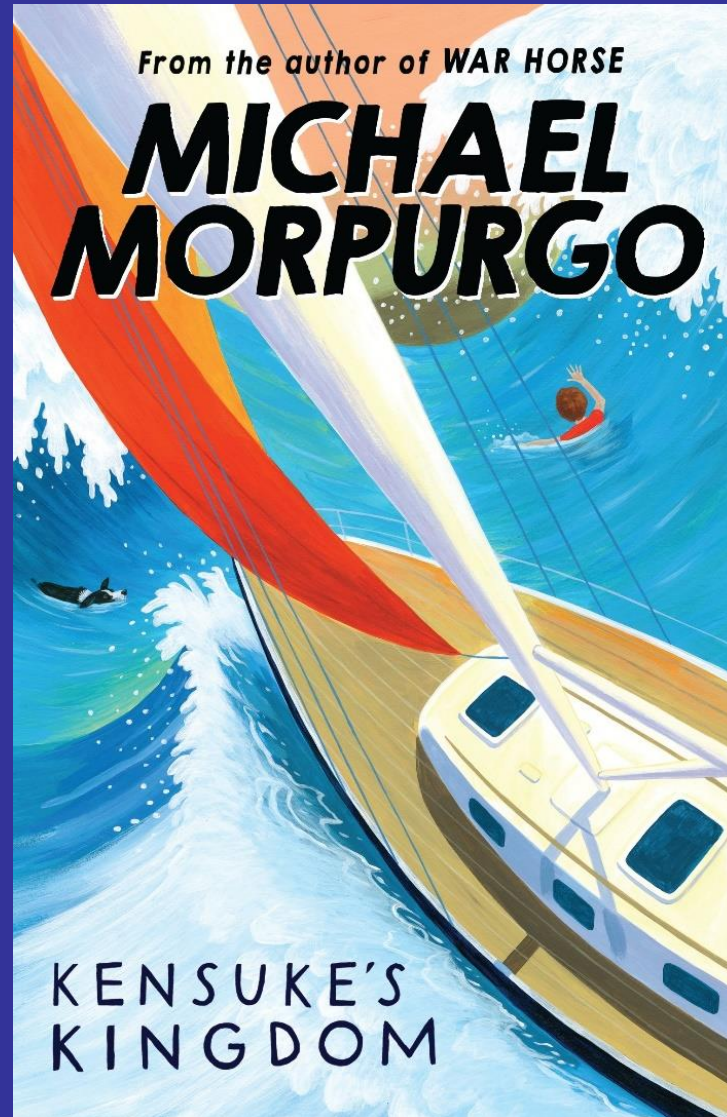


Kensuke's Kingdom
by Michael Morpurgo



Chapter 4
Gibbons and
ghosts.

Chapter 4, page 1

The terrors came fast, one upon another. The lights of Peggy Sue went away into the dark leaving me alone in the ocean. They were too far away to hear my cries of help.



I knew there was no hope, I could be eaten alive by sharks or drown slowly.



I trod water looking for something to swim towards. Then suddenly a glimpse of white in the sea. Stella! It had to be. I called out and swam towards her, I was so relieved to not be all alone. She kept bobbing away from me. After several minutes of swimming I got close enough to reach out for her.

Only then did I realise my mistake it wasn't Stella , it was my football.



Chapter 4, page 2

I grabbed the football and clung on, feeling the wonderful buoyancy. I held on, treading water and calling for Stella.

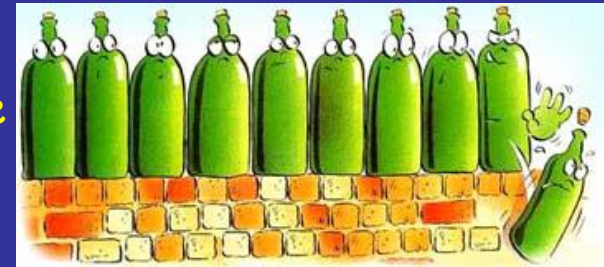
I called and called but there was no answer. Every time I opened my mouth the seawater washed in. I had to give her up, and save myself if I could.

