

7b English 2013

Goodnight Mister Tom



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Book Review Goodnight Mister Tom.

Goodnight Mister Tom traces the growth of William Beech from a sad, lonely and deprived child to a confident, assured and well-adjusted young boy. To begin with, William is described as being "*thin and sickly looking, pale with limp, sandy hair and dull grey eyes.*" However, we quickly learn that William's emaciated physical appearance is mirrored by his fragile and bruised character. William's mother has abused him to such an extent that he is unable to write, is terrified of authority and has a distorted understanding of morality.

Slowly, William's physical condition begins to improve. Good food, a warm bed and adequate clothing see William return to health:

*"Run," roared Tom,
And he and William tore down the pathway to the cottage."*

While William's physical condition improves quickly, the changes in his character are slower to manifest themselves. To begin with, William is painfully shy, he finds it difficult to make friends and is acutely aware of his own inability to write. In one memorable key moment in the novel, when William is asked to write,:

"His face had turned quite pale and beads of perspiration had broken out across his forehead."

Under Tom's loving care, William learns how to spell his own name and in the process of learning how to write, William's talent as an artist reveals itself. As autumn changes to early winter, William's growing closeness to Tom is matched by a corresponding growth in his self-confidence. He develops a friendship with Zacharias Wrench, learns how to read & write and plays the leading roll in a school play.

The insipid little boy who greeted Tom grows into a well-adjusted, confident person. The enormity of the transformation that takes place in William is signaled by his decision to change his name to Will. In this manner, William makes it clear that the person he once was is dead. Although William suffers greatly upon his return home and is nearly destroyed by the horror he experiences, he survives. When Tom rescues him and returns him to Little Weirwold, William is slowly healed. Other trials face him such as the death of his best friend, Zach, and the suicide of his mother. However, William has changed to such an extent that he meets and overcomes these challenges.

I found the final line of the novel particularly moving because it stresses the degree to which William has changed.

"Dad," repeated Will in a surprised tone, 'I'm growing!'"

A favourite section from Goodnight Mister Tom

Choose a favourite section from a novel or short story you have studied.

(i) Describe what happens in this section of your chosen text. (15)

(ii) Why is this your favourite section? Explain your answer with reference to the novel or short story you have chosen. (15)

(This would also work for a character sketch of Will)

The novel that I have studied is "Goodnight Mister Tom". Written by Michelle Magorian this novel traces the changing relationship between, Tom Oakley and a young evacuee, William Beech. The section of the novel that I have chosen includes William's arrival in Little Weirwold to his tragic return home.

In the opening pages of the Novel, we meet William Beech, a young, malnourished and excessively shy evacuee. He is literally dumped on Mister Tom

Oakley's front door. When Tom first sees William, he does not know what to make of him:

“The tales he had heard of evacuees didn't seem to fit Willie. 'Ungrateful' and 'wild' were the adjectives he had heard used or just plain 'homesick'. He was quite unprepared for this timid, sickly little specimen”.

Unfortunately, things become a great deal clearer for Mister Tom when he opens William's bag. There are no warm clothes, instead there is an old Bible and a leather belt intended for William's punishment. Tom quickly discovers that William is used to being beaten; he is covered in bruises and bleeding sores. Such is his terror of being beaten “when Tom picked up a piece of ember burning coal, William passed out with the fear of being branded”. Owing to his malnourishment, William finds it impossible to keep a proper meal down, he wets the bed, is illiterate and suffers from night terrors. However, under Tom's loving care William slowly begins to change both physically and emotionally. He gains confidence, learns to read and discovers talents that he never knew he had.

When William is forced to return home, the changes that have taken place in his character and appearance make him literally unrecognisable to his own mother:

It was Willie, but he had altered so much, she had been looking for a thin little boy dressed in grey.

For William, the return home is very painful. **“Suddenly, now, when his Mother referred to him as Willie it was as though she was talking to someone else”**. For her part, William's mother finds it impossible to accept the changes that have taken place in her son. She accuses him of stealing, lying, befriending girls and consorting with Jews. She metes out a disturbing level of corporal punishment and William retreats once more into himself:

He knew that she was hitting him but he felt numb and separated from himself.

For a short while, William even regrets having ever gone to “*Little Weirwold*”. I found this section of the novel very disturbing. He quietly admits to himself, that because of the changes wrought in his character by contact with Mister Tom, that he had grown soft. “*A wave of despair swept through him and he cursed his new awareness.*” The change in William is complete when he acknowledges to himself that he is neither William nor Willie but rather Will.

