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Michael Morpurgo and George Butler assert the moral right to be identified as the author and illustrator of the work respectively.

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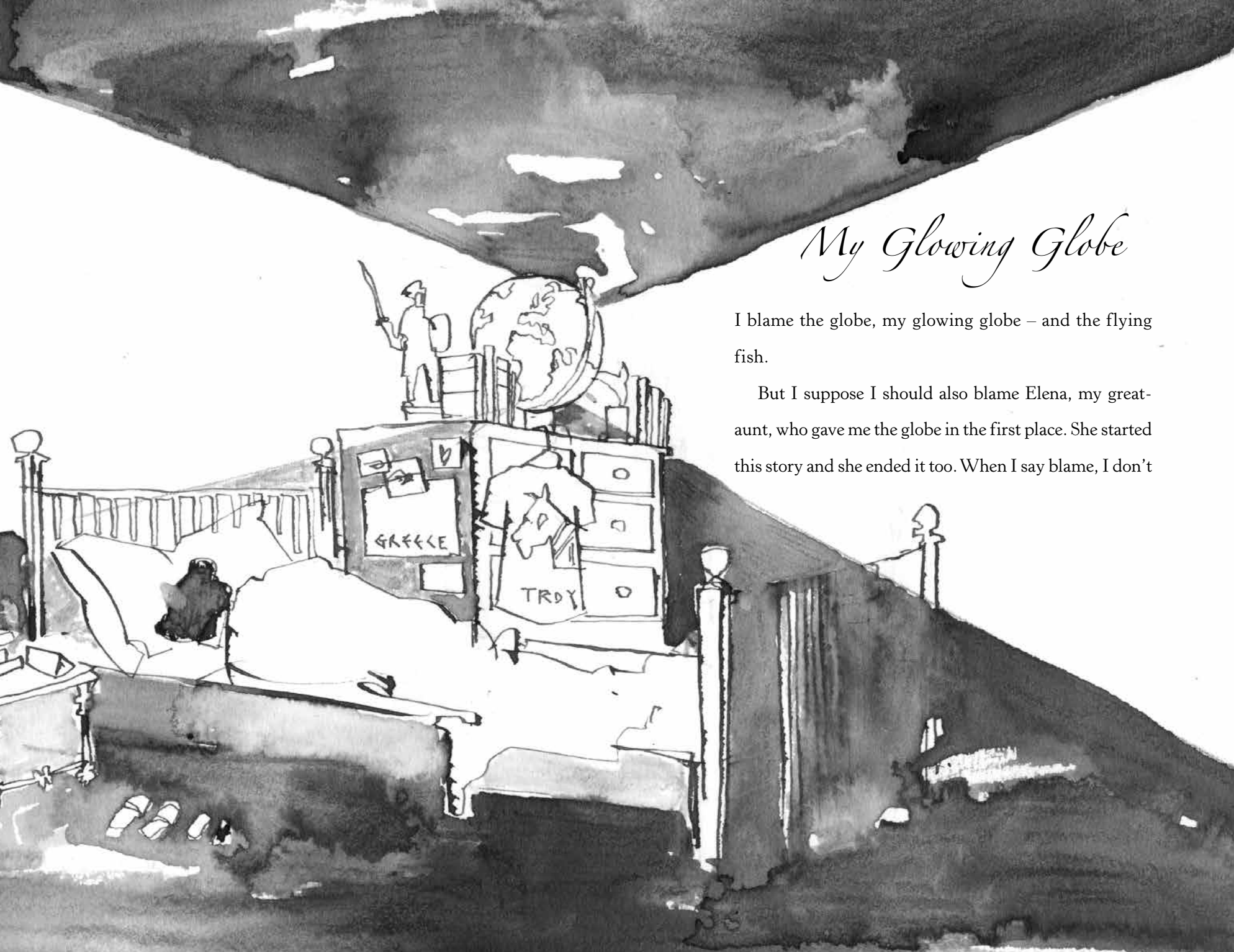
michael morpurgo

When Fishes Flew

THE STORY OF ELENA'S WAR

Illustrated by George Butler

HarperCollins *Children's Books*



My Glowing Globe

I blame the globe, my glowing globe – and the flying fish.

But I suppose I should also blame Elena, my great-aunt, who gave me the globe in the first place. She started this story and she ended it too. When I say blame, I don't

mean blame, not really. I mean that without the globe and without my great-aunt, none of the rest of this story would ever have happened. And it did happen.

