cucumbers are the vacuum cleaners of the sea.

"Are they tasty?" asked Emely.

"I've never tried them," said Dad. "But they are considered a delicacy in certain countries. Some people even believe sea cucumbers have special

healing powers. That's why they've been overfished. Now they are an endangered species."

"That doesn't stop the poachers," said the skipper. "Three men snuck out here at night. Filled their boat."

"They're probably in prison now," said Dad.

"Quick! You'd better throw those back," said the skipper, smirking.

Dad assured us it was okay for him to take a few – only for scientific testing.

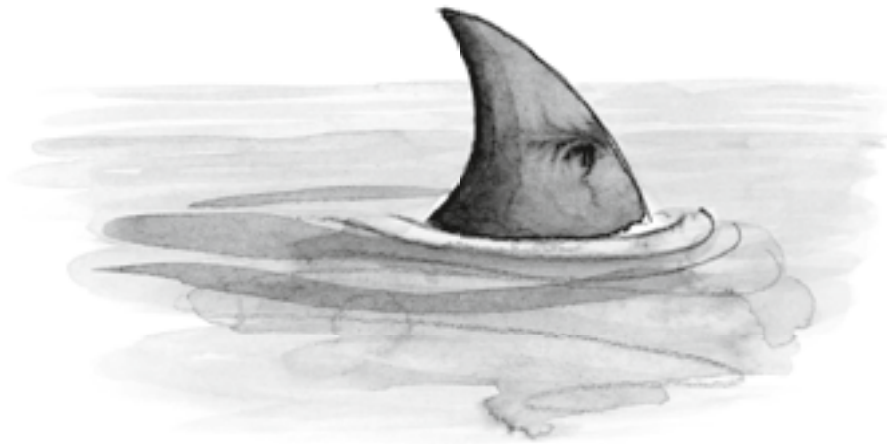
"Could you put them in the fridge, please, Emely?" asked Dad. "On the shelf above the jellies."

"Sure," said the skipper's daughter, wiggling the slugs in my face.

"Wait until you see your mum's shark pics," said Dad.

"Sharks?" I asked with a gulp. "Um, Dad, where is Mum?"

"Hmmm, she was right behind me," said Dad.



Fish Kid Facts



Breathe through their **anus**.

Are related to **starfish** and **sea urchins**.

Eat **algae**, **plankton** and **decaying matter** on the sea floor.

Favourite dessert is **fish poo!**

In defence, can expel their **toxic guts** out of their anus, then grow them back again.

Don't have **brains!**



CHAPTER 3

Snack Attack

"Now *that* is a shark," said Mum, flicking through her photos. "Look, Bodhi, Dad is in this shot too." I leaned over Mum's shoulder to see the screen.

Dad looked like a puny little baitfish. The shark was a monster.

"Whoa!" I said. "It could have swallowed you whole!"

You see? My parents are totally nuts.