

HALF A MAN



Books by the same author

Homecoming

I Believe in Unicorns

The Kites are Flying!

Meeting Cézanne

The Mozart Question

My Father Is a Polar Bear

This Morning I Met a Whale

Beowulf

Hansel and Gretel

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

Singing for Mrs Pettigrew: A Story-maker's Journey

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Such Stuff: A Story-maker's Inspiration

The background of the cover is a solid grey. Scattered across it are several stylized bird silhouettes in flight. Some are white, and some are dark grey. They are positioned at various angles, suggesting movement across the sky.

HALF A MAN

Michael Morpurgo

illustrated by
Gemma O'Callaghan



WALKER
BOOKS

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictitiously. All statements, activities, stunts, descriptions, information and material of any other kind contained herein are included for entertainment purposes only and should not be relied on for accuracy or replicated, as they may result in injury.

First published in Great Britain 2005

This edition published 2016 by
Walker Books Ltd, 87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Text © 2005, 2006 Michael Morpurgo
Illustrations © 2014 Gemma O'Callaghan

The right of Michael Morpurgo and Gemma O'Callaghan to be identified as author and illustrator respectively of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book has been typeset in Adobe Caslon

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in an information retrieval system in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, taping and recording, without prior written permission from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-6713-3

www.walker.co.uk

*For Eric Pearce, whose
extraordinary courage inspired this story.*

*One of the very last of McIndoe's
"Guinea Pigs".*

M.M.

For Paul, Anne, Kirsty and Lorna

G.O'C.





When I was very little, more than half a century ago now, I used to have nightmares. You don't forget nightmares. This one was always the same. It began with a face, a twisted, tortured face that screamed silently, a face without hair or eyebrows, a skull more than a face, a skull

which was covered in puckered, scarred skin stretched over the cheekbones. It was Grandpa's face and he was staring at me out of his scream. And always the face was on fire, flames licking out of his ears and mouth.

I remember I always tried to force myself to wake up, so that I wouldn't have to endure the rest of it. But I knew every time that the rest would follow however hard I tried to escape – that my nightmare would not release me, would not allow me to wake until the whole horrible tale had played itself out.

I saw a great ship ablaze on the ocean. There were men on fire jumping overboard



as she went down, then swimming in a sea where the water burned and boiled around them. I saw Grandpa swimming towards a lifeboat, but it was packed with sailors and there was no room for Grandpa. He begged them to let him on, but they wouldn't. Behind him, the ship's bow lifted out of the sea, and the whole ship groaned like a wounded beast in her death throes. Then she went down, slipping slowly under the waves, gasping great gouts of steam in the last of her agony. A silence came over the burning sea. Grandpa was clinging to the lifeboat now, his elbows hooked over the side. That

was when I realized that I was in the lifeboat with the other sailors. He saw me looking down at him and reached out his hand for help. It was a hand with no fingers.

I would wake up then, shaking in my terror and knowing even now that my nightmare was not over. For my nightmare would always seem to happen just a day or two before Grandpa came to stay. It was a



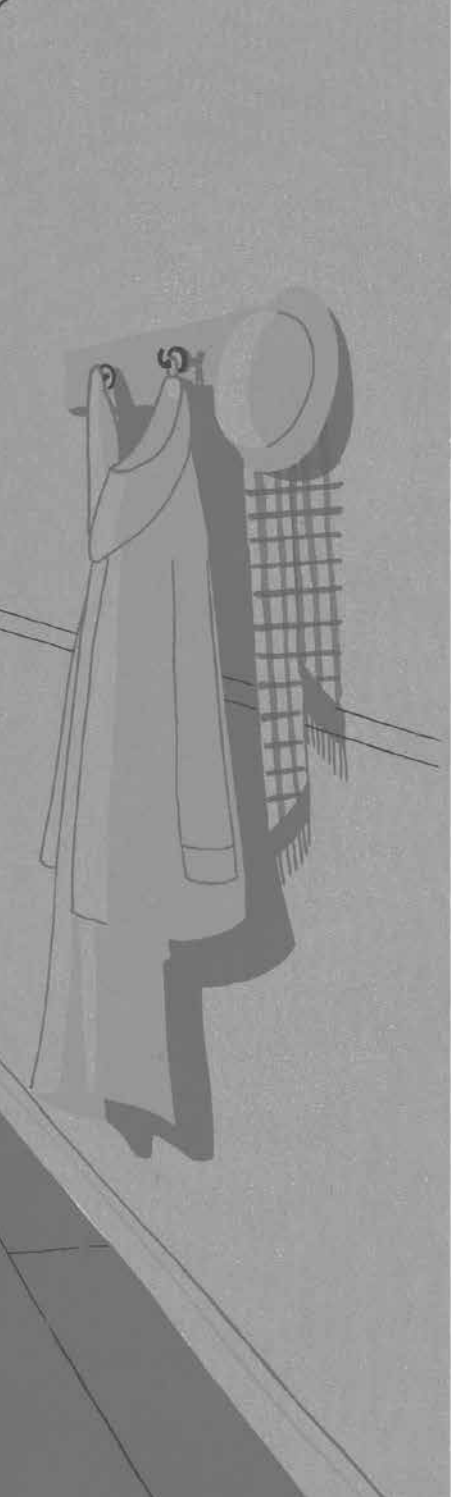
visit I always dreaded. He didn't come to see us in London very often, every couple of years at most, and usually at Christmas. Thinking about it now, I suppose this was part of the problem. There were perfectly good reasons why we didn't and couldn't see more of him. He lived far away, on the Isles of Scilly, so it was a long way for him to come, and expensive too. Besides which, he hated big cities like London. I'm sure if I'd seen him more often, I'd have got used



to him – used to his face and his hands and his silent, uncommunicative ways.

I don't blame my mother and father. I can see now why they were so tense before each visit. Being as taciturn and unsmiling as he was, Grandpa can't have been an easy guest. But, even so, they did make it a lot worse for me than they needed to. Just before Grandpa came there were always endless warnings, from Mother in particular (he was my grandpa on my mother's side), about how I mustn't upset him, how I mustn't leave my toys lying about on the sitting-room floor because he didn't see very well and might trip over





them, how I mustn't have the television on too much because Grandpa didn't like noise. But most of all they drummed into me again and again that whatever I did, I must not under any circumstances stare at him – that it was rude, that he hated people staring at him, particularly children.