I would cling to my football, tread water gently and wait for Peggy Sue to come back. Sooner or later they would come looking for me. I mustn't kick too much, just enough to keep my head above water. I didn't want to attract sharks.

Morning must come soon, the water wasn't that cold and I had my football. I had a chance.

I kept telling myself that over and over again. I was slowly getting very cold. I tried singing to stop myself shivering and thinking of sharks.

I sang every song I knew but after a while I'd forget the words, so just sang 'Ten Green Bottles' as I knew I could finish it. I sang out loud again and again.



Chapter 4, page 3

Eventually I fell silent and my legs would not kick any more.

I clung on to my football, my head drifting into sleep. I knew I must stay awake, but I couldn't help myself. My hands kept slipping off the ball.

I would go down, down to the bottom of the sea and lie in my grave amongst the seaweed, sailors' bones and shipwrecks.

The strange thing was I didn't really mind.

I floated away into sleep, into my dreams.



I dreamt I saw Peggy Sue, I knew they would come back for me. I was hauled up out of the water by strong arms. Someone was bending over me talking. I could not understand a word they said. I felt Stella's breath on my face, her tongue licking my ear.

She was safe. I was Safe.



Chapter 4, page 4.

I was woken by a howling, like a gale through the masts. I looked about me. There were no masts, no sails. No movement under me. Stella was barking, but some way off. I was not on a boat, but laying stretched out on sand.

The howling became a screaming, a fearful crescendo of screeching that died away in its own echoes.

I sat up. I was on a beach, a broad white sweep of sand, with trees growing thick and lush behind me.



Then I saw Stella prancing about in the shallows. I called and she came bounding out of the sea to greet me, her tail wagging wildly. When all the leaping and licking and hugging were done, I struggled to my feet.



Chapter 4, page 5.

I was weak all over. I looked about me. The wide blue sea was empty. No Peggy Sue. No boat. Nothing.

I called again and again for my mother and my father. I called until the tears came and I could call no more.

I stood trying to work out how I had got here. I must have clung to my football and kept afloat until I was washed up onto the beach. I thought about my football then, but it was no where to be seen.

Stella was unconcerned and kept bringing me sticks to throw, and would go galloping off into the sea after them, without a care in the world.

Then came the howling again from the trees, and the hackles went up on Stella's neck. She charged up the beach barking, until she was sure she had silenced the last of the echoes. It was a musical, plaintive howling this time, not at all menacing.

I had heard howling like it on a visit to London Zoo. Gibbons, 'funky gibbons', my father had called them.



Chapter 4, page 6

"It's only Gibbons," I told Stella, "just funky gibbons. They won't hurt us." But I couldn't be at all sure I was right.

From where I now stood I could see that the forest grew more sparsely up the side of a great hill some way inland, and it occurred to me that if I could reach the bare rocky outcrop at the summit, I would be able to see further out to sea.



Or perhaps there'd be a house or farm further inland, or maybe a road and I could find someone to help. But if I left the beach and they came looking for me, What then? I decided I would have to take that chance.

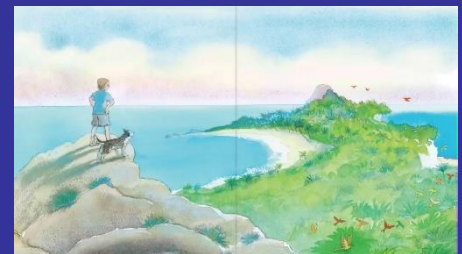
Chapter 4, page 7

I set off at a run, Stella Artois at my heels and soon found myself in the cooling shade of the forest. I found a narrow track going up hill, in the right direction I thought.

I followed it, only slowing to a walk when the hill became too steep. The forest was alive with creatures. Birds cackled and screeched high above me, and always the howling wailed and wafted through the trees, but more distantly now.

It wasn't the sounds of the forest that bothered me, it was the eyes. I felt as if I was being watched by a thousand inquisitive eyes. I think Stella did too. She had been very quiet since entering the forest, and constantly glancing up at me for reassurance and comfort. I did my best to give it, but she could sense that I, too, was frightened.

What had seemed like a short hike now felt more like a great expedition into the interior. We emerged exhausted from the trees, clambered up the rocky scree and stood at last on the peak.



