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Michael Morpurgo



What is his job?

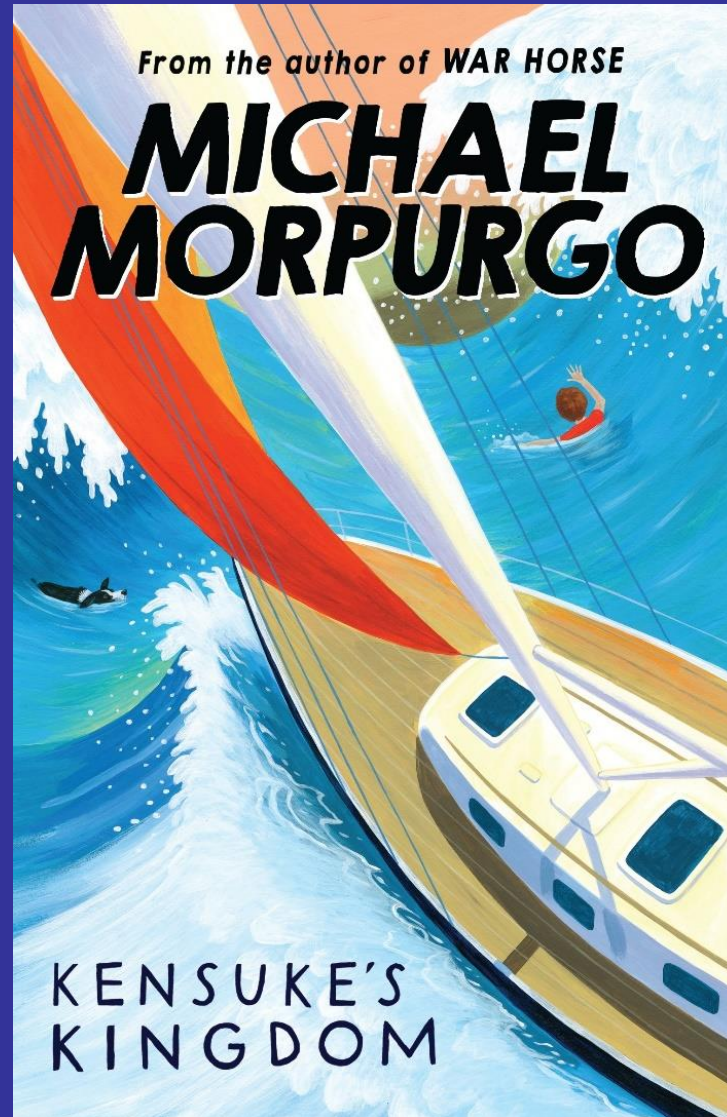
What do we call it?

Today's Challenge

What 5 things
would you take?



Kensuke's Kingdom
by Michael Morpurgo



Chapter 1

Peggy Sue



Kensuke's Kingdom

Chapter 1, page 1

I disappeared on the night before my twelfth birthday, July 28th 1988.



I had to promise Kensuke that I wouldn't tell my story for at least ten years, and because of that I have had to live a lie.

I have done school, done college and had time to think.



I owe it to my family and friends to tell the truth at last, about my long disappearance, about how I lived and came back from the dead.

There is another reason for speaking out now, a far better reason. Kensuke was a great man, a good man and my friend. I want the world to know him as I knew him.

Chapter 1, page 2

Until I was nearly eleven, until the letter came, life was normal.

There were four of us, my mother, my father,



me, (Michael)



and Stella Artois my one-ear-up and one-ear-down, black and white sheep dog.



She always seemed to know what was about to happen before it did. But even she could not have foreseen how that letter was going to change our lives for ever.

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Thinking back , there was a regularity about my early childhood. Every morning down the road to 'the monkey school', as my father called it. Because the children hung upside down on the climbing frame in the playground and gibbered like monkeys. Dad often called me 'monkey face' when he was in a playful mood.



The school was called St Joseph's and I was happy there most of the time.



After school, everyday whatever the weather I'd be off to play football with my best friend in the world, Eddie Dodds.



Matt, Bobby and the others.

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It was muddy down on the recreation ground. Cross the ball and it would land and just stick. We called our team the Mudlarks, and we were good.



Visiting teams expected the ball to bounce, and by the time they realised it didn't we were often two or three goals up. We weren't so good away from home.

Every weekend I did a paper round from Mr Patel's shop. I was saving up for a mountain bike.



