

By the way he looked at me I was quite sure he knew at once what it was.



## Chapter 9

### The night of the turtles

There fell between us a long and aching silence. Kensuke never once reproached me for what I had done. He was not angry or sullen at me. But I knew I had hurt him to the soul. It wasn't that we didn't speak –

gled to bring the outrigger back to the island that afternoon, I was filled with a sudden powerful longing to see them again, to be with them. I could steal the boat I thought. I could row away, I could light a fire again. But I knew even as I thought it that I could not do it. How could I ever leave Kensuke now, after all he had done for me? How could I betray his trust? I tried to put the whole idea out of my mind, and I really believe I would have too. But the very next morning, I found the plastic Coke bottle washed up on the beach, and after that the idea of escape came back and haunted me day and night, and would not leave me be.

For some days, I kept the Coke bottle buried under the sand, whilst I wrestled with my conscience or, rather, justified what I wanted to do. It wouldn't really be a betrayal, not as such, I told myself. Even if the bottle was found no one would know where to come to, they'd just know I was alive. I made up my mind I would do it, and do it as soon as I could.

Kensuke had gone off octopus fishing. I had stayed behind to finish a shell painting – or so I had told him. I found an old sheet at the bottom of one of his chests and tore away a small corner of it. Then I knelt down at the table, stretched it out and painted my message on it in octopus ink:

*To: the Peggy Sue. Fareham. England.  
Dear Mum and Dad,  
I am alive. I am well. I live on an island.  
I do not know where. Come and find me.*

*Love,  
Michael*

I waited until it was dry, then I rolled it up, dug my Coke bottle out of the sand, slipped in my message and screwed the bottle up tight. I made quite sure Kensuke was still intent on his fishing, and set off.

I ran the entire length of the island keeping always to the forest, so that there was no chance Kensuke could see where I was going or what I was up to. The gibbons howled their accusations at me all the way, the entire forest cackling and screeching its condemnation. I just hoped Stella would not bark back at them, would not betray where I was. Fortunately she didn't.

At last I reached the rocks under Watch Hill. I leaped from rock to rock until I was standing right at the very end of the island, the waves washing over my feet. I looked round me. Stella was the only witness. I hurled the bottle as far out to sea as I possibly could. Then I stood and watched it as it bobbed away and out to sea. It was on its way.

I didn't touch my fish soup that night. Kensuke thought I was ill. I could hardly talk to him. I couldn't look him in the eye. I lay all night in deep torment, racked by my guilt, yet at the same time still hoping against hope that my bottle would be picked up.

Kensuke and I were at our painting the next afternoon when Stella came padding into the cave. She had the Coke bottle in her mouth. She dropped it and looked up at me, panting and pleased with herself.

Kensuke laughed and reached down to pick it up. I think he was about to hand it to me when he noticed there was something inside it.



my orang-utans. They come to me when I sing. They are very frightened. They come all in my cave. We hide. Killer men not find us. But in forest they shoot – you told me name – gibbon monkeys. They shoot mothers. They take babies. Why must they do this? I very angry. I think, all people killer people. I hate all people, I think. I not want see people again.

'Then one day I need big fish to smoke, I go fishing in this boat. Wind blow wrong way. I go far out. Sea pull me away very strong. I try to come back my island. It is no good. I am old. Arms are not strong. When night come I am still far away. I very frightened. I sing. It make me brave. I hear shout. I see light. I think I dream. Then I hear another song in sea, in dark. I come quick as I can. I find you and Stella and ball. You very nearly dead person, Micasan. Stella very nearly dead dog.' So it had been Kensuke who had pulled me from the sea, Kensuke who had saved me. It had simply never occurred to me.

'In morning,' he went on, 'sea bring us again near my island. I very glad you not dead. But I very angry person too. I want to be alone. I not want to see people. For me all people killer people. I not want you on my island. I carry you. I leave you on beach. I leave you food. I leave you water so you not die. But you make fire. I want people stay away. I not want people find me here on my island. Maybe they come. Maybe they shoot orang-utan, shoot gibbon monkey. Maybe they find me, take me away too. I very angry person, I put out fire. I not want speak to you. I not want see you. I draw line in sand.

'Big storm come, biggest I ever see. After storm, sea full of white jellyfish. I know these jellyfish. Very bad. They touch you, you very

dead. I know this. I say, do not swim, very dangerous. Very soon I see you make big fire on top of hill. I think you very wicked person. I very angry now, and you very angry too. You swim in sea. Jellyfish sting. I think for sure you dead person. But you very strong. You live. I bring you into cave. I have vinegar. I make from berries. Vinegar kill poison. You live, Mica, but for long time you very sick boy. You strong again, and we friends now. We very good friends.'

So that was it, the whole story. He stopped rowing for a while, and smiled down at me. 'You are like son to me now. We happy people. We paint. We fish. We happy. We stay together. You my family now, Micasan. Yes?'

'Yes,' I said. I meant it and felt it too.

He let me take the oar, and showed me how to row his way, standing up, feet planted well apart. It wasn't as easy as he made it look. Clearly he trusted me to get us back, for he sat back in the bow of the outrigger to rest and fell asleep almost at once, his mouth open, his face sunken. He always looked even older when he slept. As I watched him I tried to picture his face as it must have been when he first came to the island all those years ago, over forty years. I owed him so very much. He had saved my life twice, fed me and befriended me. He was right. We were happy, and I was his family.