The flying fish happened, really happened. I'm telling you, I saw him. Often. I was there. But more of him later. A lot more.

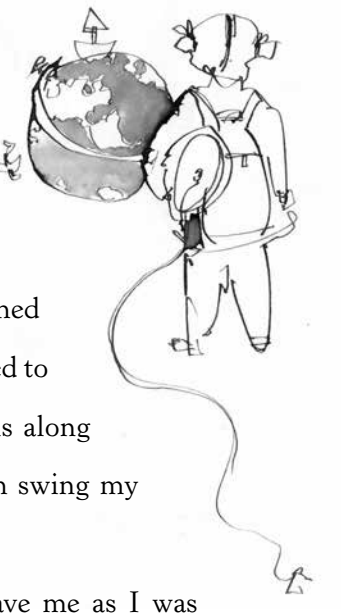
It was also my great-aunt who first gave me my name. My real name is Amanda. But, whenever she came to stay with us when I was little, she always called me Nandi. I liked that a lot better than Amanda, or Mandy – which most people seemed to want to call me. So I told everyone at school and at home that I was Nandi, and that I wouldn't answer to any other name. I've been Nandi ever since.

My great-aunt Elena – Auntie Ellie, I called her – came to stay with us about once every two years or so in our house in St Kilda in Melbourne, Australia. I longed for her visits because she always

