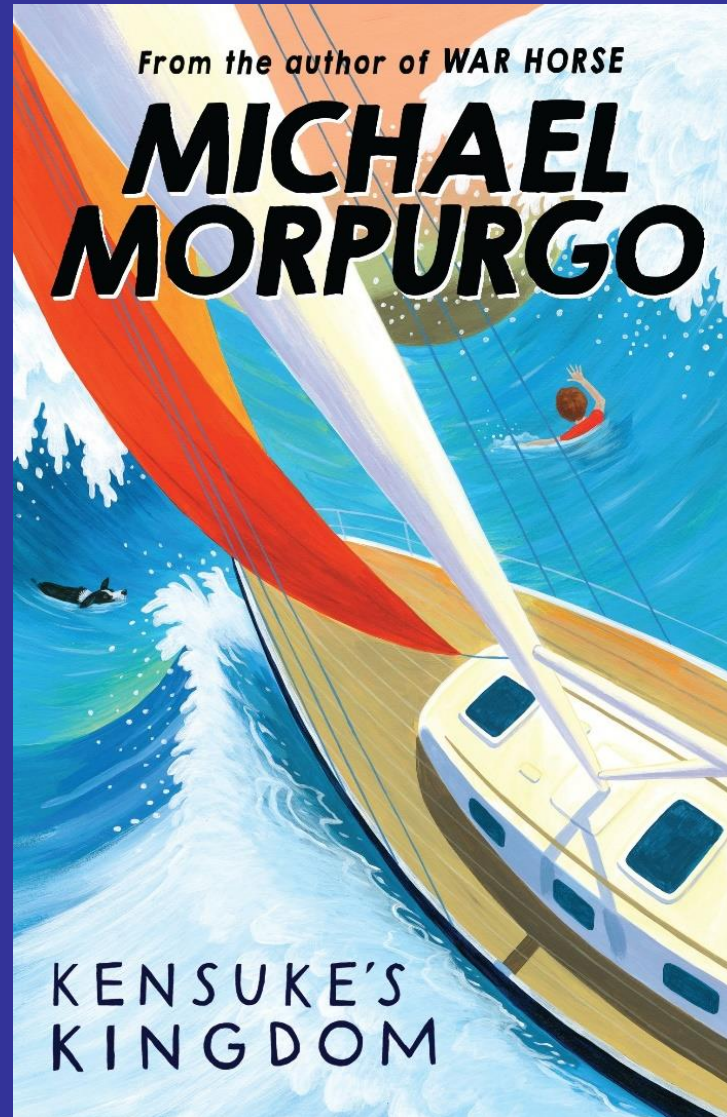


Kensuke's Kingdom
by Michael Morpurgo



Chapter 6

Abunai!

Chapter 6, page 1

In an instant I was on my feet, shouting at the top of my voice and waving frantically. I leaped up and down screaming for them to stop, to hear me, to see me. "I'm here! Here! I'm here!"

Only when my throat was raw and I could shout no longer did I stop. The tanker crept tantalisingly slowly along the horizon.



It didn't turn and I knew it would not turn. I knew too that no one would be looking, and even if they were, this entire island would be little more than a distant hazy hump on the horizon. How could they possibly see me?

I could only look on, helpless and distraught, as the tanker moved further and further away until it began to disappear over the horizon. This took all morning long, a morning of dreadful anguish.

Chapter 6, page 2

As I stood watching on the summit of Watch Hill, my despair was replaced by a burning anger. If I had been allowed to have my fire, there would have been a chance they would have spotted the smoke. True, the old man had brought me a sleeping mat and sheet. He was looking after me and keeping me alive, but he was also keeping me a prisoner.



As the tanker disappeared from my view, I promised myself that I would never again let such a chance go by.



I felt in my pocket I still had my precious fire glass.

I determined I would build another fire, not on the beach where he would find it, but up here on Watch Hill, behind the rocks and well out of his sight.

Even if he did have binoculars and I now had to presume he did.

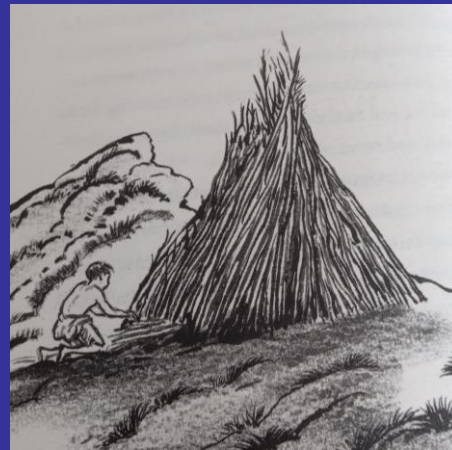


I would gather a great beacon of wood, but I would not light it. I would set it all up and wait till the moment I saw a ship. If this one had come then another would come, had to come, I reasoned.

Chapter 6, page 3

When another ship did come I would have my fire glass ready, and a store of paper-thin, tinder dry leaves. I would make such a blazing inferno of a fire, a fire that would send up a towering smoke signal that the next ship that happened along would have to see.

