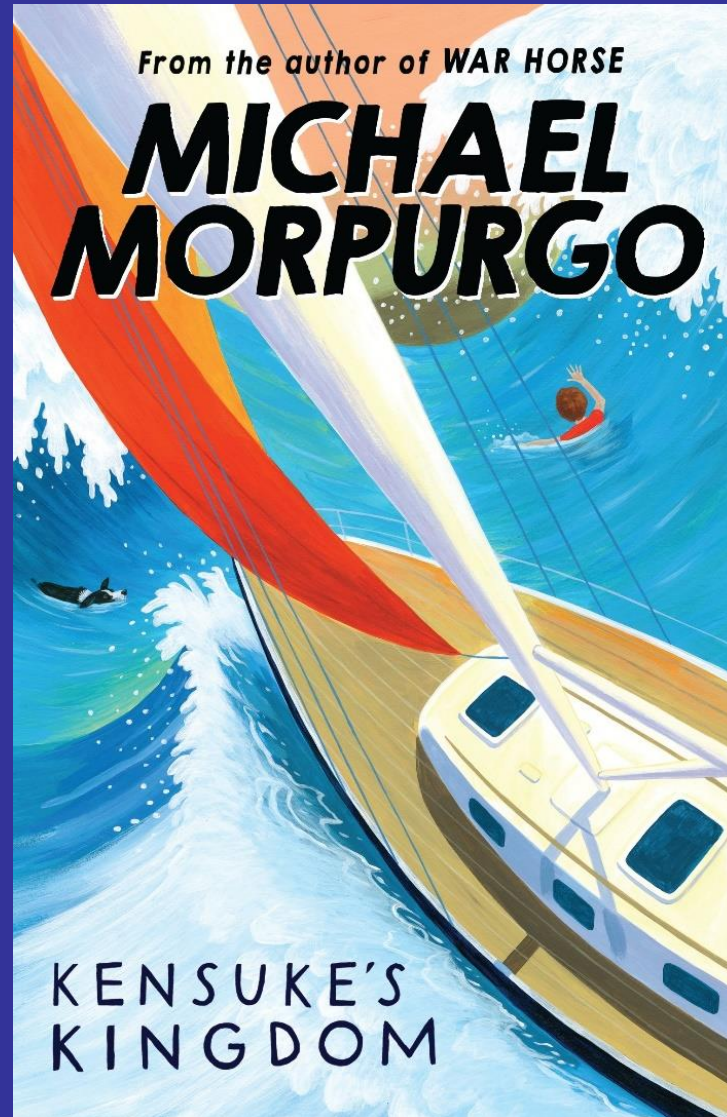


Kensuke's Kingdom
by Michael Morpurgo



Chapter 5
I, Kensuke

Chapter 5, page 1

He was no taller than me, and as old a man as I had ever seen. He wore nothing but a pair of tattered breeches bunched at the waist, and there was a large knife in his belt.



He was thin, his copper brown skin lay in folds about him, almost as if he had shrunk inside. What little hair he had on his head and chin was long and wispy and white.

He was very agitated, his chin trembling, his eyes accusing and angry. "Dameda! Dameda! He screeched at me.

His whole body shaking with fury. I backed away as he scuttled towards me waving his stick. Ancient and skeletal he may have been, but he was moving fast, almost running. "Dameda! Dameda!" I had no idea what he was saying, but it sounded Chinese or Japanese.

I was about to turn and run when Stella, went bounding off towards him. Her hackles were not up and she wasn't growling. To my astonishment she greeted him like a long lost friend.

Chapter 5, page 2

He was no more than a few feet away from me when he stopped. We stood looking at each other in silence. He was leaning on his stick, trying to catch his breath. "Americajin? American? Eikokujin? British?"

"Yes," I said relieved to have understood at last. "English, I'm English."

It seemed a struggle for him to get the words out. "No good. Fire, no good. You understand? No fire." He seemed less angry now.

