

*'Opens your eyes, touches your heart,
and is so engaging it almost turns the pages for you.'*

Michael Morpurgo

*'Rich in atmosphere and full of heart, Sky Hawk
is an intense and touching story . . . A book to treasure.'*

LoveReading4kids.com

'A heart-soaring read.'

The Big Issue

*'An edge-of-your-seat wildlife adventure that tells a very
human story of friendship, discovery and an incredible journey. I loved it!'*

Kate Humble, Presenter of BBC's Springwatch

'A truly moving and inspiring tale of wildlife, friendship and growing up.'

TBK Magazine

'Lewis shows beautifully how there is always hope in sadness.'

Literary Review

'This beautifully written, captivating book should be on everyone's bookcase.

Breathtaking. Poignant. Unforgettable.'

Virginia McKenna, Founder of the Born Free Foundation

*'The reader is held spellbound by the intensity of the writing and the
optimism in the message. This is a book for everyone from 8 to 80+!'*

The School Librarian

'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, 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.'

ELISE, AGE 11

Sky Hawk

Gill Lewis

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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

CHAPTER 1

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

Sky Hawk

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.

CHAPTER 1

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.

Sky Hawk

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.



CHAPTER 2

Euan turned on Rob. ‘What d’you do that for? It was three against one. She was on her own.’

Rob kicked the heather and stared at the far riverbank. ‘My dad lost his business because of her ma.’ He turned, grim-faced, to Euan. ‘She stole every last bit of his money and ran off. She wouldn’t dare put a foot in Scotland again.’

‘That was years ago,’ I said. ‘What’s Iona doing back here now?’

‘Stealing for her ma probably,’ snapped Rob. ‘They’re a bad lot, the McNairs. My dad will never forgive that family for what she did.’

Euan spat on the ground and glared at Rob. ‘What’ll you do with that fish?’

Sky Hawk

Rob picked up the trout. It was dead. Its body had lost its bright sheen and its eyes were dull and glassy. He turned to me and shoved it in my deep coat pocket. 'It's your river, so it's your fish.'

'I don't want it,' I said.

But Rob just scowled at me and marched up to the bikes.

'She's left her coat and trainers,' I said to Euan.

'Best leave them,' he said, following Rob. 'She'll find them on her way back.'

Euan cycled off behind Rob, and I watched them skid and bump down the muddy track.

I pulled my hood up, clipped my cycle helmet over the top and stuffed my hands into my gloves. I looked up and down the far riverbank to see if I could catch a glimpse of the girl. I spotted her higher up the valley, a small figure in the distance heading up towards the loch. A cold wind was blowing through the trees. Rain was coming, I could feel it. I pushed off and followed Rob and Euan down the steep track alongside the river, but all the time I couldn't help thinking we should wait for her.

Euan and Rob were waiting for me by the old quarry.

Euan held open the gate to the mineral track that led down to the village in the valley below. 'You coming with us?' he said.

CHAPTER 2

I shook my head. 'I'll go home across the fields from here. It's quicker.'

I watched them disappear down the mineral track towards the dull orange glow of streetlights in the distance. Daylight was fading fast. It would be dark soon.

Rain started to fall, cold and sharp, like needles of ice. I looked back hoping to see Iona, but I couldn't see her anywhere. She had no coat or shoes, and her clothes were soaked from the river. She would freeze if she stayed up here. People died in these mountains every year, caught out by the weather, unprepared.

I turned my bike and headed back the way I'd come to look for her. Streams of water ran through the deep ruts. I picked up Iona's coat and trainers on the way and stopped at the top of the track to get my breath back. The steep wooded shores of the loch were hidden by the rain. Iona could be anywhere.

I followed the path around to the far side of the loch, calling her name. The clouds were low and heavy. Dark waves slapped against the rocks.

'Iona,' I shouted, but my voice was carried off by the wind.

Maybe I had passed her. Maybe she was already on her way back to the village. I couldn't stay up here all night.

I turned my bike round to head home but my tyre

Sky Hawk

side-slipped on a rock. I glanced down to see a bare footprint in the mud beside it. Rain had already puddled in the heel and toes.

Iona had come this way.

I jumped off my bike and followed the footprints. It wasn't far along the track before they disappeared. I guessed Iona had left the path and entered the woodland. Moss and pine needles covered the floor.

'Iona,' I called. 'I've got your coat.'