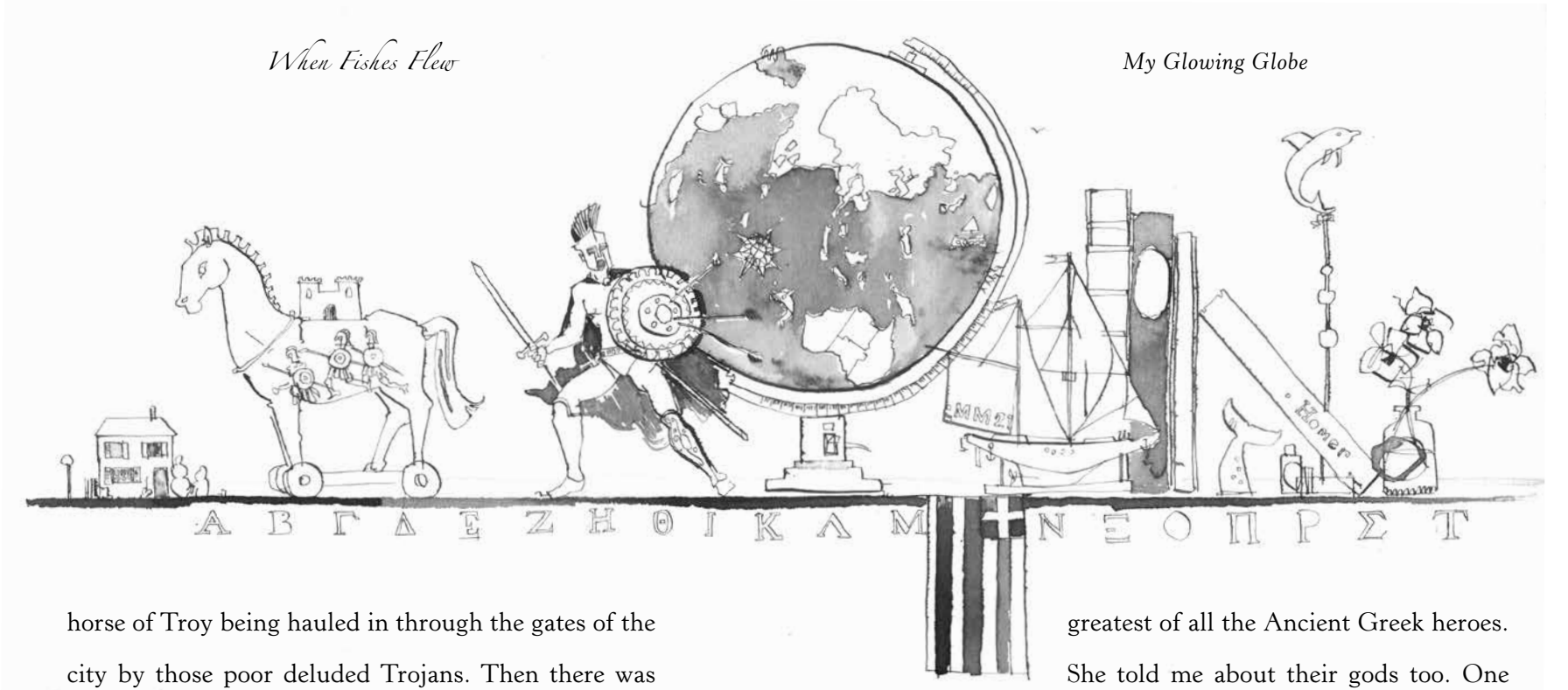


brought me interesting things from where she lived, which was far, far away, on a Greek island called Ithaca. Every time she came, there would be presents: always Greek honey from her own bees for Papa, herbs from her garden for Ma – oregano and *sapsychos*. (Meatballs mixed with *sapsychos* cooked on the barbecue was my all-time favourite – still is.)

But the best gift she ever gave me was my glowing globe. There was a light inside, so my globe was a night-light too. Auntie Ellie laughed a lot, talked quietly to me, listened to me and, when we went on walks along the Yarra River, she would often swing my hand, and I loved that.



I treasured everything she gave me as I was growing up: my T-shirt with a Greek ship sailing across a deep blue sea, and another one with the huge wooden



horse of Troy being hauled in through the gates of the city by those poor deluded Trojans. Then there was the silver dolphin and the small bronze statue of a helmeted Greek warrior from ancient times, his sword raised to fight off some hideous monster. She told me his name was Odysseus, and that he was born in Ithaca, like she was. These were my favourite things in all the world.

It was my Auntie Ellie who first introduced me to the story of Odysseus – for her, and soon for me, the greatest of all the Ancient Greek heroes. She told me about their gods too. One way or another, my Auntie Ellie and those gods were going to change my life.

My silver dolphin and my precious statue of Odysseus lived on the chest of drawers in my bedroom on either side of my glowing globe. I saw them when I woke in the morning, and they were the last things I saw at night. I don't remember when exactly, on which visit, she gave me the globe. I must have been too

young to remember, or maybe it's because her visits, all of them memorable, blur into one.

All I know is that the globe was always there, that I grew up with it, looked at it every day, touched it, spun it, went to sleep and dreamed my dreams in its glow. I travelled in my mind to every continent on that globe, sailed all the seven blue seas.

Before I left to go to school every morning, I would touch the helmet of my Odysseus – fifteen centimetres tall, no more – and give the globe a gentle spin for luck. I loved making the world turn before my eyes. I imagined how the Greek gods must have loved that too. My globe was in the room with me while I did my homework, as I listened to my music, when I did my reading and my dreaming. And, because my globe glowed in the dark, it was a comfort to me at night-times too. For me, my world was never just St Kilda or Melbourne or Australia. They were my home. But my world was my globe and, from a very young

age, all I wanted to do was to grow up fast, go travelling and explore it.

Whenever she came to stay, Auntie Ellie would read to me every night before I went to sleep. She read in such a wonderfully confidential tone, with a deep, sonorous voice that suited perfectly the epic and often tragic stories of her heroes, and mine too. She would read with intensity and passion, living every word, so that I did too – and always in her heavy Greek accent, of course.

It was mostly through Auntie Ellie's visits that I came to know anything of the family story, how and why we were living in Australia. Papa had emigrated from Greece. Auntie Ellie had told me it was because of an earthquake. The family house on Ithaca had been destroyed, so they had to leave when Papa was a very small boy. He had hardly any memories of it, he told me. He had come only with his father, and he didn't like to talk about him, or about his mother, my grandmother. All I knew about them was that my grandfather was

called Manos, my grandmother Zita, and that she had died a long, long time ago, before Papa ever came over to Australia.

Auntie Ellie told me a little more about Manos, her younger brother, that they grew up together, did everything together. But Manos too had died before I was born. I knew him and my grandmother only from photos, which Auntie Ellie showed me. But she, like Papa, did not seem to like to speak of them. So I knew nothing more about either of my grandparents. It was almost as if they'd never been. People you see only in photos and you've never known are never real to you. I loved their names, Manos and Zita, and always wish I'd known them.

