

Goodnight Mister Tom

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For the television adaptation, see [Goodnight Mister Tom \(1998 film\)](#).

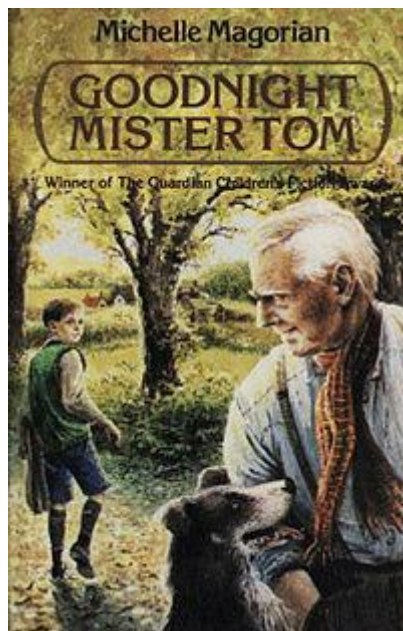
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Goodnight Mister Tom



Author(s) [Michelle Magorian](#)

Genre(s) [Historical novel](#)

Publisher [Kestrel Books](#)

Publication date 1981

Media type Print ([Hardback](#) & [Paperback](#))

Pages 304 pp (first edition, hardback)

[ISBN](#) [0722657013](#)

[OCLC](#) Number [9987640](#)

Goodnight Mister Tom (also *Good Night, Mr Tom*) is a [novel](#) by [Michelle Magorian](#). It follows a young boy, William Beech, who is [evacuated from London](#) during the Blitz of [World War II](#), and put into the care of Tom Oakley, an elderly recluse. Thanks to Tom, William Beech is able to experience a new life of loving and care.

Two musicals based on the book have been written and a [film has been made](#). There is also a new play of Goodnight Mister Tom, adapted for the stage by national children's dramatist David Wood, which opened in early 2011.

[\[edit\]](#) Summary

As Britain stands on the brink of [World War II](#), many young children from the cities are sent into the countryside to escape the German bombardment. William "Willie" Beech, a boy from [London](#), is one of these children. An unhappy, deprived child, he finds kindness and love in the home of Mr. Thomas Oakley, a [widower](#) in his sixties who lives in the village of Little Weirwold. The book is set between September 1939 and the spring of 1941.

The protagonist, William, is a child who is physically and emotionally abused by his violent and religious mother, who was widowed some years earlier. He arrives at Mr. Tom's house, thinly clad, underfed and covered with painful bruises, and believing he is full of sin, a result of his upbringing by his mother who inflicts severe punishments and uses excuses such as "If you do such a thing, you will go to hell" and "That is a sin".

However, Mr. Tom, as William calls him, does not punish William as his mother had. Mr. Tom shows him an understanding he has not previously experienced. Although William wets the bed for some time after moving into the house, Mr. Tom merely helps him change the bedding without complaint. Having seen William's bruises, and realising that William comes from an abusive home, Mr. Tom helps the boy through many challenges and gives him a healthy, happy home. William is addressed as "William" by Mr. Tom, "Willie" by his mother and "Will" by his friends. William Beech is improving and progressing a lot with the help and comfort of Mr. Tom.

William begins to trust Mr. Tom and the world around him. When William goes to school he is astonished that the children and teachers support and care for him. He forms a small circle of friends among his classmates: Zach, George, Carrie, and Ginnie. He is also fond of one of his teachers, Annie Hartridge.

As William is changed by Mr. Tom, so is Mr. Tom transformed by William's presence in his home. It is revealed that Mr. Tom lost Rachel, his wife, and soon afterwards his baby son, to [scarletina](#) some 40 years earlier, and he has become reclusive because of it. The villagers avoid him because of his apparent coldness. However, when William arrives, Mr. Tom immediately demonstrates his kind nature by acquiring good, warm clothing and nourishing food, specially cooked breakfasts and tea. He helps to educate William by reading him Bible passages and teaching him to write. Finally Mr. Tom overcomes a major personal barrier by entering an art store, something he had previously found difficult as Rachel had been a painter. William becomes proficient in drawing and dramatics in the village.

The growing bond between the two is upset when William's mother requests that the boy return to her in the city, telling him she is sick and needs him back at home for a while. At first, William thinks this will be a good thing, so he can be helpful to his mother. However his mother is not pleased to learn the details of his time with Mr. Tom, feeling that he has not been disciplined properly. While William has been away, she has become pregnant and had a girl, but has neglected the baby. After a bad reunion (in which she is furious with him for making a [Jewish](#) friend in Zach, and pointing out that [Jesus](#) was a Jew) she slaps him, and

then inquires as to where he got the art set from. She accuses him of stealing it, throws William against a bookcase, knocking him out, then ties, gags him, and locks him, with the baby, in a cupboard under the stairs.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Tom has a premonition that something is not right with William. Although he has never travelled beyond his immediate locality, he ventures into London and, with luck, locates William's neighbourhood of [Deptford](#) and eventually his home. No-one answers the door when he knocks, but he persuades the local policeman to break down the door, where they are greeted by a vile stench. There he finds William locked in the closet, holding a small, still bundle; the dead baby girl his mother had given birth to. An empty bottle is at his feet. William is malnourished and badly bruised, with a chronic illness, as he had been locked under the stairs for a number of days. When he realises that the baby is dead, he blames himself for the baby's death and can hardly speak. Later, when Annie Hartridge has her baby, William is shocked to learn from Zach that a woman cannot conceive a child on her own, and realises that his mother was having a relationship with a man, even though she had previously told him that it was wrong for unmarried couples to live together or have children together.

William goes to the hospital, where he is treated awfully and experiences terrible nightmares, mainly about the doctor. The nurse then comes round and drugs him so he'll fall asleep and stop screaming, though he'll wake up a few hours later and the process will be repeated. Mr. Tom 'kidnaps' William from the hospital and takes him back to Little Weirworld. However, Mr. Tom is traced by the authorities, who have come to offer William a place in a children's home, and to tell him that his mother is dead; she had committed suicide. They are unable to trace any other relatives who may have been able to take care of him. Luckily the authorities realise that William has already found a good home and allow Mr. Tom to adopt him.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Tom, William and Zach enjoy a holiday at Salmouth, a small seaside village. They have such a good time and Zach renames the village Salt-on-the-Mouth.

Zach then receives news that his father has been injured by a [Luftwaffe](#) bomb in London and he hurries home on the next train saying farewell to all his friends. This is the last time they hear from him.

William later learns that Zach has been killed and is grief-stricken for some time. Carrie, Ginnie, and George are also extremely upset. Eventually, through learning to ride Zach's bike (given to him by Zach's host, the doctor), William realises that Zach lives on inside him. The ending scene is a heart-warming one, when William learns to ride the bike by going down a hill and sees Mr. Tom waiting for him. They both hug each other and William, happily, calls him Dad.

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