So now I no longer spent my days just sitting on Watch Hill and waiting. Every hour I was up there I spent building my beacon.



I would drag great branches up from the forest below and pile them high, but on the seaward side of the hilltop - the perfect place to be seen by ships, when it was lit. But in the meantime, not by the prying eyes of the old man who I thought of now as my captor. And he would be watching me I was quite sure of that now, so I kept well out of his sight as I gathered my wood.

Chapter 6, page 4.

It took several days of hard labour to build my secret beacon. I had almost finished when someone did indeed discover what I was up to, but it wasn't the old man.

I was heaving a massive branch on to the pile when I felt a sudden shadow come over me.

An orang-utan was looking down on me from the rock above. I was not sure if it was the same one as before. He was on all fours, his great shoulders hunched, his head lowered, eyeing me. I dared not move. It was a stand off, just as it had been on the beach.

He sat back and watched me for a while. Then he looked away, scratched his face and sloped off, stopping once to glance back at me over his shoulder before moving into the shadow of the trees and away.

As I watched him go I wondered if he had been sent to spy on me. He might go back and tell the old man. It was a ridiculous thought, I know, but I do remember thinking it.



Chapter 6, page 5.

A storm broke over the island that night, such a fearsome storm, such a thunderous crashing of lightening overhead, such a din of rain and wind that sleep was impossible.

Great waves roared from the ocean, pounding the beach and shaking the ground beneath me.

I spread out my sleeping mat at the very back of the cave. Stella lay down beside me and huddled close. How I welcomed that.

It was fully four days before the storm blew itself out, but even during the worst of it, I would find my fish and fruit breakfast waiting for me every morning under my tin, which he now wedged in under the shelf of rock.

Stella and I kept to the shelter of our cave. All we could do was watch the rain lashing down outside.

I was awestruck at the power of the vast waves rolling in from the sea, curling, tumbling and exploding as they broke on to the beach, as if they were trying to batter the island to pieces and then suck us all out to sea.



Chapter 6, page 6

I often thought of my mother and father and the Peggy Sue, and wondered where they were. I just hoped the typhoon had passed them by.



Then one morning as suddenly as the storm had begun, it stopped. The sun blazed down from a clear blue sky, and the forest symphony started up where it had left off.

The whole island steamed and dripped. I went at once up Watch Hill to see if I could see a ship, perhaps blown off course, or sheltering in the lee of the island. There was nothing.

That was a disappointment, but at least I found my beacon had not collapsed. It was sodden, but intact, but there would be no fire until it had dried out.



The air was hot and heavy all that day. It was difficult to move or breath. Stella could only lie and pant. The only place to cool off was the sea, so I spent most of the day lolling lazily in the water, throwing the occasional stick for Stella to keep her happy.

Chapter 6, page 7

I was lying in the sea, just floating and day-dreaming, when I heard the old man's voice. He was hurrying down the beach, yelling at us and waving his stick wildly in the air.

"Yamero! Abunai! Dangerous. Understand? No swim." He did not seem angry with me, but he was clearly upset about something.

I looked around me. The sea was still heaving in, but gently now falling limply on to the beach. I could see no particular danger.

"Why not?" I called back. "What's the matter?" He dropped his stick on the beach and was wading out through the surf towards me.

"No swim. Dameda! Abunai! No swim." Then he had me by the arm leading me out of the sea. His grip was vice-like. There was no point in struggling.

Only when we were back on the beach did he release me. He stood breathless for a few moments.



Chapter 6, page 8

"Dangerous. Very bad. Abunai!" He was pointing out to sea. "No swim. Very bad. No swim. You understand?" He looked me hard in the eye, leaving me in no doubt that this was not meant as advice, this was a command that I should obey.

Then he turned and walked off into the forest, retrieving his stick as he went. Stella ran after him, but I called her back.



I felt at that moment like defying him, I would charge back into the sea and frolic as noisily as I could. That would show him. I was bristling at the outrageous unfairness of it all.

First he wouldn't let me light my fire. Then I was banished to one end of the island and now I wasn't even allowed to swim.

I wanted to call him every name I could think of. But I didn't. I didn't go swimming again either. I gave in, because I had to. I needed his food and water.

Chapter 6, page 9

Until my secret beacon dried out, until the next ship came by, I would have to do as he said, I had no choice. I did make a man size sculpture of him in the sand outside my cave, and jumped up and down on him in my fury. It made me feel a little better, but not much.

Until now, except for occasional gut-wrenching pangs of homesickness and loneliness, I had managed to keep my spirits up. But not any more. My beacon stayed damp.

Every day I went up Watch Hill hoping to spot a ship, and everyday the sea stretched away empty.

I felt more and more isolated, more and more wretched. In the end I decided not to go up onto Watch Hill any more, it wasn't worth it.

Instead I stayed in my cave and curled up on my sleeping mat for long hours during the day. I lay there in misery, thinking of the hopelessness of it all.

I would never get off this island, I would die here, and my mother and father would never know what had happened to me. Only the old man, the mad man, would know.