Chapter 4, page 8

The sun was blazing down. I had not really felt the heat of it until then.

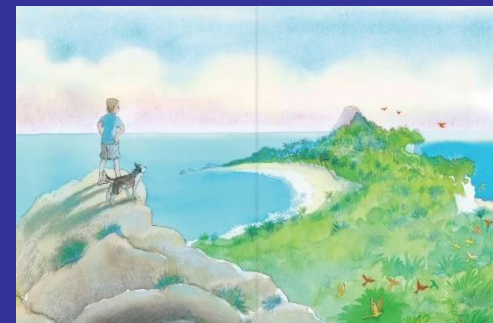
I scanned the horizon. If there was a sail out there I could not see it. Then it came to me that even if I were to see a sail, what could I do? I couldn't light a fire. I had no matches.

I knew about cavemen rubbing sticks together to light a fire but I had never tried it.

I looked all around me now. Sea. Sea. Sea. Nothing but sea on all sides. I was on an Island. I was alone.

The island looked perhaps two or three miles in length. It was shaped like a elongated peanut, but longer one end than the other.

There were brilliant white beaches on both sides, and at the far end another hill, the slopes steeper and more thickly wooded than mine but not so high. Other than the peaks the whole island was covered in forest. So far as I could see there was no sign of human life.



Chapter 4, page 9

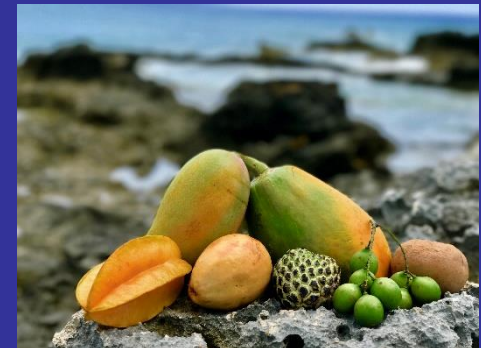
Even then, as I stood there on that first morning, filled with apprehension at the terrifying implications of my dreadful situation, I remember thinking how wonderful it was, a green jewel of an island framed in white, the sea all about it.

I was not down hearted but felt strangely elated and happy. I was alive. Stella Artois was alive. We had survived.

"We'll be alright," I told Stella. "Mum and Dad, they'll come back for us. Mum will get better and they'll come back. She won't just leave us here. She'll find us you'll see. All we have to do is keep a look out for them and stay alive."

"Water we will need. But so do monkeys, right? We've just got to find it, that's all."

"And there must be food too, fruit or nuts, something Whatever it is they eat, we'll eat."



Chapter 4, page 10

It helped to speak my thoughts out loud to Stella ,it helped stop me panicking. More than anything it was Stella's companionship that helped me through those first few hours on the island.



I decided to explore the shoreline first, to be honest I was too frightened to plunge into the forest. I might come across a stream flowing out into the sea, and with luck something to eat.

I set off in good spirits leaping down the scree like a mountain goat. Where monkeys lived so could we. I kept telling myself that.

I soon discovered there was nothing edible on the track down. There were coconuts but the trees were impossible to climb. Some were two hundred feet tall. I had never seen such giant trees.



Chapter 4, page 11

At least the intertwining canopy did provide welcome relief from the heat of the day. All the same, I was becoming desperately parched now and so was Stella.

She padded along side me all the way, her tongue hanging. She kept giving me baleful looks, but there was no comfort I could give her.

We found our beach once again, then set off round the island, keeping wherever possible to the edge of the forest to keep in the shade.

We found no stream. The fruit I saw was too high up and the trees too smooth to climb.

I found plenty of coconuts on the ground, but they were always cracked open and empty inside.

When the beach ended, we had to go into the forest itself.

I found a narrow path to follow. The forest became impenetrable at this point, dark and menacing.



Chapter 4, page 12

There was no howling any more, but something infinitely more sinister; the shiver of leaves, the cracking of twigs, sudden surreptitious rustlings, and they were near me all around me. I knew, I was quite sure now, that eyes were watching us. We were being followed.

I hurried on, swallowing my fear as best I could. I thought of the gibbons I had seen in the zoo, they looked harmless. They'd leave us alone, they weren't man eaters.



