Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Back Home

Written by

Michelle Magorian

Published by

Puffin Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

PUFFIN BOOKS

Back Home

Michelle Magorian's first ambition was to be an actress and, after three years' study at the Bruford College of Speech and Drama, she went to mime school in Paris. All this time she had been secretly scribbling stories, and in her mid-twenties she became interested in children's books and decided to write one herself. The result was *Goodnight Mister Tom* – a winner of the Guardian Award and the International Reading Association Award – which she has also adapted as a musical with the composer Gary Carpenter, and it has been adapted for the stage by playwright David Wood. Since then she has published several novels, including award-winning *Back Home* and *Just Henry* (published by Egmont), which won the Costa Book Award in 2008. She has also published poetry and short-story collections and picture books for young children.

Michelle lives in Petersfield, where she continues with both her acting and writing careers.

Books by Michelle Magorian

Back Home
Goodnight Mister Tom

Michelle Magorian

Back Home



PUFFIN

For Kay, and in memory of her best friend, my mother

My thanks to all the people in England and America who talked with me, wrote letters, sent tapes, gave me access to archive material, showed me areas of Devon and Connecticut, and generously put up with me

PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, Auckland 0632, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

puffinbooks.com

First published by Viking Kestrel 1985
Published in Puffin Books 1987
This edition published 2011
001 – 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Text copyright © Michelle Magorian, 1985
All rights reserved

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Set in Baskerville
Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–141–33226–0

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Books is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

I

'Do they have movies in England?'

'Sure they do!' said the boy in the beige suit. He was sitting cross-legged on the cabin floor, attempting to draw a liner on a sketch-pad.

A small girl was curled up on the bottom bunk nearest him.

'Films,' she interrupted. 'They call 'em films.'

On the third bunk above, a plump sixteen-year-old girl was lying on her back. She gave a deep sigh. 'I wish we coulda come back a few months later,' she murmured.

The small girl leaned out to look at her.

'Aren't you pleased to be going back to England?'

'I guess,' she said unconvincingly. 'It's just that Frank Sinatra's going to be at the Paramount Theater in November and I won't be there.'

Rusty, who was lying on one of the bunks opposite glanced up in her direction.

Poor Susie, she thought. She had hardly said a word the entire crossing. Even when she had been sea-sick, she hadn't whined or made a fuss but had just gazed vacantly into the distance.

After the previous night's farewell concert, given by all the groups of children and teenagers to the crew and each other, Rusty had sat next to her. She had watched the others play party games and had felt herself growing more and more distant from them.

Just as we've made friends, she had thought, we have to say goodbye all over again. The sailors had given them ice-cream. All the kids had adopted their own special

sailor. Rusty's was from Brooklyn. 'Irish' they called him.

Rusty had stared through the crowd of children to where he was sitting. He had spotted her and given her a friendly wink. She had forced herself to smile back and had then turned to Susie. Alarmed at the despair in her eyes, she had put her arm round her.

'Susie,' she whispered. 'It'll be O.K. You'll see.'

But Susie hadn't even looked at her.

'I was going steady with a boy at my school,' she said quietly. 'I miss him so much.' And she glanced hastily into the palm of her hands. 'I may never see him again.'

Rusty rolled over on to her side and tried to catch her attention, but Susie's face was now deep in the pillow. Below her, a small group of children continued to chat and play 'jacks' on the floor.

'You'll be able to hear him much better on a phonograph,' said the boy in the beige suit. 'If you went to his concert you wouldn't hear anything for all the squealing.'

'Gramophone,' said the small girl. 'They call 'em gramophones.'

'It's not the same as seeing him,' Susie muttered.

Rusty glanced down at her open suitcase. A few weeks ago, she had been staying at the Omsks' summer cottage right by the ocean. Now she was here, in a cabin that had thirty-six bunks squashed together in tiers of three.

As she gazed at the contents of her case she could hardly see them, so blurred were her eyes. She blinked her tears away and wiped her face hurriedly with a handkerchief.

'Now, remember,' Grandma Fitz had said, 'you have to think yourself into being a pioneer. I came out to America, a scrap of a thing with all I owned in a carpet-bag, and I didn't know what the heck I'd find. You show 'em that a bit of that old American pioneer spirit has rubbed off on you.'

And Grandpa had added, 'You don't want 'em to think you're an old misery-guts.'

Only a couple of weeks back, she had been standing on the New York docks saying goodbye to them all: Aunt Hannah, Uncle Bruno, her American sisters, Grandma Fitz and Gramps, Skeet and Janey, her best girlfriend. Janey hadn't seemed to realize what was happening. She had looked as excited as if Rusty was just making some kind of a weekend trip. They had both vowed eternal friendship and had promised to be pen-pals for ever.

If only Skeet was with her, then she wouldn't feel so lonely. She wondered what he was doing. Probably out in the rowing boat with the fishing tackle. For four years they had roomed together, and even in her fifth year their bedrooms had been next door to one another. She couldn't imagine life without Skeet close by. This summer he had turned fourteen and his voice had started getting all croaky. Now she'd never get to hear him sounding grown-up. Heck, she was crying again.