But I had another family too. I thought of the last time I had been out in a boat, of my mother and my father and how they must be grieving for me every day, every night. By now they must surely believe I was drowned, that there was no chance I could be alive. But I *wasn't* drowned. I *was* alive. Somehow I had to let them know it. As I strug-

Nagasaki, atomic bomb. Many dead. I very sad person. I think Kimi dead, Michiya dead. My mother live there too, all my family. I think they all dead.

'Soon radio say Japan surrender. I so sad I want to die.' He fished in silence for a while before he began again. 'Soon engine stop, but ship not go down. Big wind come, big storm. I think I die for sure now. But sea take ship and bring me here on this island. Ship come on to beach, and still I am not dead.'

'Very soon I find food. I find water also. I live like beggar man for long while. Inside I feel bad person. I think, all my friends dead, all my family dead, and I alive. I not want to live. But soon I meet orang-utans. They very kind to me. This very beautiful, very peaceful place. No war here, no bad people. I say to myself, Kensuke, you very lucky person to be alive. Maybe you stay here.'

'I take many things from ship, I take food, I take clothes, sheets. I take pots. I take bottles. I take knife. I take binoculars. I take medicine. I find many things, many tools also. I take everything I find. When Kensuke finish, not much left on ship, I tell you. I find cave. I hide all things in cave. Soon terrible storm come, and ship go on rocks. Very soon she go down.'

'One day American soldiers come. I hide. I not want to surrender, not honourable thing to do. I very afraid too. I hide in forest with orang-utans. Americans make fire on beach. They laugh in the night. I listen. I hear them. They say everyone dead in Nagasaki. They very happy about this. They laugh. I very sure now I stay on this island. Why go home? Soon Americans, they go away. My ship under water

by now. They not find it. My ship still here. Under sand now, part of island now.'

The rusting hull I had found that first day on the island! So much was beginning to make sense to me now. A fish took my line suddenly, almost jerking the rod from my grasp. Kensuke leaned across to help me. It took many minutes of heaving to bring the fish to the surface, but between us we managed to haul it in. We sat back exhausted as it floundered at the bottom of the boat at our feet. It was massive, bigger even than the biggest fish I'd ever seen, the pike my father had caught in the reservoir back home. Kensuke dispatched it quickly, a sharp blow to the back of the neck with the handle of his knife. 'Good fish. Very good fish. You very clever fisherman person, Mica. We good together. Maybe we catch more now.'

But it was many hours before we caught another, though it did not seem like it. Kensuke told me of his life alone on the island, how he had learned to survive, to live off the land. He learned he said mostly by watching what the orang-utans ate, and what they did not eat. He learned to climb as they did. He learned to understand their language, to heed their warning signals – the darting eyes, the nervous scratching. Slowly he built a bond of trust and became one of them.

By the time we made for home that evening with three huge fish in the bottom of the boat – tuna I think they were – his story was almost finished. He talked on as he rowed. 'After Americans, no more men come to my island. I alone here many years. I not forget Kimi. I not forget Michiya. But I live. Then year ago, maybe, they come. Very bad people, killer men. They have guns. They hunt. They shoot. I sing to



ever. 'Now,' Kensuke said, beaming at me. 'Now you happy person, Micasan. I happy too. We go fishing. I tell you very soon where I find this ball. Very soon I tell you everything. Little fish not so good now. Not so many. We need big fish sometimes from deep sea. We smoke fish. Then we have always plenty fish to eat. You understand?'

The outrigger was a great deal heavier than it looked. I helped Kensuke drag it down the beach and into the sea. 'This very good boat,' he said, as we lifted Stella in. 'This boat never go down. I make myself. Very safe boat.' He pushed us off and jumped in. I never ceased to be amazed at his extraordinary agility and strength. He rowed with a single oar, standing in the stern of the boat, more as if he was punting. Very soon we were out beyond the shelter of the cove and into the swell of the open sea.

Clutching my beloved football, and with Stella at my feet, I sat watching him and waiting for him to begin his story. I knew better than to pester him by now. The fishing came first. We baited our lines and settled silently to our fishing, one over each side of the boat. I was bursting to ask him about the football, about how he'd found it, but I dared not, for fear he would clam up and say nothing. It was some time before he began, but when he did it was well worth waiting for.

'Now I tell you everything, Micasan' he said, 'like I promise. I am old, but it is not long story. I am born in Japan, in Nagasaki. Very big town, by the sea. I grow up in this town. When I young man I study medicine in Tokyo. Soon I am Doctor, Doctor Kensuke Ogawa. I very proud person. I look after many mothers, many babies too. I first person many babies see in world. Then I go to London. I do studies in

London, Guy's Hospital. You know this place?' I shook my head. 'Of course I learn speak little English there. Afterwards I came back to Nagasaki. I have beautiful wife, Kimi. Then I have little son too, Michiya. I very happy person in those days. But soon war comes. All Japanese men are soldiers now, sailors maybe. I go to navy. I doctor on big war-ship.'