Both Auntie Ellie and Papa were more than happy to remind me where I came from. Papa in particular was very proud of being Greek. He had a very Greek name: Jason. The first story of the Greek heroes Auntie Ellie ever told me was Jason and the Argonauts, and his search for the Golden Fleece. But to me he was never Jason, just

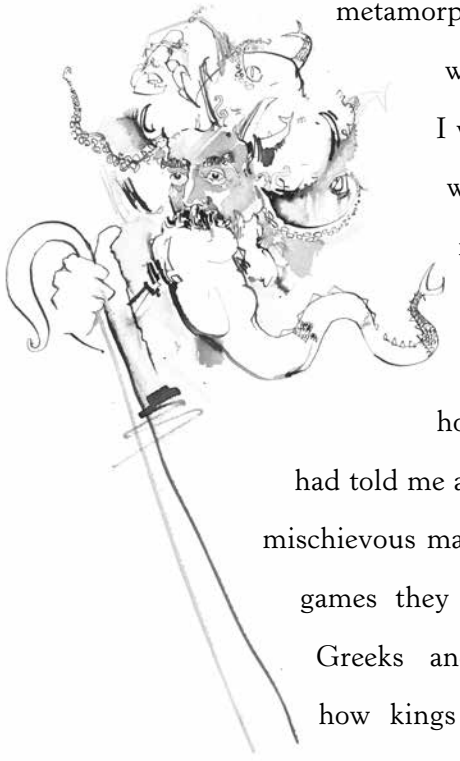
Papa, a Greekish papa, but also Australian. He spoke English much like everyone else I knew, much like Ma – who had come from Ireland, by the way, when she was little. Auntie Ellie was really Greek, properly Greek.

Ma had a fine Irish name. She was called Grania, who was an Irish heroine, just as important and heroic as Jason, she would insist, whenever she thought Papa and I were both becoming a bit too Greek. Papa always insisted he was a Greek under his skin, in his heart. 'Australian outside, Greek inside,' was what he used to tell me. And I think that's what I was already becoming too, but I didn't tell Ma.

Even after I was way past the age to be read to, when I was reading books by myself, I loved to listen to Auntie Ellie reading to me. I loved all her Greek stories, especially the tale of Odysseus, of the Trojan Wars and his ten-year journey home to Ithaca, after the siege of Troy. By the time I was ten or eleven, I knew the names of all the Greek islands he visited on his way back home, all

his adventures, and all the Greek gods who made life so hard for him. And these fickle, interfering gods? Believe me, they really knew how to make things difficult.

Proteus, son of Poseidon, was my favourite Greek god because he could change who he was: he could metamorphose, become whoever and whatever he wanted to be. I was fascinated by that, as I was by all the one-eyed or many-headed monsters that brave Odysseus had to confront on his journey home. In time, Auntie Ellie had told me all about the gods and their mischievous machinations, all the devious games they played with the lives of Greeks and Trojans. I discovered how kings and queens and princes and princesses, all my great heroes



and heroines, seemed to be little more than puppets manipulated by these scheming gods. They were not likeable in the least, except Proteus.

But the more I heard Auntie Ellie's stories of all these Ancient Greek gods and heroes, especially Proteus and Odysseus, the more I was coming to love the idea of being Greek. Every time Auntie Ellie came to stay, she would teach me a few more words of Greek, and bring more books for me to read, mostly books about Odysseus, about Ithaca. She taught me the letters of the Greek alphabet, to write them and pronounce them. She taught me to speak my first Greek words: *kalimera*, good morning. *Efharisto*, thank you. *Ellas*, Greece. *Adio*, goodbye. *Kalinikta*, goodnight. I'd practise my words again and again at night in bed, looking at my glowing globe, longing to go there, to Greece, when I grew up.

Auntie Ellie would remind me often – she did repeat herself a bit, but I didn't mind: 'It's where your Greek

family, your papa's family, comes from. And it's where Odysseus came from too. Never forget that, Nandi. One day you must come to Ithaca to visit. We have flying fish there, you know, and dolphins. Oh, and my bees. I sell their honey all over the island. Without my bees, I wouldn't be there. I save all my honey money to buy my plane ticket to come to Australia. You're my only family, you know. But it's always worth it, Nandi, just to see you.'

'We've got bees too, in Australia,' I told her. 'And flying fish and dolphins.'

'Of course you have, Nandi,' she said. 'I live on an island; you live on an island. Australia is a little bigger maybe than Ithaca. But you have sea all round just the same, don't you? And, where there's sea, there's dolphins and flying fish. And, where there's islands, there's bees, thank goodness – the world couldn't do without bees – but no honey is as good as mine. Keeps me young, keeps me strong.'

I knew about bees pollinating plants, of course,

and how important they were for growing things, but somehow I had never thought of Australia as an island till Auntie Ellie told me. Australia always seemed smaller to me after she said that. So much that she told me made me think again about the world, about myself.

