

Book Review: The Wreck of the Zanzibar

Author: Michael Morpurgo

This engrossing book by Michael Morpurgo has a poignant storyline about a close-knit family living on the island of Bryher in the Isles of Scilly. Although the story has a lot of sadness and hardship, it ends on a happy note. The story revolves around the lives of its main characters - Father, Mother, their children Billy and Laura and Granny May.

Life on the island of Bryher is tough and Laura's family make their living by selling milk and eggs and occasionally from the spoils of a wreck when the men of the island go out in the gig to rescue the people on board the wrecked ship. While Laura longs to row in the gig, father won't hear of it because in those days girls weren't allowed to row boats with men. As Laura deals with this disappointment, relations between Father and Billy are getting worse because of their constant arguments about their daily jobs. Like Laura, Billy longs to go out and see the world but Father won't let him.

An opportunity presents itself and Billy takes it. He leaves Bryher without saying goodbye to his family. Mother is heartbroken and retreats into her shell. The rest of the family, devastated, find their own ways of dealing with this grief. More misfortune strikes as a storm wipes out the cattle, the hens and ruins their houses. Things go from bad to worse before they start getting better towards the end.

What I really liked about the characters is their determination to carry on in the face of all odds and their undying love for Billy and the fervent hope that Billy will return. I was especially struck by Laura and Granny May's kindness and compassion in saving the dying turtle when they had been hungry for days and the turtle could have made a filling meal. Granny May believed that saving the turtle broke the cycle of misfortune and perhaps she was right. Her good deed brought them the good fortune they needed so badly.

I like Granny May the most because she never doubted that Billy would come back one day and saving the turtle will bring them good luck. She is very brave and is willing to wait for Billy on Bryher when everyone is leaving, even though she knows that she might die waiting.

My only criticism of the book is that there is perhaps a little too much misery and sadness in the book, but the author keeps the characters very real and as a reader, I felt very involved in their lives. I would recommend it to those who enjoy realistic stories.

Reviewed by: Mr. Newell