A fish tugged on his line and took his bait, but not the hook. He went on as he rebaited his hook. 'This war very long time ago now.' I did know something of a war with Japan – I had seen it on films – but I knew very little about it. He shook his head. 'Many die in this war. This war very terrible time. Many ships go down. Japanese army win many battles. Japanese navy win many battles. All Japanese very happy people. Like football, when you win you happy. When you lose, you sad. I go home often, I see my Kimi and my little Michiya in Nagasaki. He grow fast. Already big boy. We all very happy family.'

'But war go on long time. Many Americans come, many ships, many planes, many bombs. Now war is not so good for Japan. We fight, but now we lose. Very bad time. We are in big sea battle. American planes come. My ship is bombed. There is fire and smoke. Black smoke. Many men burned. Many men dead. Many jump off ship into sea. But I stay. I am doctor, I stay with my patients. Planes come again. Many more bombs. I think I am dead person this time for sure. But I am not. I look all round ship. All patients dead. All sailors dead. I am only person alive on ship, but engine is still going. Ship moving on her own. She go now where she want to go. I cannot turn wheel. I can do nothing. But I listen to radio. Americans say on radio, big bomb fall on

Suddenly, Kensuke caught me by the arm. 'You look, Micasan. What you see?' His eyes were full of mischief. I didn't know what I was supposed to be looking for. 'Nothing here, yes? I very clever fellow. You watch. I show you.' He made for the end of the beach, and I followed. Once there he began to pull and tug at the undergrowth. To my surprise it simply came away in his hands. I saw first what looked like a log lying in the sand but then, as he dragged away more branches, I saw it was part of a boat, an outrigger, a long wide dugout with a frame of outriggers on either side. It was covered in canvas which he folded back very slowly, chuckling to himself as he did so.

And there lying in the bottom of the boat beside a long oar was my football. He reached in and tossed it to me. It was softer now and much of the white leather was cracked and discoloured, but in places I could still just make out Eddie's name.



## Chapter 8

### Everyone dead in Nagasaki

I was overjoyed. I had found a part of me that I thought I had lost for



we did – but we no longer talked to one another as we had before. We lived each of us in our separate cocoons, quite civil, always polite, but not together any more. He had closed in on himself and wrapped himself in his thoughts. The warmth had gone from his eyes, the laughter in the cave house was silenced. He never said so – he did not need to – but I knew that now he would prefer to paint alone, to fish alone, to be alone.

So, day after day, I wandered the island with Stella, hoping when I returned that he might have forgiven me, that we could be friends again. But always he kept that distance between us. I grieved for my lost friendship. I remember I went often now to the other end of the island, to Watch Hill, and sat there and sat there, no longer looking out for ships, but rehearsing aloud my explanation. But no matter how much I rehearsed it, how I reasoned it, I could never convince even myself that what I had done was anything other than treachery. In the end, as it turned out, it was Kensuke who explained it to me.

We had just gone to bed one night when Tomodachi came to the mouth of the cave and squatted there. She had done this once or twice lately, stayed for just a few minutes, peered in at us and gone off again. Kensuke spoke up in the darkness. 'She lose Kikanbo again,' he said. 'She always lose her baby. Kikanbo very wicked baby. He run off a lot. He make Tomodachi very sad mother.' He clapped his hands at her, shooing her away. 'Kikanbo not here, Tomodachi. Not here.' But Tomodachi stayed, I think for comfort more than anything else. I had noticed before with the orang-utans, how they would often come to Kensuke when they were upset or frightened, just to be near him. After

a while Tomodachi slunk off into the night and left us alone again, with the din of the forest and the silence between us.

'I think many thoughts,' Kensuke said suddenly, out of the silence. 'You are sleeping, Micasan?' He had not called me by my name for weeks, ever since the Coke bottle incident.

'No,' I said.

'Very good. I got lot to say. You listen. I talk. I think many thoughts. When I think of Tomodachi, I think of your mother. Your mother, she too lose her baby. She lose you. That very sad thing for her. Maybe she come looking, and she not find you. You not there when she come. She think you dead for ever. But she see you in her mind. Now as I speak maybe she see you in her mind. You always there. I know. I have son too. I have Michiya. He always in my head. Like Kimi. They dead for sure, but they in my head. They in my head forever.'

For a long while he did not say another word. I thought he had gone to sleep. Then he spoke again. 'I tell you everything I think, Micasan. It best way. I stay on this island because I want stay on this island. I do not want go home Japan. Different thing for you. You want go back home across the sea, and that right thing, good thing for you. But not good for me. For me, very sad thing. Many years I live alone here. I happy here. Then you come. I hate you when you first come. But after little while you are like son to me. I think maybe I like father to you, you like son to me. I very sad now when you go. I like talk with you. I like listen. I like sound when you speak. I want you stay here on this island. You understand?'

'I think so,' I said.

'But you do one very bad thing. We friends, but you not tell me what you feel. You not say what you do. That not honourable thing to do. When I find bottle, when I read words, I very sad person indeed. But after little while I understand. I think maybe you want stay here with me, and you want also go home. So when you find bottle, you write message. You do not say what you do because you know it make me sad. I right, yes?'

'Yes,' I said.