Goodnight Mister Tom is a deeply moving and at times harrowing novel to read. The section of the novel that I have just outlined is a favourite of mine because it takes us on an unforgettable journey, is realistically told and it is a full of dramatic moments.

William’s journey of growth from insipid, fearful little boy to a confident, loving and articulate young man is related to us in unforgettable detail. For me, the change that takes place in William’s character is best seen during his preparation for the school play. Here William demonstrates an inner confidence that is unimaginable earlier on in the novel. He draws on his awful experiences at home in order to give depth and life to the character that he is playing. I really enjoyed reading this section of the novel because Michelle Magorian allows us to enter fully into the lives of William and Mister Tom. We feel like we know these characters and we take genuine satisfaction in watching William change. In one particularly memorable key moment, Mister Tom is talking to Mrs Fletcher. During the conversation, he reminds us of the profound change that has come over William:

Do you know, Mrs Fletcher, last week he laughed. It were a bit of a nervous one like, but he actually laughed. It were the first time I ever heard him do it.

New Vocabulary

	MEANING
APPREHENSIVELY	
APTITUDE	
AUXILIARY	
BAIRNS	
BEWILDERED	
BLAND	
BRACKEN	
BRUSQUELY	
CADENCE	
CONFIDENTIAL	
CONTENTEDLY	
CONVALESCENT	
DEJECTEDLY	
DILAPIDATED	
DILEMMA	
DIRGE	
ENGULF	
EXASPERATION	
EXUBERANT	
FERVOUR	
FIGURATIVE	
FINALITY	
FOND	
GALOSHES	
GLUTINOUS	
IMPATIENTLY	
IMPOTENTLY	
INCONSPICUOUS	

INSOMNIA	
INTERMINABLE	
INTERMITTENT	
INTERPOSED	
LABORIOUSLY	
LATRINE	
MORGUE	
NONCHALANTLY	
NUBBLY	
OMINOUSLY	
PALLID	
PEWS	
PIEBALD	
PRECOCIOUS	
QUAGMIRE	
RAGGED	
RAVENOUS	
RECLUSE	
RECOLLECTED	
RECTORY	
RESIGNATION	
RETICENT	
RIVULETS	
SEDATION	
SEVERAL	
SHILLING	
SLAB	
SPRY	
STARVING	
STUPOR	
TANDEM	
TO BUNDLE	
TO CONDENSE	
TO CONFIDE	

TO DRONE	
TO EXCEL	
TO NAG	
TO REBUKE	
TO REEL	
TO REJUVENATE	
TO RETORT	
TO REVERBERATE	
TO SILHOUETTE	
UNDAUNTED	
VACANT	
VOLUBLE	

Key

Key Quotes

Chapter One: Meeting

Pg 10 – ‘The boy was thin and sickly-looking, pale with limp sandy hair and dull grey eyes.’

'Tom was well into his sixties, a healthy, robust, stockily-built man with a head of thick white hair. Although he was of average height, in Willie's eyes he was a towering giant with skin like coarse, wrinkled brown paper and a voice like thunder.'

' "Come on in," repeated Tom harshly. "I ent got all day."

Page 11 - ' "Go on," said Tom, "I told you before, I ent got all day. Now make a mark so's I know where to put a peg, see."

Page 12 - 'Willie tugged nervously at the tops of his woollen socks...'

Page 13 - 'One of his socks slid half-way down his leg, revealing a large multicoloured bruise on his shin and a swollen red sore beside.

"That's a nasty ole thing," Tom said, pointing to it. "What give you that?" Willie paled and pulled the sock up quickly.'

'Tom noticed another bruise on the boy's thigh, but said nothing.'

'Willie heard him slam the front door and listened to the sound of his footsteps gradually fading. He hugged himself tightly and rocked backwards and forwards on the stool. "I must be good," he whispered urgently, "I must be good," and he rubbed a sore spot on his arm. He was such a bad boy, he knew that. Mum said she was kinder to him than most mothers. She only gave him soft beatings. He shuddered. He was dreading the moment when Mr Oakley would discover how wicked he was. He was stronger-looking than Mum.'

Page 16 - with the squirrel: 'He was terrified and remained frozen in a crouched position.'