As the rustlings got closer, I found it harder and harder to convince myself. I began to run, and kept running till the track brought us out onto rocks, back into the light of day, and there was the sea again.

This end of the island appeared to be littered with massive boulders that lay like tumbled cliffs all along the coast.

We leaped from one to the other, and all the time kept a keen eye out for the trickle of a stream coming down through the rocks, but I found none.



Chapter 4, page 13

I was exhausted by now. I sat down to rest, my mouth dry, my head throbbing. I was racked with desperate thoughts. I would die of thirst. I would be torn limb from limb by the monkeys.

Stella's eyes looked into mine. "There's got to be water," I told her. "There's got to be." So said her eyes, what are you doing sitting here feeling sorry for yourself?

I forced myself to my feet and went on. The water in the rockpools was so cool, so tempting. I tasted it, but it was salty and brackish. I spat it out at once. You went mad if you drank it. I knew that much.

The sun was already low in the sky by the time we reached the beach on the other side of the island. We were only half way round by my reckoning. The island was a lot bigger than it looked from the top of the hill that morning.

I had found no water and nothing to eat. I could go no further, and neither could Stella. She lay stretched out beside me on the sand, panting her heart out.



Chapter 4, page 14

We would have to stay where we were for the night. I dared not venture into the forest with the shadow of night falling.

The howling started up again far away in the forest. The whole orchestra of the jungle was tuning up. But it wasn't the sounds that frightened me, it was those phantom eyes.

I wanted to be as far as possible from those eyes. I found a small cave at one end of the beach with a dry sandy floor.

I lay down and tried to sleep, but Stella would not let me. She whined at me in the pain of her hunger and thirst, so I slept only fitfully.

The jungle droned, cackled and croaked, and all night long the mosquitos were at me too. I held my hands over my ears to shut out the sound.

I curled myself round Stella, tried to forget where I was, to lose myself in my dreams.



Chapter 4, page 15

I remembered then that it was my birthday, and I thought of my last birthday back at home with Eddie Matt, and the barbecue we'd had in the garden, how the sausages had smelled so good. I slept at last.



The next morning I woke cold and hungry and shivering, and bitten all over. It took some moments to remember where I was and what had happened. I was suddenly overwhelmed by one cruel reality after another.

My utter aloneness, my separation from my mother and father, and the dangers all around me.

I cried aloud in my misery, until I saw that Stella was gone. I called for her, I listened but only gibbons howled in reply.



Then I turned and saw her she was up on the rocks above the cave, half hidden from me, but even so I could see her head was down. She was clearly intent on something. I clambered up to find out what it was.

Chapter 4, page 16

I heard her drinking before I got there, lapping noisily as she always did. She didn't even look up as I approached. Then I saw she was drinking from a bowl, a battered tin bowl.

Then I noticed something strange up on a flat shelf of rock above her.

I left Stella to her water feast and climbed up further to investigate. Another bowl of water and beside it, palm leaves laid out on the rock and half covered with an unturned tin.

I sat down and drank the water without pause for breath. Water had never tasted so wonderful as it did then. I lifted aside the tin. Fish! Thin strips of translucent white fish, dozens of them laid out neatly in rows on the palm leaves.

And five, six, seven small red bananas. Red bananas.



Chapter 4, page 17

I ate the fish first, savouring each precious strip. But even as I ate I was looking around me, looking for a tell tale trembling of leaves at the edge of the forest, or a trail of footprints in the sand. I could see none.

Yet some one had brought me this food. Someone must be there, someone watching me. I wasn't sure whether to be fearful or overjoyed.

Stella was whimpering pitifully at me from the rock below, and I knew it wasn't love or comfort she was after. She caught every strip of fish I threw her, snaffled it in one gulp and waited for the next piece. After that it was one for me, one for her.

Her beseeching eyes wouldn't let me do otherwise.

The fish was raw but I didn't mind. I was too hungry to mind, and so was Stella. I kept the bananas for myself, I ate them all. They weren't like bananas back home, they were much sweeter and juicier, much more delicious. I could have eaten dozens more.



Chapter 4, page 18

Once I finished I stood up and scanned the forest, who ever had put the food there must be nearby.