'You very young person, Micasan. You paint good picture, very good picture, like Hokusai. You have long life waiting for you. You cannot live whole life on this island with old man who die one day. So, thinking like this, I change my mind. You know what we do tomorrow?' He didn't wait for me to answer. 'We start build new fire, big fire. We ready then for when we see ship. Then you go home. And also we do another thing. We play football, you, me. What you say?'

'All right.' It was all I could say. He had in just those few moments lifted the whole weight of guilt off my shoulders and given me such happiness, such new hope.

'Very good. Very good. You sleep now. We do lot of work tomorrow, lot of football also.'

The next morning we began building a beacon on the hilltop above the cave house. We used most of the pile of firewood we had collected for the cooking fire and stored in the dry at the back of the cave – he even sacrificed some of his best pieces of driftwood. It wasn't far to carry it, so before long we had enough to make a sizeable fire. Ken-

suke said it would do for the moment, that we could find more from the forest, more and more each day as we wanted. 'We soon have fire so big they see in Japan maybe,' he laughed. 'We have lunch now, then sleep, then football. Yes?'

Later that afternoon we set up sticks in the sand for a goal and took turns at shooting at each other. The ball was very soft, and so it didn't bounce any better on the sand than it had back on the mud of the recreation ground back home, but it didn't matter. Kensuke may have carried a stick, he may have been as old as the hills, but he could kick a football well enough to put it past me, and often too.

What a time we had. Neither of us wanted it to end. With a crowd of bemused orang-utans looking on, with Stella interfering and chasing after every goal scored, we were at it till darkness drove us at last back up the hill. We were both too tired to do more than have a long drink of water, eat a banana or two and go to our sleeping mats.

It was after our reconciliation that I came to know Kensuke better than I ever had before. His English became more and more fluent, and he clearly loved to speak it now. For some reason he was always more happy to talk while we were out fishing in his outrigger. We did not go out that often, only when the fishing was so poor in the shallows that we needed to catch big fish for smoking and keeping.

Once at sea, the stories simply flowed. He talked a great deal of his childhood in Japan, of his twin sister and how the worst thing he'd ever done was to push her out of the tree in their garden, how she'd broken her arm, how when he painted that cherry tree it always reminded him of her. But she too had been in Nagasaki when the bomb



fell. I remember he even told me the address of where he lived when he was studying in London – No. 22 Clanricarde Gardens, I have never forgotten it. Once he had gone to watch Chelsea playing football and afterwards he'd sat astride a lion in Trafalgar Square and been ticked off by a policeman.

But it was Kimi and Michiya he talked of most, about how he wished he could have seen Michiya grow up. Michiya, he said, would have been nearly fifty by now if the bomb hadn't fallen on Nagasaki, and Kimi would be exactly the same age as he was, seventy-five. I rarely interrupted him when he was like this, but once to comfort him I did say, 'Bombs don't kill everyone. They could still be alive. You never know. You could find out. You could go home.' He looked at me then as if it was the first time such a possibility had ever occurred to him in all those years. 'Why not?' I went on. 'When we see a ship and we light the fire and they come and fetch me, you could come too. You could go back to Japan. You don't have to stay here.'

He thought about it for some time, but then shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'They are dead. That bomb was very big bomb, very terrible bomb. Americans say Nagasaki is destroyed, every house. I hear them. My family dead for sure. I stay here. I safe here. I stay on my island.'

Day after day we piled more and more wood on the beacon. It was massive now, bigger even than the one I had built on Watch Hill. Every morning now before we went down to the pool to wash, Kensuke would send me up to the top of the hill with his binoculars. I always scanned the horizon both in hope and in trepidation. I longed to see a ship, of course I did. I longed to go home. But at the same time I

dreaded what that would mean. I felt so much at home with Kensuke. The thought of leaving him filled me with a terrible sadness. I determined to do all I could to persuade him to come away with me, if and when a ship came.

At every opportunity now I talked to him of the outside world, and the more I talked the more he seemed to become interested. Of course, I never spoke of the wars and famines and disasters. I painted the best picture of the world outside I could. There was so much he didn't know. He marvelled at all I told him, at the microwave in our kitchen, at computers and what they could do, at Concorde flying faster than the speed of sound, at men going to the moon, and satellites. These things took some explaining, I can tell you. Some of it he didn't even believe, not at first.

The time came when he began to quiz me. In particular he would ask about Japan. But I knew very little about Japan, only that back home in England lots of things, including our microwave, had 'made in Japan' written on them: cars, calculators, my father's stereo, my mother's hair dryer.

'I "made in Japan" person,' he laughed. 'Very old machine, still good, still very strong.'

Try as I did to trawl my memory, after a while I could find nothing more to tell him about Japan, but he would still keep asking. 'You sure there no war in Japan these days?' I was fairly certain there wasn't and said so. 'They build up Nagasaki again after bomb?' I told him they had, and hoped I was right. All I could do was to reassure him as best I could, and then tell him the same few things I did know about over and

over again. He seemed to love to hear it, like a child listening to a favourite fairy story.

Once, after I'd finished expounding yet again on the amazing sound quality of my father's brilliant Sony stereo that made the whole house vibrate, he said very quietly, 'Maybe one day before I die I go back to my home. One day I go back to Japan. Maybe.' I wasn't sure he meant it, but it did mean that he was at least considering it, and that gave me some cause for hope. It wasn't until the night of the turtles though, that I came to believe Kensuke was really serious about it.