"But my mother, my father, they might see it, see the smoke." He didn't understand, so I pointed out to sea, "Out there. They're out there. They'll see the fire. They'll come and fetch me." I said.

Instantly he became aggressive again. "Dameda!" he shrieked, waving his stick at me. "No fire!"

I thought he was going to attack me, but he didn't. Instead he started to rake through the sand at my feet with his stick.



Chapter 5, page 3

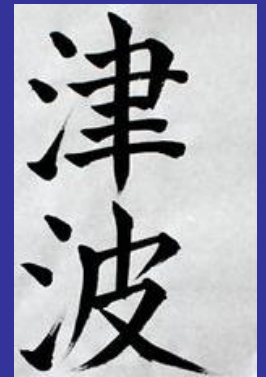
He was drawing the outline of something, jabbering incomprehensibly all the time. It looked like some kind of fruit or nut. Now I understood, it was a map of the island.



When it was done he fell on his knees beside it, and piled up mounds of sand, one at each end - the two hills. Then very deliberately, he drew a straight line, top to bottom, cutting the smaller end of the island off from the larger one.

"You, boy. You here," he said, pointing back towards my cave end of the beach. "You." And he stabbed his finger in the mound of sand that was my hill.

Then across the whole of the sand map he wrote something. The lettering was symbols - all kinds of ticks and pyramids, crosses, lines, slashes and squiggles. He wrote it all backwards, in columns, from right to left.



Chapter 5, page 4.

He sat back on his haunches and tapped his chest. "Kensuke. I, Kensuke. My island." He brought his hand down like a chopper, cutting the island in half. "I Kensuke. Here. You, boy. Here." I was in no doubt what he meant.

Suddenly he was on his feet again waving me away with his stick. "Go, boy. No fire. Dameda. No fire. You understand?"

I did not argue, but walked away at once. When I looked back, he was kneeling down beside what was left of my fire, and scooping still more sand on to it.

Stella had stayed with him. I whistled for her. She came, but not at once. I could see she was reluctant to leave him. She was behaving very oddly.



Stella Artois had never really liked strangers. I felt disappointed, a bit betrayed even.

When I next looked back the fire was completely smothered and not smoking at all. The old man was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 5, page 5.

For the rest of the day I stayed in my cave. I felt safe there. I suppose I had begun to think of it as home. I had no other. I felt like an orphan must feel, abandoned and alone in the world. I was frightened, I was angry, I was completely bewildered.



I sat trying to gather my thoughts. So far as I could tell, though I wasn't sure - there were just the two of us on the island. In which case he must have left me the water, fish and bananas.

Surely that was an act of kindness, of friendship, of welcome? Yet now he had banished me to one end of the island and made it clear he didn't want to meet ever again. All because I had lit a fire? It didn't make sense, unless he was completely mad.



I was marooned on an island, with man who might be mad, a bunch of howling monkeys, at least one orang-utan, millions of mosquitoes to eat me alive every night and God knows what else was hidden in the forest.

Chapter 5, page 6

I knew only one thing. I had to get away. But how? If I couldn't attract the attention of a passing ship I could be here for the rest of my life. The thought didn't bear dwelling on.

I wondered how long the old man had been on the island. Who was he? And who was he to tell me what to do and not do. And why had he put out my fire?

I wished I was back home, or on the Peggy Sue with my mother and father.



I was almost asleep when the mosquitoes and howling from the forest dragged me back awake.

It came to me suddenly that I had seen the old man's face somewhere before. I had no idea how that could be.

As I lay there I felt the piece of glass in my pocket pressing into my hip. My spirits were lifted, I still had my fireglass. I would build my fire again, somewhere he wouldn't discover. I would wait for a ship to come, until then I would survive. The old man had survived in this place. If he could, I could. I could do it alone I didn't need him.