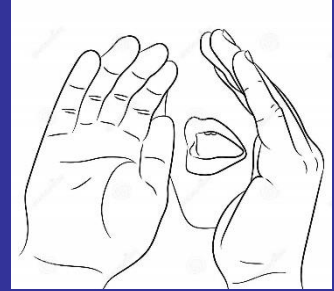
I put my hands to my mouth and called out again and again "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

My words echoed round the island. Suddenly the forest was alive again with noise, singing, hooting, howling, cawing and croaking. Stella barked wildly back at it.

As for me I suddenly felt exhilarated, elated, ecstatically happy. I jumped up and down laughing, until my laughter turned into tears of joy. I was not alone. They must be friendly or they wouldn't have fed us. But why wouldn't they show themselves?

They would have to come back for the bowls, I thought. I would leave a message on the rock beside the bowls.

I found a sharp stone, knelt down and scraped out my message. 'Thank you. My name is Michael. I fell off a boat. Who are you?'



Chapter 4, page 19

After that I decided to stay on the beach all day, and stay close to the cave and rock. I would at least be able to see who it was that had helped me.

Stella ran on ahead and into the sea. I plunged in and whooped and splashed, Stella just cruised steadily on. She always looked so serious when she swam, chin up and paddling purposefully.

The sea was balmy and calm, but I didn't dare go out of my depth. I'd had enough of that for a life time. I came out clean and refreshed a new person. The sea was a great healer, my bites were still there, but they didn't burn any more.

I decide to explore further along the beach, right to the end if I could keep the cave in view.

There were shells here, millions of them, golden and pink in long lines along the beach.



Chapter 4, page 20

I came across what looked like a flat rock. Stella was scrabbling excitedly at it. It turned out to be a long sheet of rusted metal - all that was left of the side of a ship's hull, now sunk deep in the sand.

Had some terrible storm driven her onto the island?
How Long ago? Were there any survivors? Could any of them still be here?

I noticed a fragment of clear glass lying in the sand nearby. It was too hot to handle. It came to me in a flash. Eddie had showed me how to do it. A piece of paper, a bit of glass and the sun. We made fire.

I didn't have any paper but leaves would do. I ran up the beach and gathered twigs, bits of cane, all sorts of leaves, all tinder dry.

I made a small pile on the sand. I held my piece of glass close to the leaves and angled it at the sun.

If only I could light a fire. I could sleep by it at night - it would keep the flies and animals away. And sooner or later, a ship would come by and someone would spot the smoke.



Chapter 4, page 21

I sat and sat, Stella wanted to play but I pushed her away. In the end she went off and stretched out under the shade of the palm trees.



The sun was roasting hot, but nothing happened. My arm began to ache, so I made a frame to hold the glass. Still nothing.

All of a sudden Stella sprang up, a deep growl in her throat. She turned and ran towards me, barking in fury at the forest. Then I saw what it was that had disturbed her.

A shadow under the trees moved and came lumbering out towards us. A monkey a giant monkey. It moved slowly on all fours, and was ginger brown.



An orang-utan, I was sure of it. He sat down a few feet from me, and considered me. I dared not move. When he had seen enough he scratched his neck, turned and on all fours made his way back into the forest.

I had seen a Clint Eastwood film with an orang-utan. That one had been friendly. I just hoped this one would be the same.

Chapter 4, page 22

Then I saw smoke. I smelled smoke. There was a glow in my pile of leaves. I crouched down and blew gently. The glow became flames. I put on more leaves. I had a fire! I had a fire!

I ran into the forest and collected all the wood and leaves I could find. Back and forth I went till my fire was crackling like an inferno.

Sparks were flying into the air, smoke rising into the trees behind me. I could not rest now, the fire would need more wood, bigger branches even. I had to have enough to keep it going. My pile of wood grew huge.

Stella waited for me by the fire, she would not come into the forest. I knew she was frightened of the orang-utan.

I was coming out of the trees when I realised there was less smoke and no flames at all. Then I saw him the orang-utan. He was crouching down and scooping sand onto my fire. He stood up and came towards me out of the smoke. He was not an orang-utan at all.

He was a man.

