

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Unlucky

a timed exercise

by Fran Duffield

I am writing this account, in another man's book, by candlelight, inside the belly of a fish. The purple sides of the belly shudder, the candle gutters, then steadies. I focus hard on the words I am writing, but each one melts away as soon as my hand moves on. I know if only I can remember them, I will be freed.

I have dreamt this same nightmare for weeks, with small variations. Sometimes there is an echoing distant voice calling urgently, but I can't make out the words. Sometimes I feel a brooding presence just behind me, but I am frozen to the spot, completely unable to turn to see who it is.

And each time the dark tunnel roars, and the tide of salt water gushes in, and I struggle and thrash to try to reach above it, waking gasping for breath and as soaked in sweat as if I had been drenched in water.

The counsellor looks thoughtful: "Do you believe in bad luck?" she says, sitting back in her chair.

I frown. "Sometimes," I mutter "It seems the only kind there is."

She smiles a professional smile: "I wondered if you felt everything that has happened was arbitrary, pure chance: bad luck?"

I am wary. Where is she leading me? "Not all of it, I suppose." I am hedging.

"You said last time that you thought you were jinxed: do you believe that?"

I wait, thinking. "Well, bad luck seems to follow me wherever I go."

She flicks the screen of her tablet to bring the notes up. "So do you think people might see you as a 'Jonah', who brings bad luck, bad vibes?"

A long ago door opens in my memory, an old book with dark, scary pictures.

“You can write your own luck, you know,” she says, “and erase the bad luck.” I sigh, and the great maw opens to daylight at last.