Chapter 6, page 10

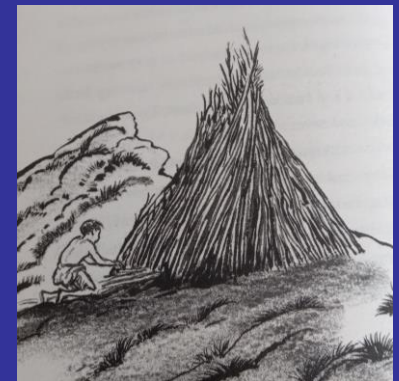
The weather stayed heavy and humid. How I longed to plunge into the ocean, but I dared not. With every day that passed, in spite of the fish, fruit and water he brought me, I came to hate the old man more and more.

Dejected and depressed I may have been, but I was angry too, and gradually this anger fuelled me in a new determination to escape.

Once again, I went on a daily trek up Watch Hill. I began to collect new dry leaves and twigs from the forest edge and hide them away in a deep cleft in the rock, so I would always be sure they would be dry, when the time came.

My beacon had dried out at last. I built it higher and higher. When I had done all I could I sat and waited for the time to come, as I knew it must.

Day after day, week after week, I sat up on Watch Hill, my fire glass polished in my pocket, my beacon ready and waiting.



Chapter 6, page 11

As it turned out, when the time did come, I wasn't up on Watch Hill at all. One morning, with sleep still in my head, I emerged from my cave, and there it was. A boat!

A boat with strange red-brown sails - I supposed it to be some kind of Chinese junk, and not far out to sea either.

Excitement got the better of me. I ran helter-skelter down the beach, shouting and screaming for all I was worth. But I could see at once it was hopeless.

The junk was not far out to sea, but it was still too far for me to either be seen or heard. I tried to calm myself, tried to think. The fire! Light the fire!

I ran all the way up Watch Hill, Stella hard on my heels and barking. I readied my dry leaves, took my fireglass and crouched down beside the beacon to light my fire. I was trembling so much with excitement and exhaustion by now that I could not hold my hand still enough.

I set up a frame of twigs and laid the glass over it, just as I had before. Then I sat over it, willing the leaves to smoulder.



Chapter 6, page 12

Every time I looked out to sea the junk was still there, moving slowly away, but still there.



It seemed an age, but there was a wisp of smoke, and shortly afterwards a glorious, wonderous glow of flame spreading along the edge of one leaf. I bent over to blow it to life.

That was when I saw his feet. I looked up. The old man was standing over me, his eyes full of rage and hurt. He said nothing but started stamping out my fire.



He snatched up my fireglass and hurled it at the rock below where it shattered to pieces.

I could only look on and weep, as he kicked away my precious pile of dry leaves, as he dismantled my beacon and hurled the sticks and branches down the hill.

The group of orang-utans gathered to watch.



Soon nothing remained of my beacon. All about me the rocky scree was covered with the ruins of it.

Chapter 6, page 13

I expected him to shout at me, but he didn't. He spoke very quietly, very deliberately. "Dameda," he said.

"But why?" I cried. "I want to go home. There's a boat, can't you see? I just want to go home, that's all. Why won't you let me? Why?"

He stood and stared at me. For a moment I thought I detected just a flicker of understanding. Then he bowed very stiffly from the waist, and said "Gomenasai. Gomenasai. Sorry. Very sorry." With that he left me there and went off back into the forest followed by the orang-utans.

I sat there watching the junk until it was nothing but a spot on the horizon. By this time I had already decided how I could best defy him. I was so enraged that the consequences didn't matter to me now.

With Stella beside me I headed along the beach, and stopped at the boundary line in the sand. Then very deliberately, I stepped over it. As I did so, I let him know precisely what I was doing.



Chapter 6, page 14

"Are you watching, old man?" I shouted. "Look! I've crossed over. I've crossed over your silly line. And now I am going to swim. I don't care what you say. I don't care if you don't feed me. You hear me old man?"

Then I turned and charged down the beach into the sea. I swam furiously, until I was completely exhausted, and a long way from the shore.

I trod water and thrashed about the sea in my fury. Making the sea boil and froth all around me.

"It's my sea as much as yours," I cried. "And I will swim in it when I like."

I saw him then he appeared at the edge of the forest. He was shouting something at me, and waving his stick.

That was the moment I felt it, a searing, stinging pain in the back of my neck, then my back and my arms too.



Chapter 6, page 15

A large, translucent white jelly fish was floating right beside me, its tentacles groping at me. I tried to swim away but it came after me, hunting me.

I was stung again, in my foot this time. The agony was immediate and excruciating. It permeated my whole body like one continuous electric shock.

I felt my muscles going rigid. I kicked for the shore, but could not do it. My arms and legs seemed paralysed. I was sinking and there was nothing I could do about it.

I saw the jellyfish poised for the kill above me now, I screamed and my mouth filled with water.

I was choking. I was going to die, I was going to drown but I didn't care.

I just wanted the pain to stop. Death I knew would stop it.

