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Opening extract from

The Wreck of the Zanzibar

Written by

Michael Morpurgo

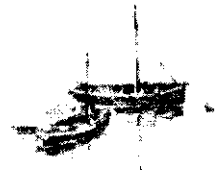
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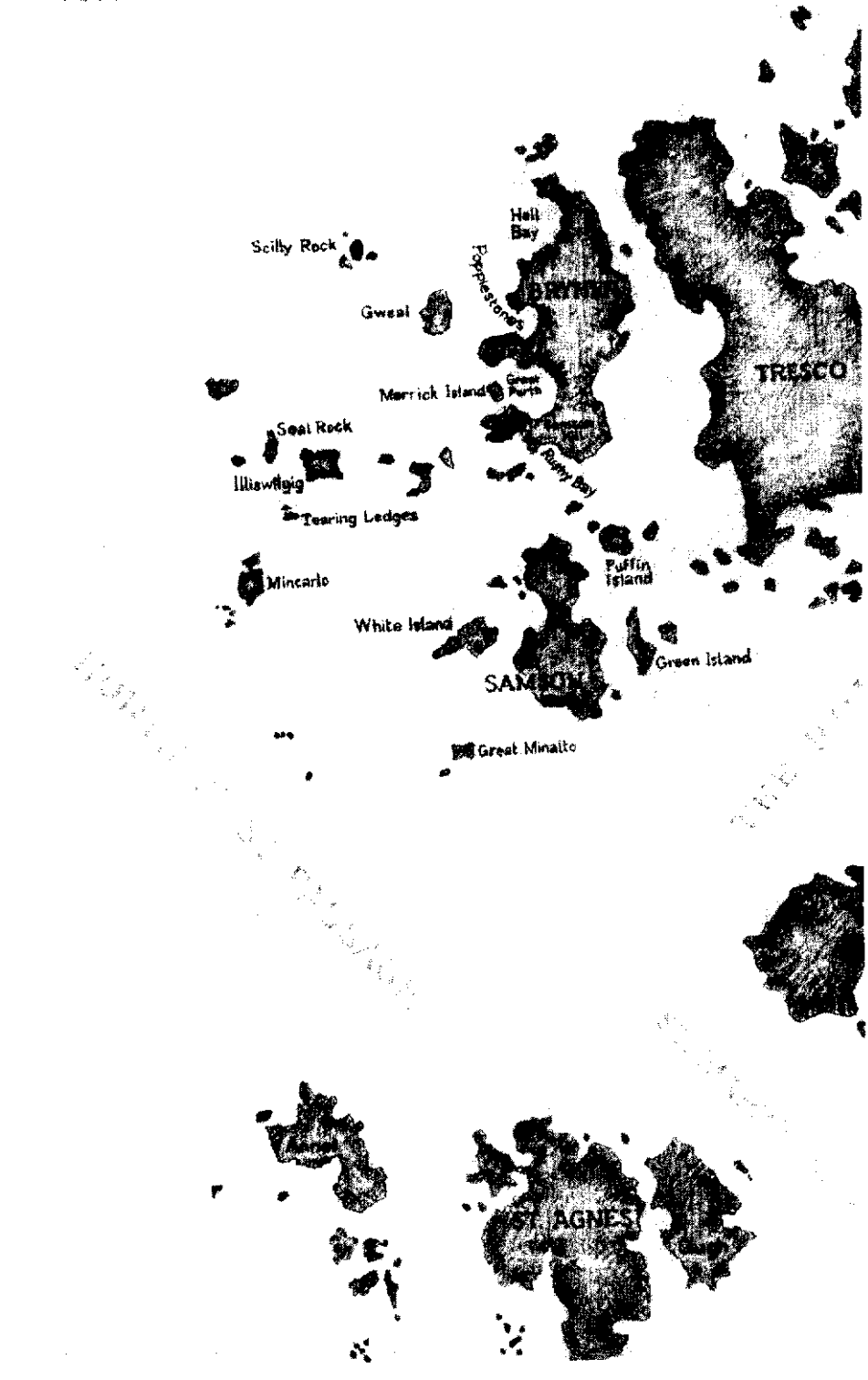
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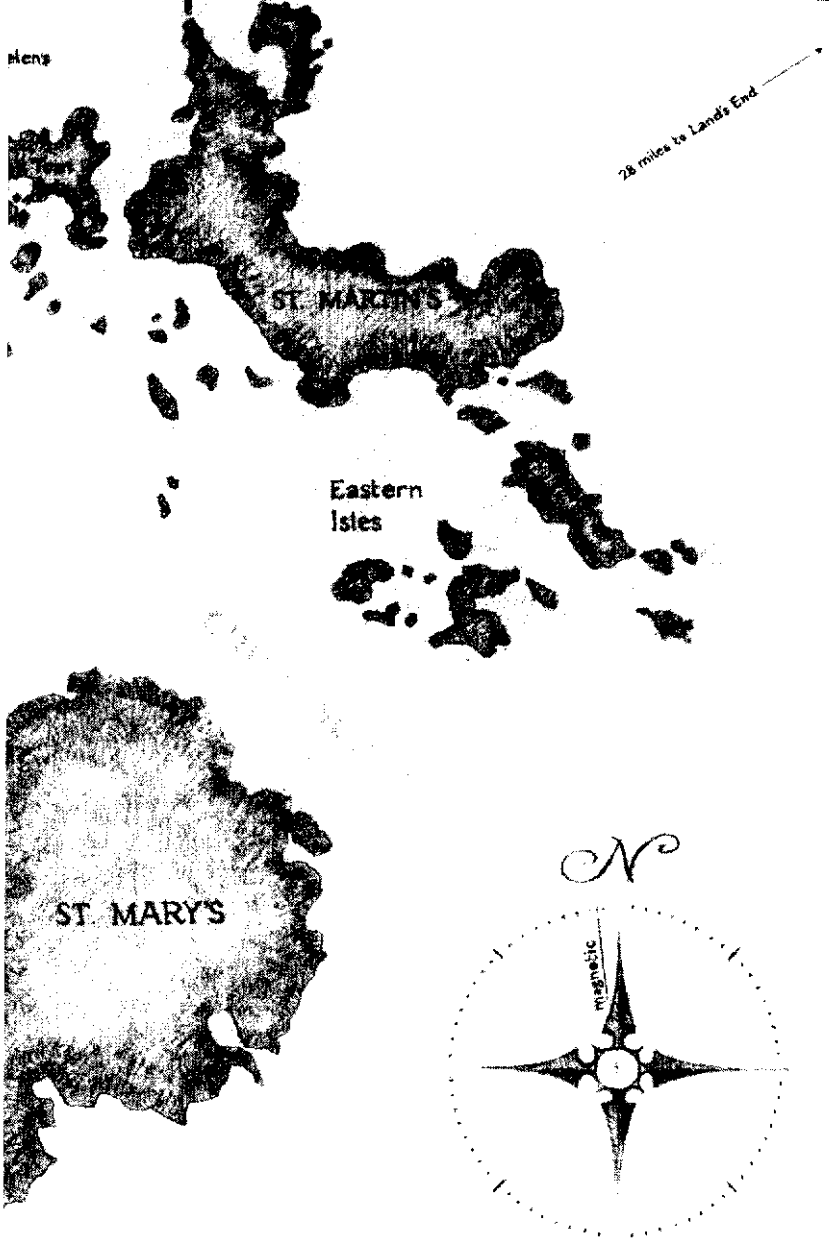
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Please print off and read at your leisure.