Chapter 5, page 7

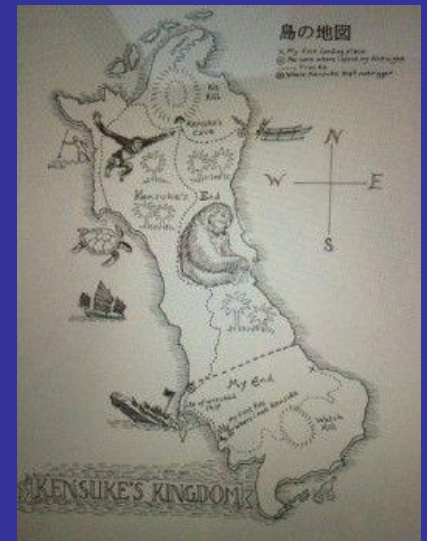
I felt hungry and thirsty. Tomorrow I would go into the forest and find food for myself. I would find water. I would try and catch fish too. I was good at fishing.

I kept seeing the reservoir and my mother in her skippers cap. I felt tears coming and tried not to think of her. I thought of the old man. I was still trying to remember what he said his name was when I fell asleep.

I awoke and knew he had been. It was as if I had dreamed it. Stella seemed to have had the same dream, and was bounding up the rocks above the cave. She found her bowl of water full again. And there too was the upturned tin, and my water bowl, just as it had been the day before.

As I sat there cross-legged, chewing my fish and throwing pieces down for Stella, I knew he meant, we were not friends. We would not be friends.

He would keep us alive only if we stuck by his rules. I had to keep to my end of the island, and must never light fires. It was quite clear.



Chapter 5, page 8

With any real hope of immediate rescue diminishing day by day, I became more and more resigned. I knew I had no choice but to accept his terms.

He had now marked out a frontier, a boundary line in the sand from the forest down to the sea on both sides of the island.

Stella strayed over it of course but I did not. In spite of his animosity and that huge knife he had in his belt I didn't think he would hurt me. But I was frightened by him.

I didn't want to confront him, after all he was providing us with food and water everyday.

I was beginning to find some edible fruit myself - in particular a prickly shelled fruit, I found out later was called rambutan. It was delicious, but I could never find enough and Stella wouldn't eat it.

I found the occasional coconut, but often the milk and flesh were foul. I tried climbing for them but they were always too high up, and I soon gave up.



Chapter 5, page 9

I tried fishing in the shallows, fashioning a crude spear, a long stick I had sharpened on a rock, but I was always too slow in my strike.



There were plenty of fish but they were too small and too fast. So, like it or not we still relied on the daily ration of fish, fruit and water the old man was bringing us.

I searched my end of the island for water but found none. I dared not trespass into his part to look. For the most part I kept to the forest tracks.

It wasn't only the old man's law, nor the howling of the monkeys - which I came to understand as a warning - that prevented me from venturing into his side of the island, it was the orang-utan too.



He seemed placid enough, but I had no idea how he or his friends might react if they found me in their territory.

I kept wondering too what other creatures might lurk unseen, waiting to ambush me in the dark, damp forest. If the constant jungle talk was anything to go by, the place was crawling with all sorts of dreadful creatures.



Chapter 5, page 10

I kept largely to my beach, my cave and the forest track up the hill top. From high on my hill I did catch distant glimpses of the old man.

Often in the mornings I would see him spear fishing in the shallows, sometimes alone but often with a group of orang-utans, who sat on the beach and watched him. Once I counted fourteen or fifteen. Occasionally he would carry one of the young ones on his back. He moved amongst them, it seemed almost as if he was one of them.

Time and again I tried to stay awake till the old man came with the food but I never managed it. I never even heard him, not once. Every morning there would be water, fish and fruit. The fruit was not always the same, and some of it I didn't like, but I ate it anyway.

Besides bananas and coconut and berries, he would leave bread fruit or jackfruit. I would save some of the fruit for an evening meal, but not the red bananas they were just too delicious not to eat all at once.



Chapter 5, page 11

My recurring nightmare was the mosquitoes at night. From dusk onwards they searched me out, buzzed in on me and ate me alive. There was no hiding place. My nights were one long torture, and in the morning I would scratch myself raw.