Page 17 - ' "Them poisonous dogs," he heard his mother's voice saying inside him. "One bite from them muts and you're dead. They got 'orrible diseases in 'em.'" (shortly after Willie thinks Tom will hit him with the branch that he picked up to protect himself from Sammy with)

Page 19 – Tom realises Willie thought he was going to hit or brand him with the hot poker! ‘ ‘E never thought...No...Surely not!’ he murmured. “Oh, Thomas Oakley, where ‘ave you landed yerself?”’

Page 20 – ‘ “Well, Sam,” Tom whispered, “I don’t know nothin’ about children, but I do know enuff not to beat ‘em and make ‘em that scared.”’

Chapter Two: Little Weirwold

Page 24 – ‘ Tom slowed down and Willie walked more easily beside him. He stared up at the gruff old man who was so kind to him.’

The note from Willie’s Mum (page 27 – 28) – ‘Like most boys he’s full of sin but he’s promised to be good...I’ve put the belt in for when he’s bad...

Tom was angry.

“While you’re in my house,” he said in a choked voice, “you’ll live by my rules. I ent ever hit a child and if I ever do it’ll be with the skin of me hand. You got that?” (Willie cries tears of joy and relief after this moment but after Tom has left the house.)

Chapter Three: Saturday Morning

Tom continues to show Willie patience and kindness; he discovers Willie cannot read or write so writes his postcard home for him; Willie fails to understand the importance of it being his 9th birthday on Thursday 7th September and Tom is surprised; Tom takes Willie to the shops where he sees Zach for the first time.

Chapter Four: Equipped

Tom takes Willie into town and buys him a sweet, a comic, clothes and pyjamas. We learn from the librarian that Tom is known for being emotionally distant and cold towards people and has kept to himself for years. In this chapter we see her surprise at how much Tom is looking out for this evacuee but we also see Tom’s surprise at the same thing.

Chapter Five: 'Chamberlain announces'

Building the Anderson shelter Tom protects Willie from embarrassing questions as to why, on a hot day, he won't remove all his warm clothes. Willie is ashamed of the 'marks of his sins' (his bruises and sores) and Tom steps in to save him by making up an excuse.

Chapter Six: Zach

Chapter Seven: An encounter over Blackberries

Meeting George, Carrie and Ginnie

Page 87 – 'A sudden burst of energy rose up inside him. It excited and frightened him. He had always been good at keeping still. It was wicked not to, he knew that, but now he felt a desperate desire to leap and jump.'

Chapter Eight: School

After being put down a class Tom offer's to help Willie read and write –

Page 102 - 'Willie's eyes stung as the ground moved in a gentle haze beneath him. He beamed. "Aw, mister," was all he could manage to say.

Tom was surprised to find a lump in his own throat.'

Willie copies what Tom shows him and writes his own name, he also draws two almost perfectly straight lines free-hand –

Page 104 – ' "That's very good," remarked Tom.

"Is it?"

"Don't you know?"

Willie shook his head.

Chapter Nine: Birthday Boy

Gifts on the breakfast table – page 108 ' "Are they fer me?" he asked in astonishment.'

Page 110 – ‘Willie looked lovingly at the paints and brushes and swallowed a pain that had risen at the back of his throat.

“I take it you like them,” murmured Tom. “I chose them meself, like.”

He glanced out of the window at the oak tree where Rachel and his son were buried. She used to hug and kiss him when he gave her presents. She loved painting, wild flowers and pretty lace, sweet jams, freshly brewed beer. Since her death he had never wanted to touch anything that might remind him of her. Trust a strange boy to soften him up. The odd thing was that, after he had entered the paint shop, he had felt as if a heavy wave of sadness had suddenly been lifted from out of him. Memories of her didn’t seem as painful as he had imagined.’ (It took love for William for Tom to move out of his years of grieving for his wife and back into living!)

After lunch Tom takes Willie to visit all the people who gave him gifts – ‘As for Tom, everyone was very surprised to see him, for he rarely visited anyone.’ (Willie has only been there for six days and already Tom is much changed and so is Willie although his transition will take longer due to his abuse. He requires much love...)

Chapter Ten: The Case

Chapter Eleven: Friday

After two months in Little Weirwold, Tom is chatting to Mrs Fletcher –

Page 134 – ‘ “He’s changed quite a bit in these last few weeks.” [said Tom]

So has you and all, thought Mrs Fletcher.