I wanted to go mountain biking on the moors with Eddie. The trouble was I kept spending the money.

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Sundays were always special the four of us would go dinghy sailing on the reservoir. Stella barking at the other boats.



My father loved it, fresh clean air, no brick dust. He worked at the brick works, so did my mother, part time in the offices.



There was nothing my father couldn't fix, so he was in his element on a boat. My mother loved it too. "This is it," she cried throwing back her head in the wind. "This is how life is supposed to be. Wonderful, just wonderful."

She always wore the blue cap. She was the undisputed skipper. If there was a breeze out there, she'd find it and catch it. She had a real nose for it.



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We had some great days on the water. We went when it was rough and no one else would, skimming over the waves at great speed, it was sheer joy. Other times we were the only boat out as there was no wind. We'd sit and fish instead.

I was better at fishing than either of them. Stella would be curled up, bored as there was no one to bark at.

Then the letter arrived. Stella savaged it as it came through the letter box.



There were puncture holes in it, and it was damp, but we could read it. The brickworks were closing down. They were both being made redundant.

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There was a terrible silence at the breakfast table that morning. After that we never went sailing on Sundays. They both tried to find new jobs, but there was nothing.

The house became miserable. I'd come home and they weren't talking, or they were arguing. They had never been like that.

My father stopped fixing things in the house. He was hardly ever at home he was out looking for a job or at the pub.

When he was home, he would sit flicking through yachting magazines and saying nothing.

I tried to stay out of the house and play football, but then Eddie moved away because his father found a job down south.



Chapter 1, page 8

Football wasn't the same without him, and the Mudlarks disbanded. Everything was falling apart.

Then one Saturday I got home from my paper round and found my mother sitting at the bottom of the stairs crying. She was always so strong. I'd never seen her like this before.

"Silly beggar," she said. "Your dad's a silly beggar, Michael, that's what he is."

"What's he done?" I asked.

"He's gone off, he wouldn't hear reason oh no. He's had this idea, but he wouldn't tell me what it was. He's sold the car, and we are moving south and he's going to find us a place." She said.

I was relieved he hadn't left for good and pleased as South must be nearer to Eddie.

She went on: "If he thinks I'm leaving this house, then he's got another thing coming."



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"Why not? There's not much here." I said.

"Well, there is this house, Gran, and your school," she replied. When I said there are other schools, she became so angry I had never seen her so angry.

"You want to know what was the last straw?" she said. "You know what your dad said? Well, I will tell you. There's only one lousy wage coming into this house - Michael's paper money. How do you think that makes me feel, eh? My son's eleven years old. He's got a job and I haven't."

Her eyes filled with fierce tears. "I'm not moving Michael. I was born here. And I am not going what ever he says, I'm not leaving."

A few weeks later the phone call came. I knew it was my father. My mother said very little, so I didn't understand what was going on, what he was saying.



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She sat me down and told me. "He sounds different Michael. I mean like his old self, like he used to be when I first knew him. He's found us a place, somewhere near Southampton called Fareham. Right on the sea," he says."

My father did seem changed. He was waiting for us when we got off the train. He was bright eyed and full of laughter. He helped us with the luggage.

He ruffled my hair and said, "It's not far, you wait till you see it, monkey face. I've got it all sorted. And it's no good you trying to talk me out of it, either of you. I've made up my Mind."

We caught the bus because the cases were too heavy. When we got off the bus, we were right by the sea, but there didn't seem to be any houses just a yachting marina.

"There is someone I want you to meet. A good friend of mine. She's called Peggy Sue. She's been looking forward to meeting you, I've told her all about you.

My mother frowned at me puzzled. I knew he was being deliberately mysterious.



Fareham Marina

Chapter 1, page 11

We struggled on with our suitcases, gulls crying overhead, yacht masts clapping around us, and Stella yapping at it all.

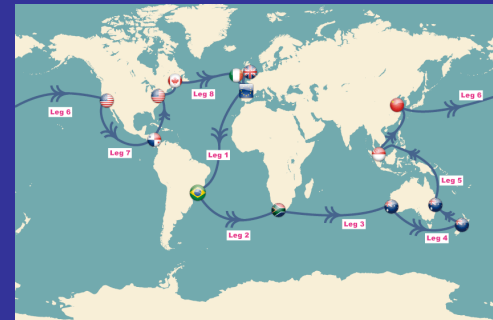
At last dad stopped, he pit down the suitcases by the gangplank that led to a gleaming dark blue yacht. "Here she is," he said. "Let me introduce you. This is the Peggy Sue. Our new home. Well?"

