

From *The Mozart Question* by Michael Morpurgo

The question I am most often asked is always easy enough to answer. Question: how did you get started as a writer? Answer: funnily enough, by asking

someone almost exactly that very same question, which I was only able to ask in the

first place by a dose of extraordinarily good fortune.

I had better explain.

My good fortune was, of course, someone else's rotten luck – it is often that way, I find. The phone call sounded distraught. It came on a Sunday evening. I had only been working on the paper for three weeks. I was a cub reporter, this my first paid job.

"Lesley?" It was my boss, chief arts correspondent Meryl Monkton, a lady not to be messed with. She did not waste time with niceties; she never did. "Listen, Lesley, I have a problem. I was due to go to Venice tomorrow to interview Paulo Levi."

"Paulo Levi?" I said. "The violinist?"

"Is there any other Paulo Levi?" She did not trouble to hide her irritation.

"Now look,

Lesley. I've had an accident, a skiing accident, and I'm stuck in hospital in Switzerland.

You'll have to go to Venice instead of me."

"Oh, that's terrible," I said, smothering as best I could the excitement surging inside me.

Three weeks into the job and I'd be interviewing the great Paulo Levi, and in Venice!

Talk about her accident, I told myself. Sound concerned. Sound very concerned.

"How did it happen?" I asked. "The skiing accident, I mean."

"Skiing," she snapped. "If there's one thing I can't abide, Lesley, it's people feeling sorry for me."

"Sorry," I said.

"I would postpone it if I could, Lesley," she went on, "but I just don't dare. It's taken

more than a year to persuade him to do it. It'll be his first interview in years. And even

then I had to agree not to ask him the Mozart question. So don't ask him the Mozart

question, is that clear? If you do he'll like as not cancel the whole interview – he's

done it before. We're really lucky to get him, Lesley. I only wish I could be there to do it myself. But you'll have to do."

"The 'The Mozart question?' I asked, rather tentatively.

The silence at the end of the phone was long.