She slammed the case shut and blew her nose. Uncle Bruno had been crying, too, when he had said goodbye, and he was a man, so it couldn't be so bad that *she* was doing it. When he had given her a final hug, he had held her so tight that she had thought that perhaps he wasn't going to let her go after all. But then one of the escorts had touched them and they had broken apart, and Rusty had felt herself being pushed towards the gangway. She had felt so dazed walking up it, as if she had been winded by a fast-flying baseball – only instead of the sick feeling going away, it stayed there, deep and heavy in the pit of her stomach.

Suddenly the cabin door was flung open and a freckled teenage girl rushed in.

'Hey, you guys, come on up,' she said excitedly. 'Everyone else is up on deck. We can see the quayside!'

Rusty lay on her back and listened to the stampede of footsteps and the yells as the other children fled to join her. As soon as they had gone, she slipped out from her

bunk, smoothed her flared green-and-white-check skirt out and pulled down her large lemon cardigan.

A small hand-mirror was propped against a book on one of the bunks. Rusty peered into it. It had taken her all morning to manoeuvre her dark-red hair into ringlets. Janey had taught her to do that before leaving, but the other girls on board had helped her along a bit. She straightened the green bows that held her hair back from a central parting. One of her ribbons looked crumpled through endless jiggering around with. She just couldn't seem to get each side level with the other.

She glanced down at the white toes of her brown-and-white saddle-shoes and wiped them along the backs of her legs.

At least her bobby socks didn't look so grubby, now that they were inside out and plumped out a bit. It had been so difficult keeping them clean on the ship.

She was about to join the others when she heard muffled sniffs from the far end of the cabin. She edged her way past the rows of bunks.

On a lower bunk in a corner sat a dark-haired girl in a plaid red-and-green dress. She was thirteen, a year older than Rusty. Like Rusty's had been, her case was open. Half the contents were strewn across the floor.

She looked up, startled. 'I was just checkin' I had everything,' she blurted out.

Rusty stared at all the bottles on her bed.

'Vitamins,' she explained anxiously. 'My Aunt Joan says you can't have too many.'

Wedged in among her clothes Rusty noticed Palmolive soap, nylons, linen and peanut butter.

'Aunt Joanie,' she said, 'she knows all about English rationing. Do you think our luggage will be all right?' she added, and a look of terror came into her eyes.

'Sure it will,' said Rusty.

The girl blew her nose.

'I guess I must have a cold.'

'Yeah,' said Rusty. 'Same as the one I got.'

They smiled guiltily at each other.

'Can I go up on deck with you?' asked the girl.

'Sure you can,' said Rusty.

The girl swept the bottles off her bunk into the suitcase and banged it shut.

Arm in arm, they squeezed their way down the narrow aisle between the bunks. At the doorway the girl hesitated.

'I've always known I'd be coming back to England,' she murmured. 'I guess I really didn't believe it.'

'Me neither,' confided Rusty.

The boy in the beige suit had saved them a place by the rail.

'How does my hair look?' asked Rusty. 'My ribbons don't look scrunched up, do they?'

He had a go at straightening the bows, but no sooner had he pushed one up higher than the other one looked too low.

'Oh,' he said, giving up, 'you look swell.'

'You really mean it?'

'Sure I do.' He looked puzzled for a moment. 'Do you know you have your cardigan on back of front?'

'Sure I do. It's the fashion.'

He grinned.

'Oh, you're just teasin'.'

He stepped back. 'How 'bout me? I brushed my hair.'

Rusty didn't have the heart to tell him that the knees of his suit looked as if he had been scrubbing the decks with them, and anyway, his hair did look tidier than usual.

'You look swell, too.'

Elbows on the rails, they gazed out at the approaching docks.

The ship moved heavily and slowly forward. It was a

dull sort of a day, thought Rusty, especially for summer, and the buildings around the docks seemed so ugly. She knew that they were still at war with Japan but somehow she had imagined that, because the war in Europe was over, everything would look bright and cheery.

A small group of people were clustered around the docks. Rusty grew aware that all the other children had stopped speaking and were just staring quietly at the great smoking funnels in the distance and the tugs in the nearby harbour.

Someone began waving. Rusty and the dark-haired girl joined in and soon all the other children and the waiting crowd were raising their arms. As the ship drew closer to land they could see that most of the group was made up of women.

'I guess those must be our mothers,' whispered the boy.

'Uh-huh.'

'Which one is yours?'

Rusty didn't recognize any of them. 'Uh. I don't think she's arrived yet. I guess she's waiting somewhere else.'

He nodded. 'Guess mine must be, too.'

They both began waving again.

'Do you think,' began the dark-haired girl hesitantly. 'Do you think they'll recognize us?'

'Sure they will,' he said. 'I know I've growed some, but my family, I mean,' he added, 'my American family, sent photographs of me.'

Mine too, thought Rusty, but not for nearly a year; and in the last ten months she had grown inches taller. She was big enough for some of Kathryn's clothes now, and Aunt Hannah had even bought her some brassieres.

She started waving vigorously again, aware that she was smiling and feeling very shy. Unusual for her.

Suddenly there was a great jostling of people around her. One of the escorts was ushering a group of children

past her towards the cabins to collect their luggage. Her two companions turned to follow them.

Rusty remained on her own by the railing. A flock of seagulls dipped and soared around the dark grey buildings that surrounded the docks. So this is it, she thought. England.