My mother took it very well, she didn't shout, she stayed very quiet. She was quiet all through his explanation as we sat down in the galley over a cup of tea.

He said, "I've been thinking about it for a long time, but if I hadn't lost my job at the factory, I'd never have dared do it, not in a million years. Here's what I thought. What is it we all love doing most? Sailing right? Wouldn't it be wonderful, I thought, if we could just take off and sail around the world?"

"Africa, South America. Australia. The Pacific."

"We have the money from the redundancy, our savings and selling the car, not a fortune but enough."



Chapter 1, page 12

We sat there completely dumbstruck. "I know what your thinking, all we have ever done is reservoir sailing, you think I've gone crazy, it's dangerous, we will run out of money. But I have thought it all through even your Gran. We won't be gone for ever and she will be here when we get back. She's perfectly healthy."



"We've got the money. I've done my sums. We're going to do six months' training. We'll be away a year. We're going to do it properly, safely."

Mum, you'll do your Yacht master's certificate. You'll be skipper, I'll be first mate and handyman. Michael you'll be ship's boy, and Stella can be ship's cat.



He was full of it and breathless with excitement. "We'll train ourselves up. Do a few trips across the channel or over to Ireland. We'll get to know this boat like she is one of us."

"She's a forty-two foot. Bowman, best make and safest there is. It'll be the adventure of a lifetime. Our one chance, we'll never get another one. What do you think then?" He asked.



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"Ex ...cell...ent," I breathed and that is exactly what I thought.

"And I'll be skipper?" my mother asked.

"Aye, Aye Cap'n" and my father laughed and gave her a mock salute.

"What about Michael's school?" she asked.

"I asked the local school here, it's all arranged. We'll take all the books he needs and we will teach him, and he will teach himself. He will learn more in a couple of years at sea than he would ever learn at his monkey school. Promise."

Mother took a sip of her tea then nodded slowly.

"All right, why not? Go ahead and buy her, buy the boat," she said smiling.

"I already have," said my father.

We all knew it was madness but it didn't matter. Thinking back it must have been a kind of inspiration driven by desperation.

Chapter 1, page 14

Everyone warned us against it. Gran even came and stayed on the boat. She tried to frighten me with horror stories of icebergs, hurricanes, pirates, whales, supertankers and freak waves.

She terrified me but I never showed it. We were going, and nothing and no one was going to stop us. We were going off to seek adventure.

The training took a lot longer than my father had planned. We soon learned that handling a forty-two foot yacht was not just dinghy sailing in a bigger boat.

We were taught by a whiskered old mariner from the yacht club called Bill Parker. We called him Barnacle Bill, but not to his face of course. He had been twice round Cape Horn and across the Channel "more times than you've had hot dinners, my lad."

He was a hard task master and none of us liked him much. I kept out of his way as to him animals and children were a nuisance and on board ship a liability.



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To be fair Bill did know his business, he gave us a healthy respect for the sea, but confidence that we could handle just about anything. By the time he had finished with us and my mother was given her certificate, we felt we could sail the Peggy Sue anywhere.

There were times when I was terrified. My father and I shared our terror together, silently. We went through seas with waves twenty feet high. But the more we rode our terror, rode the waves, the more we felt sure of ourselves and of the boat.

My mother never showed any fear. It was her and Peggy Sue that saw us through our worst moments. Sometimes she was seasick, and we never were. So that's something.

We lived close, as there is not much living space on the boat. My father became my friend, my shipmate, we relied on each other. My mother worked day and night over her books and charts, until she had mastered everything. She was the skipper. She was going to take us round the world and back again. We were proud of her she was brilliant.



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The ship's boy and first mate were pretty brilliant too. On the winches, at the helm and cooking bake beans in the galley. We were a great team.

On September 10, 1987 - I know the date as I have the ships log in front of me as I write. We set sail on our grand adventure. The boat was loaded with stores and provisions.

Gran was there to wave us off, tearfully. She even said she wanted to come with us as she had always wanted to visit Australia to see the koalas.

There were lots of our friends too, including Barnacle Bill, Eddie Dodds and his dad. Eddie gave me a football he had signed as a 'lucky mascot'.

Stella Artois barked her farewells at them and at every boat we passed in the Solent. But as we sailed past the Isle of Wight she fell strangely quiet.

Maybe she sensed as we did there was no turning back now. This was not a dream. We were off round the world. It was real, really real.