“Yes,” he went on, “ I almost fancy he’s grown a bit. It won’t do him no harm to be out of his mother’s apron-strings fer a bit longer. She puts the fear of the divvil into him anyways. Do you know, Mrs Fletcher, last week he laughed. It were a bit of a nervous one like, but he actually laughed. It were the first time I ever heard him do it.”

Chapter Twelve: The Show Must Go On

In which Willie finds he has the ability to act and grows somewhat in confidence and friendship with Zach, Carrie, Ginnie and George.

Chapter Thirteen: Carol Singing

Chapter Fourteen: New Beginnings

In which everything is going very well, it's January and Willie is moved up a class so is now with his friends. By the end of the chapter it is March and Willie has lived with Tom for seven months –

Page 174 – Willie sang as he walked down the lane. He was still bursting with energy.

“I don't care if there's even an air-raid drill tonight,” he said, grinning and twirling around. He ran into the cottage, flinging the back door open, his cheeks flushed with both pleasure and the cold wind. He tore off his coat, balaclava and scarf and burst into the front room.

Tom was standing by the range. He glanced at Willie and listened quietly to his chatter.’

The chapter ends with the letter from Willie's mum telling him to come home.

Chapter Fifteen: Home

His mum sees him for the first time in seven months – page 181 – ‘Here stood an upright, well-fleshed boy in sturdy ankle boots, thick woollen socks, a green rolled-top jersey, and a navy blue coat and balaclava. His hair stuck out in a shiny mass above his forehead and his cheeks were round and pink. It was a great shock to her.’

‘She had expected him to be more subservient but even his voice sounded louder.’

Page 185 – ‘Suddenly, now, when his Mother referred to him as Willie it was as though she was talking to someone else. He felt like two people. He knew she

wouldn't accept the Will side of him, only the Willie, and he didn't feel real when she called him that.'

After accusing him of stealing, lying, befriending girls and Jews, his mother beats him – page 192 – 'Something heavy hit him across the head and he sank into a cold darkness. He could still hear her screaming and he knew that she was hitting him but he felt numb and separated from himself. He had become two people and one of his selves was hovering above him watching what was happening to his body...

He felt as though he was a different person lying there in the dark. He was no longer Willie. It was as if he had said good-bye to an old part of himself. Neither was he two separate people. He was Will inside and out.

For an instant he wished he had never gone to Little Weirwold. Then he would have thought his Mum was kind and loving. He wouldn't have known any different. A wave of despair swept through him and he cursed his new awareness. He hadn't been used to this pain for a long time. He had softened.

"Mister Tom," he whispered in the darkness. "Mister Tom. I want you, Mister Tom,"

Chapter Sixteen: The Search

Chapter Seventeen: Rescue

Page 206 - 'The small alcove stank of stale urine and vomit. A thin emaciated boy with matted hair and skin like parchment was tied to a length of copper piping. He held a small bundle in his arms. His scrawny limbs covered with sores and bruises and he sat in his own excrement.'

Page 207 – 'The warden, realizing that the boy looked calmer when the old man was by him, left him to it and watched.'

Page 208 – 'I ent Willie'

Page 218 (in the hospital) ' "The boy ent had a lot of lovin'!"

"I'd like him back with me," said Tom firmly.

“I’m fond of the boy.”

Page 225 – ‘ “I kidnapped you,” he said over his shoulder and then he suddenly realized the enormity of what he had done and he burst into laughter. “Yes, that’s what I done boy. I kidnapped you!”’

‘ “I knew you’d bring him back,” Zach said fiercely, tears in his eyes.’

Chapter Eighteen: Recovery

Page 229 – ‘One night he was so feverish Tom stayed by his bed keeping watch.’

Page 231 – ‘ “They’ll git stronger. Remember...” but Will finished the sentence for him.

“Everythin’ has its own time,” and he laughed.’ (This quote shows how united Will and Tom have become that they can finish each other’s sentences, and how strong Tom’s voice is in Will’s mind) ‘It was good to see Will smile again. It made Tom feel lively, rejuvenated...As Tom broke an egg into the frying pan he started singing. He too felt released.’

Page 238 – ‘ “But why did you kidnap me then?”

“They were goin’ to put you in a children’s home. I wanted you back here.”

“Why?”