I was fast asleep when he woke me. 'You come, Micasan. Very quickly you come. You come,' he said.

'What for?' I asked him, but he was already gone. I ran out after him into the moonlight and caught him up halfway down the track. 'What are we doing. Where are we going? Is it a boat?'

'Very soon you see. Very soon.' Stella stayed at my heels all the way to the beach. She never liked going out in the dark very much. I looked around. There was nothing there. The beach looked completely deserted. The waves lapped listlessly. The moon rode the clouds, and the world felt still about me as if it was holding its breath. I did not see what was happening until Kensuke suddenly fell on his knees in the sand. 'They very small. Sometimes they are not so strong. Sometimes in the morning birds come and eat them.' And then I saw it.

I thought it was a crab at first. It wasn't. It was a minuscule turtle, tinier than a terrapin, clambering out of a hole in the sand and then beetling off down the beach towards the sea. Then another, and another, and further down the beach dozens of them, hundreds I could see

now, maybe thousands, all scuttling across the moonlit sand into the sea. Everywhere the beach was alive with them. Stella was nosing at one, so I warned her off. She yawned and looked innocently up at the moon.

I saw that one of them was on its back at the bottom of the hole, legs kicking frantically. Kensuke reached down, picked it up gently and set it on its feet in the sand. 'You go to sea, little turtle' he said. 'You live there now. You soon be big fine turtle, and then one day you come back and see me maybe.' He sat back on his haunches to watch him scuttle off. 'You know what they do, Mica. Mother turtles, they lay eggs in this place. Then, one night-time every year, always when moon is high, little turtles are born. Long way to go to sea. Very many die. So always I stay. I help them. I chase birds away, so they not eat baby turtles. Many years from now, when turtles are big, they come back. They lay eggs again. True story, Micasan.'

All night long we kept our vigil over the mass birth, as the infant turtles made their run for it. We patrolled together, reaching into every hole we found to see if there were any left, stuck or stranded. We found several too weak to make the journey, and carried them down into the sea ourselves. The sea seemed to revive them. Away they went, no swimming lessons needed. We turned dozens the right way up and shepherded them safely into the sea.

When dawn came and the birds came down to scavenge, we were there to drive them off. Stella chased and barked after them, and we ran at them, shrieking, waving, hurling stones. We were not entirely successful, but most of the turtles made it down into the sea. But even



here they were still not entirely safe. In spite of all our desperate efforts a few were plucked up out of the water by the birds and carried off.

By noon it was all over. Kensuke was tired as we stood ankle deep in the water watching the very last of them swim away. He put his arm on my shoulder. 'They very small turtles, Micasan, but they very brave. They braver than me. They do not know what they find out there, what happen to them; but they go anyway. Very brave. Maybe they teach me good lesson. I make up my mind. When one day ship come, and we light fire, and they find us, then I go. Like turtles I go. I go with you. I go home to Japan. Maybe I find Kimi. Maybe I find Michiya. I find truth. I go with you, Micasan.'



## Chapter 10

### Killer men come

Shortly after this the rains came and forced us to shelter for days on end inside the cave house. The tracks became torrents, the forest became a swamp. I longed for the howl of the gibbons instead of the roar of the rain on the trees outside. It did not rain in fits and starts as it did at home, but constantly, incessantly. I worried over our beacon, that was becoming more saturated now with every passing day. Would it ever dry out? Would this rain ever stop? But Kensuke was stoical about it all. 'It stop when it stop, Micasan,' he told me. 'You cannot make rain stop by wanting it to stop. Besides, rain very good thing. Keep fruit growing. Keep stream flowing. Keep monkeys alive, you also, me also.'

I did make a dash up to the hilltop each morning with the binoculars, but I don't know why I bothered. Sometimes it was raining so hard I could hardly see the sea at all.

Occasionally we sallied out into the forest to gather enough fruit to keep us going. There were berries growing in abundance now, which Kensuke insisted on gathering – he didn't seem to mind getting soaked to the skin as much as I did. We ate some, but most he turned into vinegar. The rest he bottled in honey and water. 'For rainy day, yes?' he laughed. (He loved experimenting with the new expressions he had picked up.) We ate a lot of smoked fish – he always seemed to have enough in reserve. It made me very thirsty, but I never tired of it.

I remember the rainy season more for the painting we did than for anything else. We painted together for hours on end – until the octopus ink ran out. These days Kensuke was painting more from his memory – his house in Nagasaki, and several portraits of Kimi and Michiya

standing together, always under the cherry tree. The faces, I noticed, he always left very indistinct. He once explained this to me. (He was more and more fluent now in his English.)

'I remember who they are,' he said. 'I remember where they are. I can hear them in my head, but I cannot see them.'

I spent days perfecting my first attempt at an orang-utan. It was of Tomodachi. She would often crouch soulful and dripping at the cave mouth, almost as if she was posing for me. So I took full advantage.

Kensuke was ecstatic in his delight at my painting, and lavish in his praise. 'One day, Micasan, you will be fine painter, like Hokusai, maybe.' That was the first shell painting of mine he kept and stored away in his chest. I felt so proud. After that he insisted on keeping many of my shell paintings. He would often take them out of the chest and study them carefully, showing me where I might improve, but always generously. Under his watchful eye, in the glow of his encouragement, every picture I painted seemed more accomplished, more how I wanted it to be.