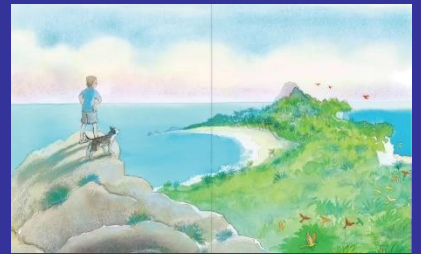


Some bites, particularly on my legs, had swelled up and become suppurating red sores. I found relief from them only by dunking myself often into the cool of the sea.



I tried sleeping in another cave, deeper and darker, but it smelled dreadful. Once I discovered it was full of bats, I left at once.

Wherever I slept the mosquitoes found me out. I got so that I dreaded the coming of every night. I longed for the mornings, for the cool of the sea and the cool of the wind on my hilltop.



Here I would spend the greater part of my day sitting on the very summit looking out to sea and hoping and praying for the sight of a ship.

Chapter 5, page 12

I would close my eyes tight and pray for as long as I could. Every time I did it, I really believed there was a chance my prayers would be answered, and when I opened my eyes I would see Peggy Sue sailing back to rescue me. But always the great wide ocean was empty. I was always disappointed of course, but not yet completely despondent in those early weeks.



I had severe problems, too, with sunburn. I had learnt rather late that I should keep my clothes on all the time. I made myself a hat to keep the sun off my face and neck.



It was very broad and Chinese looking, made out of palm leaves. I was quite pleased with my handiwork.

Sunburn, I discovered, was a discomfort I could help prevent and sea water could sooth it. At noon I would go down the hill to shelter in my cave from the burning afternoon sun.



Then afterwards I would go for a swim. This was the moment Stella longed for. I spent long hour throwing a stick for her. She loved it and so did I, it was the highlight of our day.

Chapter 5, page 13

We only stopped when darkness came down. It always came surprisingly quickly and drove us back to our cave.

Back to my nightly battle with my bloodsucking tormentors.



One day, after another fruitless morning of watching from the hill, Stella and I were coming out of the forest when I spotted something lying on the sand just outside our cave.

At a distance it looked like a piece of driftwood. Stella was sniffing it over excitedly. I could see it now for what it was. It was not driftwood, but a roll of rush matting. I unrolled it. Inside, and neatly folded was a sheet, a white sheet.



He knew! The old man knew my miseries, my discomforts, my every need. He had been watching me all the time.

He must have seen me scratching myself, seen the red weals on my arms and legs. Seen me sitting in the sea every morning to sooth away my sores. Surely this must mean he had forgiven me for lighting the fire?



Chapter 5, page 14

I carried the matting inside the cave, unrolled it, wound myself in the sheet, and just lay there giggling with joy. I could pull the sheet right up over my face.

Tonight there would be no way in for those cursed mosquitoes. Tonight they would go hungry.

I went racing along the beach to the boundary line where I stopped, cupped my hands to my mouth and shouted, "Thank you! Thank you for my bed! Thank you! Thank you!" I didn't expect an answer, and none came. I hoped he would come, but he didn't.

I wrote my thanks in the sand right by the boundary line and signed it.

I wanted so much to see him again, to talk to him, to hear a human voice. Stella Artois had been a wonderful companion to me, good for confiding in, good for a cuddle, good for a game, but I so missed human company - my mother, my father, lost to me now, perhaps forever.

I longed to see the old man, to speak to him, even if he was a bit mad, even if I couldn't understand much of what he was saying.



Chapter 5, page 15

That night I was determined to stay awake for him, but comfortable on my new matting bed, protected in my sheet, I went to sleep quickly and never woke once.

The next morning after breakfast of fish, jackfruit and coconut, Stella and I made our way back up to the top of my hill, or 'Watch Hill' as I now called it. The other hill I had named 'His Hill'.

I was repairing my hat, replacing some of the palm leaves. It never seemed to hold together for very long.

I looked up and saw a ship on the horizon. There was no mistake. It was the long bulky profile of a super-tanker.

