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Opening extract from

Sky Hawk

Written by

Gill Lewis

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For
Roger
Georgie, Bethany and Jemma

and for
Huw
who still walks with me across the mountains

'Sky Hawk is a book almost as incredible as the ospreys it is written about; with vivid descriptions that have made this book my new favourite. It is like a Michael Morpurgo novel, only even better, containing brilliant characterisation, as well as much more. I love how the osprey makes and breaks friendships. I couldn't ask for more in a book.'

Arthur, age 12

'I really enjoyed reading Sky Hawk. Some parts had me sitting up straight in my bed eager to read more. All of the characters were believable and realistic. Iona's and Callum's friendship for each other and loyalty for Iris is really special.'

Millie, age 11

'I was totally absorbed by this wonderful book which was full of many happy and sad moments. The book taught me lots about the life of the osprey and at times, I felt as though I was in the story too. I would recommend this book to children aged ten and up, particularly if they are nature lovers, but not afraid to shed a tear! Marks out of ten: eleven!'

Harry, age 10

'Sky Hawk is a gripping story. Gill Lewis captures you and sweeps you to the Scottish countryside. When I read this book, it made me feel like I was standing there with Callum and Iona next to me, watching the nest. The ending was very beautiful. I would recommend this book to anyone aged 10 and up, especially animal lovers.'

Elsie, age 11



Prologue

The pattern of this landscape is folded deep, deep within her memory. She rides the currents of air that curl like rapids over the mountains. Below, the lochs reflect the cloud and sunlight. They lie in the valleys like scattered fragments of fallen sky. The cold north wind carries the remembered scent of pine and heather. The ice-carved valleys guide her.

She is coming.



Chapter 1

I saw her first, a pale skinny girl lying on a flat rock below the rapids. She was leaning out over the edge, reaching down into a deep pool of still water. Swirls of river foam clung to the bottom of her rolled-up sleeves and the floating ends of her long red hair. She was watching something in the dark river-shadows.

Rob and Euan pulled up beside me by the gap in the trees, their bike tyres skidding on the muddy track.

'What you looking at, Callum?' said Rob.

'Someone's down there,' I said, 'a girl.'

Euan pushed away a pine branch to get a better view down to the river. 'Who is it?'

'Dunno,' I said. 'She's nuts though. It must be freezing in there.' I looked up and down the river to see if she was with

anyone, but there was no one. She was on her own.

The river was fast and swollen from the heavy rains. It came down from the loch in the high glen above us. Late March snow still clung to the mountain gullies. The loch and river were cold as ice.

'She's on our river,' scowled Rob.

The girl slipped her arm in deeper. Water crept over her sleeve and up to her shoulder.

'What's she doing?' I said.

Euan dropped his bike onto the ground. 'Fishing, that's what.'

The girl plunged forwards in a blur of spray. When she sat back up, she was clutching a massive brown trout. It flapped and thrashed in her wet hands. She flicked her hair back over her head, and for the first time we could clearly see her face.

'I know her,' said Rob.

I turned to look at him. His face was dark and grim.

'Who is she?' I said.

But Rob was already off his bike and marching down the riverbank towards her.

'Rob,' I called.

The girl looked up and saw us, and tried to hide the fish in her arms. Euan and I ran down to the water's edge

following Rob. A narrow channel of fast water ran between us and the girl.

Rob yelled across at her. 'Iona McNair!'

The girl scrambled to her feet.

Rob leapt across to the flat rock and grabbed her arm. 'You're a thief, Iona McNair, just like your ma.'

The girl struggled to hold the slippery fish. 'I'm not stealing,' she cried.

Rob pulled the fish off her and jumped back onto the riverbank. 'Then what d'you call this?' He held the fish up high. 'This is Callum's river and you're stealing.'

They all looked at me now.

'What about it, Callum?' said Rob. 'What's the punishment for fishing on your farm without a permit?'

I opened my mouth but no words came out.

'I don't need a permit,' spat Iona, 'I didn't use a rod.'

'You're a thief,' shouted Rob. 'And we don't want you here.'

I looked at Iona and she narrowed her eyes at me.

Rob dropped the thrashing fish on the ground and picked up a plastic bag next to Iona's coat on the riverbank. 'What else have you got in here?'

'Leave it, it's mine,' yelled Iona.

Rob tipped out a pair of old trainers and a tatty notebook.

He picked up the notebook from the ground and flicked the mud from it.

Iona jumped across to the riverbank and tried to snatch it from him. 'Give it back. It's secret.' She bit her lip, as if she'd said too much.

Her hands were shaking, and her arms and feet were blue with cold.

'Give it back, Rob,' I said.

'Yeah,' said Euan. 'Come on, Rob, let's go.'

'Wait a sec,' said Rob. He started flicking over the pages. 'Let's see what secret she's trying to hide.'

Iona tried to grab the book, but Rob held it out of reach, laughing.

'What's your secret, Iona McNair?' he taunted.

The pages fluttered in the breeze. I glimpsed pencil drawings of animals and birds, and lots of scribbled notes. A page hung open on a painting of the loch in deep greys and purples.

Iona jumped and tore the book from his hands. She leapt across to the flat rock and held the book over the water. 'I'll never tell you,' she cried, 'never.'

Rob took a step towards her. 'Come on. Let's see.'

Iona's face was fierce and set.

'Leave it, Rob,' I shouted.

Euan tried to pull him away, but Rob shook him off.

'What's the big secret, Iona?' shouted Rob. He lunged towards her.

Iona leapt across the rocks to the far riverbank. It was an impossible leap. She slipped on wet rock and went tumbling into a deep pool on the far side. The notebook flew from her hand and spun through the air before it hit the fast-water and was gone. Iona scrambled out of the river and disappeared up the steep bank into dense pine forest. The river surged down the valley between us, taking the notebook and Iona's secret away down with it.