Then one morning the gibbons were howling again and the rains had stopped. We went fishing in the shallows, out at sea too, and had very soon replenished our stores of smoked fish and octopus ink. We played football again. And all the while the beacon on the hilltop was drying out.

Wherever we went now we took the binoculars with us, just in case. We very nearly lost them once when Kikanbo, Tomodachi's errant son – always the cheekiest, most playful of all the young orang-utans stole them and ran off into the forest. When we caught up with him he didn't



want to surrender them at all. In the end Kensuke had to bribe him – a red banana for a pair of binoculars.

But as time passed we were beginning to live as if we were going to be staying on the island for ever, and that began to trouble me deeply. Kensuke made repairs to his outrigger. He made more vinegar. He collected herbs and dried them in the sun. And he seemed less and less interested in looking for a ship. He seemed to have forgotten all about it.

He sensed my restlessness. He was working on the boat one day and, ever hopeful, I was scanning the sea through the binoculars. 'It is easier when you are old like me, Micason,' he said.

'What is?' I asked.

'Waiting,' he said. 'One day a ship will come, Micason. Maybe soon, maybe not so soon. But it will come. Life must not be spent always hoping, always waiting. Life is for living.' I knew he was right, of course, but only when I was lost and absorbed in my painting was I truly able to obliterate all thoughts of rescue, all thoughts of my mother and father.

I woke one morning and Stella was barking outside the cave house. I got up and went out after her. At first she was nowhere to be seen. When I did find her, she was high up on the hill, half growling, half barking, and her hackles were up. I soon saw why. A junk! A small junk far out to sea. I scrambled down the hill and met Kensuke coming out of the cave house buckling his belt. 'There's a boat!' I cried. 'The fire! Let's light the fire!'

'First I look,' said Kensuke. And, despite all my protestations, he went back into the cave house for his binoculars. I raced up the hill

again. The junk was close enough to shore. They would be bound to see the smoke. I was sure of it. Kensuke was making his way up towards me infuriatingly slowly. He seemed to be in no hurry at all. He studied the boat carefully now through his binoculars, taking his time about it.

'We've got to light the fire,' I said. 'We've got to.'

Kensuke caught me suddenly by the arm. 'It is the same boat, Micason. Killer men come. They kill the gibbons and steal away the babies. They come back again. I am very sure. I do not forget the boat. I never forget. They very wicked people. We must go quick. We must find all orang-utans. We must bring them into the cave. They be safe there.'

It did not take him long to gather them in. As we walked into the forest Kensuke simply began to sing.

They materialised out of nowhere, in twos, in threes, until we had fifteen of them. Four were still missing. We went deeper and deeper into the forest to find them, Kensuke singing all the while. Then three more came crashing through the trees, Tomodachi amongst them. Only one was still missing, Kikanbo.

Standing there in a clearing in the forest, surrounded by the orang-utans, Kensuke sang for Kikanbo again and again, but he did not come. Then we heard a motor start up, somewhere out at sea, an outboard motor. Kensuke sang out again louder now, more urgently. We listened for Kikanbo. We looked for him. We called for him.

'We cannot wait any longer,' said Kensuke at last. 'I go in front, Micason, you behind. Bring last ones with you. Quick now.' And off he

went, up the track, leading one of the orang-utans by the hand, and still singing. As we followed, I remember thinking that this was just like the Pied Piper leading the children away into a cave in the mountain side.

I had my work cut out at the back. Some of younger orang-utans were far more interested in playing hide-and-seek than following. In the end I had to scoop up two of them and carry them, one in the crook of each arm. They were a great deal heavier than they looked. I kept glancing back over my shoulder for Kikanbo, and calling for him, but he still did not come.

The outboard motor died. I heard voices, loud voices, men's voices, laughter. I was running now, the orang-utans clinging round my neck. The forest hooted and howled in alarm all around me.

As I reached the cave I heard the first shots ring out. Every bird, every bat in the forest lifted off so that the screeching sky was black with them. We gathered the orang-utans together at the back of the cave and huddled there in the darkness with them, as the shooting went on and on.

Of all of them, Tomodachi was the most agitated. But they all needed constant comfort and reassurance from Kensuke. All through this dreadful nightmare Kensuke sang to them softly.

The hunters were nearer, ever nearer, shooting and shouting. I closed my eyes. I prayed. The orangutans whimpered aloud as if they were singing along with Kensuke. All this while Stella lay at my feet, a permanent growl in her throat. I held on to the ruff of her neck, just in case. The young orang-utans burrowed their heads into me wherever

they could, under my arms, under my knees, and clung on.

The shots cracked so close now, splitting the air and echoing round the cave. There were distant yells of triumph. I knew only too well what this must mean.

After that the hunt moved away. We could hear no more voices, just the occasional shot. And then nothing. The forest had fallen silent. We stayed where we were for hours. I wanted to venture out to see if they had gone, but Kensuke would not let me. He sang all the time, and the orang-utans stayed huddled around us, until we heard the sound of the outboard motor starting up. Even then Kensuke still made me wait a while longer. When at last we did emerge, the junk was already well out to sea.

