

I don't read much these days. In fact, most of the reading I do is on instruction packets, the part that says 'microwave in a suitable container for 15 minutes' and I'll also look at the back of a cereal box every so often at breakfast. Beyond that, my eyes grow tired, and I decide it's not worth it to stress myself out so much. I've had the same book sitting on my bedside table for half a year and I still haven't finished it. I pick it up, read the first couple of pages, put it down and carry on with my life; it just doesn't 'pull me in,' and I know I'm not the only one who experiences this.

But it didn't use to be this way, when I was twelve years old my bookshelves were filled with *Goosebumps*, *Michael Morpurgo* and *Percy Jackson*. I used to spend the cool summers outside in a camping chair with my head in a book. I couldn't put it down until my dad's coarse voice would shout '*a tavola*' (come eat); I would always try and read for an extra five minutes but he'd eventually stand at my feet and ask me to come inside, and with a sigh, I'd get up to go eat. Sitting at the table, I used to go through the book in my mind, barely tasting the food I was putting in my mouth until my mum told me to slow down.

It makes me sad to think that nowadays these books are sitting in some forgotten corner of my parents' house, collecting dust, untouched and unwanted. However, there is one book I own that has survived multiple addresses, and although I don't read it often (sometimes years), I still think about it occasionally because it was my favourite book as a kid. It is a *Michael Morpurgo* book called *Born to Run*, which I received as a present for my tenth

birthday and it has stayed with me since. It kept me sheltered from the world when things got tough as a kid, kept me busy when I was bored out of my mind, and got me to sleep when nothing else would work.

The last time I read it was a week ago. I remember sitting in my garden on a mouldy patio chair, watching it get dark when out of nowhere the vague curiosity to read the book entered my mind, so I went inside and into my room where I pulled out a faded cardboard box from underneath my bed, mostly filled with junk I had collected throughout each address. I riffled through the box and fished out the book, it was small and worn but not absolutely destroyed; the deep creases on the spine showed that it had been well loved. A dog sat forlornly on the front cover, and inside the overleaf read 'Happy Birthday xx 2010.' I sat on the floor, my eyes adjusting to the size of font, it seemed I had grown familiar with 'adult' books, with their intimidating monolith of words and letters. The words on the pages in the *Morpurgo* book felt cosy with its big block letters that were so familiar to 11-year-old me. I spent the whole night turning its pages, lost in quiet concentration as the book slowly drew me in. I'd find grease marks and occasionally even small, scribbled illustrations on the dog-eared pages. At three o'clock in the morning I reached the end. Lazily, I lifted my eyes from the pages and watched inwardly, reminiscing, and sitting there unconsciously smiling.

The fact that I finished a book in one sitting is a sign that my love of reading never really went away in the first place, so why then is it so hard for me to pick up

a book nowadays? I think the blame lies with the fact that I no longer read for pleasure. I set the bar too high for myself, I try to read what challenges me, and what I think a 22-year-old should read. Sure, having this attitude has helped me become a wider reader and it's made me more knowledgeable, but it has made reading unenjoyable to the point where picking up a book just doesn't feel worth it. I think we would all benefit if we had a healthier attitude towards reading. Instead of dismissing children's and YA books because they're not challenging enough and therefore not worth our time, we should revisit these books and enjoy them as a child would: for fun.