To Marion, Keith, Daniel and Charlie




Hell Bay
Scilly Rock
Gweal
Merrick Island
Seal Rock
Illiswiggig
Tearing Ledges
Mincarlo
White Island
Puffin Island
Green Island
Great Minalto
TRESCO
ST AGNES



ISLES OF SCILLY

GREAT-AUNT LAURA

MY GREAT-AUNT LAURA DIED A FEW MONTHS ago. She was a hundred years old. She had her cocoa last thing at night, as she usually did, put the cat out, went to sleep and never woke up. There's not a better way to die.

I took the boat across to Scilly for the funeral – almost everyone in the family did. I met again cousins and aunts and uncles I hardly recognised, and who hardly recognised me. The little church on Bryher was packed, standing room only. Everyone on Bryher was there, and they came from all over the Scilly Isles, from St Mary's, St Martin's, St Agnes and Tresco.

We sang the hymns lustily because we knew

Great-aunt Laura would enjoy a rousing send-off. Afterwards we had a family gathering in her tiny cottage overlooking Stinking Porth Bay. There was tea and crusty brown bread and honey. I took one mouthful and I was a child again. Wanting to be on my own, I went up the narrow stairs to the room that had been mine when I came every summer for my holidays. The same oil lamp was by the bed, the same peeling wallpaper, the same faded curtains with the red sailing boats dipping through the waves.

I sat down on the bed and closed my eyes. I was eight years old again and ahead of me were two weeks of sand and sea and boats and shrimping, and oystercatchers and gannets, and Great-aunt Laura's stories every night before she drew the curtains against the moon and left me alone in my bed.

Someone called from downstairs and I was back to now.

Everyone was crowded into her sittingroom. There was a cardboard box open in the middle of the floor.

'Ah, there you are, Michael,' said Uncle Will. He was a little irritated, I thought.

'We'll begin then.'

And a hush fell around the room. He dipped into

the box and held up a parcel.

'It looks as if she's left us one each,' said Uncle Will. Every parcel was wrapped in old newspaper and tied with string, and there was a large brown label attached to each one. Uncle Will read out the names. I had to wait some minutes for mine. There was nothing I particularly wanted, except Zanzibar of course, but then everyone wanted Zanzibar. Uncle Will was waving a parcel at me.

'Michael,' he said, 'here's yours.'

I took it upstairs and unwrapped it sitting on the bed. It felt like a book of some sort, and so it was, but not a printed book. It was handmade, handwritten in pencil, the pages sewn together. The title on the cover read *The Diary of Laura Perryman* and there was a watercolour painting on the cover of a four-masted ship keeling over in a storm and heading for the rocks. With the book there was an envelope.

I opened it and read.

Dear Michael

When you were little I told you lots and lots of stories about Bryher, about the Isles of Scilly. You know about the ghosts on Samson, about the bell that rings under the sea off St Martin's, about King Arthur still waiting in his cave under the Eastern Isles.

You remember? Well, here is my story, the story of me and my twin brother Billy whom you never knew. How I wish you had. It is a true story and I did not want it to die with me.

When I was young I kept a diary, not an everyday diary. I didn't write in it very often, just whenever I felt like it. Most of it isn't worth the reading and I've already thrown it away - I've lived an ordinary sort of life. But for a few months a long, long time ago, my life was not ordinary at all. This is the diary of those few months.

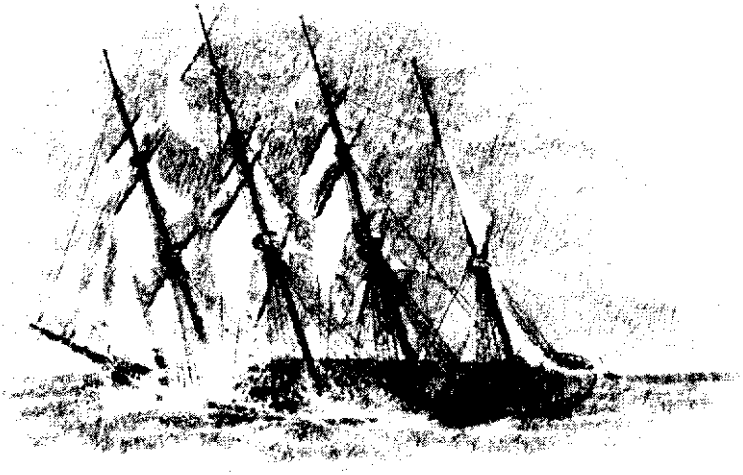
Do you remember you always used to ask where Zanzibar came from? (You called him 'Marzipan' when you were small.) I never told you, did I? I never told anyone. Well, now you'll find out at last.

Goodbye, dear Michael, and God bless you.

Your Great-aunt Laura

P.S. I hope you like my little sketches. I'm a better artist than I am a writer, I think. When I come back in my next life - and I shall - I shall be a great artist. I've promised myself.

The Diary of Laura Perryman



(1907)