We searched the island for Kikanbo, sang for him, called for him, but there was no sign of him. Kensuke was in deep despair. He was inconsolable. He went off on his own and I let him go. I came across him shortly after, kneeling over the bodies of two dead gibbons, both mothers. He was not crying, but he had been. His eyes were filled with hurt and bewilderment. We dug away a hole in the soft earth on the edge of the forest and buried them. There were no words in me left to speak, and Kensuke had no songs left to sing.

We were making our sorrowful way back home along the beach when it happened. Kikanbo ambushed us. He came charging out of the trees, scattering sand at us and then climbed up Kensuke's leg and wrapped himself round his neck. It was such a good moment, a great moment.

That night Kensuke and I sang 'Ten Green Bottles' over and over



again, very loudly, over our fish soup. It was, I suppose, a sort of wake for the two dead gibbons, as well as an ode to joy for Kikanbo. The forest outside seemed to echo our singing.

But in the weeks that followed I could see that Kensuke was brooding on the terrible events of that day. He set about making a cage of stout bamboo at the back of the cave to house the orang-utans more securely in case the killer men ever returned. He kept going over and over it, how he should have done this before, how he would never have forgiven himself if Kikanbo had been taken, how he wished the gibbons would come when he sang, so he could save them too. We cut down branches and brush from the forest and stacked them outside the cave mouth so that they could be pulled across to disguise the entrance to the cave house.

He became very nervous, very anxious, sending me often to the hill-top with the binoculars to see if the junk had returned. But as time went by, as the immediate threat receded, he became more his own self again. Even so, I felt he was always wary, always slightly on edge.

Because he was keeping so many of my paintings now, we found we were running out of good painting shells. So early one morning we set off on an expedition to find some more. We scoured the beach, heads down, side by side, just a few feet apart. There was always an element of competition with our shell collecting – who would find the first, the biggest, the most perfect. We had not been at it long and neither of us had yet found a single shell, when I became aware that he had stopped walking.

‘Micasan,’ he breathed, and he was pointing out to sea with his

stick. There was something out there, something white, but too defined, too shaped, to be a cloud.

We had left the binoculars behind. With Stella yapping at me all the way, I raced back along the beach and up the track to the cave house, grabbed the binoculars and made for the top of the hill. A sail! Two sails. Two white sails. I bounded down the hillside, back into the cave and pulled out a lighted stick from the fire. By the time I reached the beacon Kensuke was already there. He took the binoculars from me and looked for himself.

‘Can I light it?’ I asked. ‘Can I?’

‘All right, Micasan,’ he said. ‘All right.’

I thrust the lighted stick deep into the beacon, in amongst the dry leaves and twigs at its core. It lit almost instantly and very soon flames were roaring up into the wood, licking out at us as the wind took them. We backed away at the sudden heat of it. I was disappointed there were so many flames. I wanted smoke, not flames. I wanted towering clouds of smoke.

‘Do not worry, Micasan,’ Kensuke said. ‘They see this for sure. You see.’

We took turns with the binoculars. Still the yacht had not turned. They had not seen it. The smoke was beginning to billow up into the sky. Desperately I threw more and more wood onto the fire, until it was a roaring inferno of flame and dense smoke.

I had thrown on almost the very last of the wood we had collected, when Kensuke said suddenly, ‘Micasan, it is coming. I think the boat is coming.’

He handed me the binoculars. The yacht was turning. It was very definitely turning, but I couldn't make out whether it was towards us or away from us. 'I don't know,' I said. 'I'm not sure.'

He took the binoculars off me. 'I tell you, Micasan, it come this way. They see us. I am very sure. It come to our island.'

Moments later, as the wind filled the sails, I knew he was right. We hugged each other there on the hilltop beside the blazing beacon. I leaped up and down like a wild thing, and Stella went mad with me. Every time I looked through the binoculars now, the yacht was coming in closer.

'She's a big yacht,' I said. 'I can't see her flag. Dark blue hull, like the *Peggy Sue*.' Only then, as I said it out loud, did I begin to hope that it could possibly be her. Gradually hope turned to belief, and belief to certainty. I saw a blue cap, my mother's cap. It was them! It was them! 'Kensuke,' I cried, still looking through the binoculars, 'Kensuke, it's the *Peggy Sue*. It is. They've come back for me. They've come back.' But Kensuke did not reply. When I looked round, I discovered he was not there.

I found him sitting at the mouth of the cave house, with my football in his lap. He looked up at me, and I knew already from the look in his eyes what he was going to tell me.

He stood up, put his hands on my shoulders, and looked me deep in the eyes. 'You listen to me very good now, Micasan,' he said. 'I am too old for that new world you tell me about. It is very exciting world, but it is not my world. My world was Japan, long time ago. And now my world is here. I think about it for long time. If Kimi is alive, if Michiya

is alive, then they think I am dead long time ago. I would be like ghost coming home. I am not same person. They not same either. And, besides, I have family here, orangutan family. Maybe killer men come again. Who look after them then? No, I stay on my island. This is my place. This Kensuke's Kingdom. Emperor must stay in his Kingdom, look after his people. Emperor does not run away. Not honourable thing to do.'