“Why? Well,” and in an embarrassed manner he puffed out a billow of smoke from his pipe. “Because I’m fond of you, boy. That’s why. I missed you,” (Will’s response)

“I love you,” and instead of the cold feeling he imagined would happen if he uttered those words, he felt a wave of warmth flooding into his stomach and through to his chest, and he beamed. Mister Tom’s face became flushed. He cleared his throat.

“I love you too, boy,” he grunted. “And now I’ll git on with downstairs,” and he disappeared quickly down the ladder.’

Page 243 – ‘As they walked home Will felt suddenly lighter. Tom had been right. He couldn’t have given Trudy what she had needed. It wasn’t his fault that she had

died. He was still saddened by her death but the awful responsibility that had weighed so heavily on him had now lifted.'

Chapter Nineteen: The Sea, the Sea, the Sea!

(When they first see the sea Will and Zach do the following)

Page 245 – 'Flinging their bicycles into the hedgerows they leapt and pranced about waving their arms in the air and yelling at the tops of their voices, and when suddenly Will and Zach realized that Tom was dancing too, they clutched their stomachs and laughed hysterically till the tears rolled down their cheeks.'

Page 247 - 'Will had imagined that the sea would terrify and engulf him but instead he felt surprisingly calm. It seemed as if his mind had suddenly opened and all his worries, painful memories and fears were flooding to the surface and drifting away.'

Chapter Twenty: Spooky Cott

Where Will is the bravest one to approach the supposedly haunted cottage, meets an artist who tells him he has a gift – excited Will goes home to find a policeman, psychologist, social worker and the London ARP warden in the house. Will is defiant about talk of him leaving – he is not the boy he was at the beginning of the story.

Page 270 – ' "When you kidnap someone you usually want a ransom. There ent no one in the world who'd pay a ransom for me," and he glanced at Tom, "except Mister Tom perhaps and he's the one that's supposed to have kidnapped me. Well, I reckon I weren't kidnapped. I reckon I was rescued."

Tom is told he can adopt Will:

Page 273 – 'In an instant it suddenly dawned on him that Will would be growing up with him. With a great yell of joy he leapt up from the armchair.

Will threw his arms around him and together they danced and cavorted across the room shouting and yelling while Sammy whirled around their ankles chasing his tail and barking in lunatic fashion.'

Chapter Twenty – One: Back to School`

Zach insists on going home for the weekend to see his injured father, Will's 10th birthday and Zach dies in the bombing.

Page 279 – 'The high spot of the party, however, was when everyone swarmed round the cottage screaming hysterically and hiding from Tom who was chasing them and pretending to be a monster at the same time.'

Chapter Twenty-Two: Grieving

Page 282 - ' "I ent got anything left inside me," Will would say repeatedly, for he felt that half of himself had been cut away, that life without Zach was only half a life and even that half was empty.'

Page 289 – after confronting Zach's death and his anger at it, Will falls asleep in the freezing woods, on arriving home he says: ' "I'm sorry, Dad."...It wasn't until Will was asleep and Tom was lying in his own bed that he allowed the full impact of Will's words to sink in.

"He called me Dad," he whispered croakily into the darkness. "He called me Dad." And, although he felt overwhelmed with happiness, the tears ran silently down his face.'

Will has come to grips with Zach's death and so happily wears Zach's old things and even bunks school to teach himself how to ride Zach's bike.

Page 291 – 'Undaunted, he clambered back on again and each time he swerved and fell, he only grew more determined.'... 'He could hear his Dad's words over and over again inside his head. "Takes yer time, everythin' 'as its own time"' 'As he rode, his coat flapping behind him, the crisp wind cooling his face, he suddenly felt that Zach was no longer beside him, he was inside him and very much alive. The numbness in his body had dissolved into exhilaration.'

Page 294 – 'During the weeks that followed the bicycle-riding incident everyone noticed a dramatic change in Will...' (Will asks to cast as Captain Hook in the play a very flamboyant role but Will is behaving like this) 'It was so obvious that

the audience loved Will, that when several of the children pushed him forward to take a separate bow the hall erupted into cheers.

Tom was terribly proud of him but then he had been for a long time.' Will realises that ... 'the Zach part of himself, the outgoing, cheeky part of himself, had been buried inside him and it was his friendship with Zach that had brought those qualities to the surface.'

Chapter Twenty-Three: Postscript

Will helps Carrie come to terms with Zach's death. Will realises how much he has changed... READ PAGE 303 and 304 note how Will has changed since the incidents with the peg, the fear of Sammy, the age of Tom...Will is growing.