I could see there was no point in pleading or arguing or protesting. He put his forehead against mine and let me cry. 'You go now,' he went on, 'but before you go, you promise three things. First, you paint every day of your life, so one day you be great artist like Hokusai. Second, you think of me sometime, often maybe, when you are home in England. When you look up at full moon, you think of me, and I do same for you. That way we never forget each other. Last thing you promise and very important for me. Very important you say nothing of this, nothing of me. You come here alone. You alone here in this place, you understand? I not here. After ten years, you say what you like. All that left of me then is bones. It not matter any more then. I want no one come looking for me. I stay here. I live life in peace. No people. People come, no peace. You understand? You keep secret for me, Mica? You promise?'

'I promise,' I said.

He smiled and gave me my football. 'You take football. You very good at football, but you very much better painter. You go now.' And with his arm round my shoulder he took me outside. 'You go,' he said. I walked away only a little way and turned round. He was still standing



at the mouth of the cave. 'You go now please.' And he bowed to me. I bowed back. 'Sayonara, Micasan', he said. 'It has been honour to know you, great honour of my life.' I hadn't the voice to reply.

Blinded with tears I ran off down the track. Stella didn't come at once, but by the time I reached the edge of the forest she had caught up with me. She raced out on to the beach barking at the *Peggy Sue*, but I stayed where I was hidden in the shadow of the trees and cried out all my tears. I watched the *Peggy Sue* come sailing in. It was indeed my mother and my father on-board. They had seen Stella by now and were calling to her. She was barking her silly head off. I saw the anchor go down.

'Goodbye, Kensuke,' I whispered. I took a deep breath and ran out on to the sand waving and yelling.

I splashed out into the shallows to meet them. My mother just cried and hugged me till I thought I'd break. She kept saying over and over again, 'Didn't I tell you we'd find him? Didn't I tell you?'

The first words my father said were, 'Hello, monkey face.'

For almost a year my mother and father had searched for me. No one would help them, for no one would believe I could still be alive – not a chance in a million, they said. My father too – he later admitted – had given me up for dead. But never my mother. So far as she was concerned I was alive, I had to be alive. She simply knew it in her heart. So they had sailed from island to island, searching on until they had found me. Not a miracle, just faith.



## Postscript

Four years after this book was first published, I received this letter.

*Dear Michael,*

*I write to tell you, in my bad English, that my name is Michiya Ogawa. I am the son of Dr Kensuke Ogawa. Until I read your book I thought my father had died in the war. My mother died only three years ago still believing this. As you say in your book, we lived in Nagasaki, but we were very lucky. Before the bomb fell we went into the countryside to see my grandmother for a few days. So we lived.*

*I have no memories of my father, only some photographs and your book. It would be a pleasure to talk to someone who knew my father as you did. Maybe one day we could meet. I hope so.*

*With my best wishes,  
Michiya Ogawa.*

A month after receiving this letter I went to Japan, and I met Michiya. He laughs just like his father did.

ジ・エンド

## Glossary

あぶない	<i>Abunai</i>	Danger!
アメリカ人	<i>Amerikajin</i>	An American
だめだ	<i>Dameda</i>	Forbidden
英国人	<i>Eikokujin</i>	An Englishman
ごめんなさい	<i>Gomenasai</i>	Sorry
ジャパン	.....	Japan
きかんぼう	<i>Kikanbo</i>	
きみ	<i>Kimi</i>	
道哉 (みちや)	<i>Michiya</i>	
長崎	.....	Nagasaki



おやすみなさい	<i>Oyasumi nasai</i>	Goodnight
さよなら	<i>Sayonara</i>	Goodbye
ともだち	<i>Tomodachi</i>	
ジ・エンド	.....	The End
やめろ	<i>Yamero</i>	Stop!

IMAGINE what Kensuke's kingdom would have been like without the forest, without the trees. No coconuts or fruit to eat, no palm leaves for shade, no sap for paintbrushes, no wood for a fire and certainly no gibbons or orang-utans for company. Without the forest, would Kensuke or Michael have been able to survive there as well as they did?

Believe it or not, in some parts of the world this is fast becoming a reality. In Asia and South America, even in parts of Europe, forests are being chopped down illegally, without permits, to make way for roads, to clear the way for crops such as palm oil, or simply for the valuable wood itself. In Sumatra and Borneo Orang-utans themselves are in danger, not just because of hunters, but because their home is disappearing. In the last twenty years 80% of their forest has been chopped down – they could become extinct in the wild within ten years.

But we need wood; to build our homes, to make paintbrushes, to make paper, even the book in your hands was once part of a forest. It's a matter of balance. We need to carefully manage our forests to make sure they don't disappear but are there in the future, for the creatures that live in them and the people that rely on them. We need to make sure that they are sustainable.

That's why I am so pleased that this book is printed entirely on paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), one of only a small number of books in the world to have achieved this standard. This means you can be sure that the wood used to make it has come from well managed forests. The people at Egmont are working hard to make sure that all of the paper they use is made of trees that have been harvested without breaking the law and over time they will be printing more and more of their books on FSC paper.

So next time you're looking for a book or your parents are buying furniture, think of Kensuke and look for the FSC logo.

*Michael Morpurgo*