I walked further into the wood. It was dark under the cover of trees, almost too dark to see. I knew Mum and Dad would be wondering where I was.

'Iona,' I called again. But there was no answer.

I turned to go back to my bike, and jumped. Iona stood right in front of me. She had an oversize jumper on, jogging bottoms and a woolly hat that came down over her ears. But her feet were still bare and she shivered with cold.

'I've got your coat and trainers,' I said. I shoved them in her hands. 'Put them on and go home. It'll be dark soon.' I looked around but couldn't see where she'd got her dry clothes from.

Iona pulled her coat on, sat down on a rock and pushed her feet into her trainers. Her hands were shaking and her fingers were blue. She fumbled uselessly with the laces.

CHAPTER 2

I knelt down and tied them up.

She glared at me as I stood up. 'You can't stop me coming here.'

'You heard Rob,' I said. 'You're not wanted. We know you're here now. We'll find you.'

'I have to come back,' she said. The words slipped out, they were barely a whisper.

I shook my head.

'I wasn't stealing,' she said, her teeth chattering. 'I *didn't* have a rod.'

I reached into my coat pocket. 'Have the fish and go,' I said. I threw it on the ground next to her. It rolled in the dirt, coming to rest at her feet.

Iona looked at me and swirled patterns in the pine needles on the ground with her fingers. Circles, round and round and round. 'If you let me back, I'll tell you the secret,' she said.

I stared at her.

She stood up and faced me. 'It's here, on your farm.'

'I know everything on this farm,' I said.

Iona shook her head. 'You don't. You don't know anything about it. No one does.'

'What makes you so sure?' I said.

She glared at me. 'I just know.'

Sky Hawk

How could she know something about my farm that I didn't? Maybe her grandad knew something. Mr McNair was as old as the hills. He used to farm the land next to ours before he moved into the village. But that was years ago, before I was even born.

'What is it then?' I said.

'If I tell you,' she whispered, 'you mustn't tell anyone about it, not your friends, not anyone.'

We just stood, staring at each other in the half light. Wind rushed through the pine branches above us. Rainwater dripped from the trees and pattered on the forest floor.

'All right,' I said.

'And you'll let me back on your farm?' Iona spat on her palm and held it out.

I pulled off my glove, spat on my hand and shook hers. 'Deal.'

She swept her matted hair away from her eyes. 'Tomorrow morning, then,' she said. 'Meet me here, at the loch.'

She picked up the fish, disappeared through the dark trees, and was gone.



CHAPTER 3

It was dark as I cycled down through the fields to the farmhouse. The rain had eased off but I was soaked through. It was hard going, the tyres sucked and slid through the sticky mud. The lights were on in the kitchen, and I could see Mum talking on the phone. I pushed my bike past the lambing shed and kicked the gate open into the yard.

The lambing shed door flung open outlining Dad's silhouette in the doorway.

'Callum, is that you?'

'Yes, Dad.'

'Where've you been?' he said. 'You should have been back hours ago.'

'My bike chain came off,' I lied. 'I'm sorry.'

Sky Hawk

‘Go and tell that to your mum,’ said Dad. ‘She’s phoned up half the village trying to find out where you are. She’s sent Graham out looking for you. He’s mad about it. He’s meant to be going out to see a band tonight. I’d better text him.’

I leaned my bike against the wall, kicked my boots off and slipped into the kitchen. My feet left big wet footprints across the stone floor.

‘Look at the state of you,’ said Mum. ‘I was worried sick. You were meant to be back before dark. Rob and Euan said that you’ve all been up on the river. Graham’s up there now, looking for you.’

‘Dad’s texted him,’ I said.

‘Go and get changed into some dry clothes and have your tea,’ said Mum. ‘I’d avoid Graham, if I were you.’

I climbed the stairs to my room and pulled off my wet clothes. My fingers were uselessly cold. I put on a jumper and a fleece, my lined combats and two pairs of socks, but I was still freezing. I thought of Iona. Wherever she was staying, I hoped she’d got there by now. What if she hadn’t? I knew where her grandad lived at the edge of the village, but he was Mad Old McNair. I wasn’t going there.

I went back down to the kitchen and sat at the table. Dad was there too, tucking into meat pie and chips.

The door slammed and Graham walked past. He didn't even look at me.

Mum passed me a plate of food. I was starving.

Boots clumped on the path outside, and there was a loud knock on the door.

'Come in, Flint,' Mum called.

Flint, Rob's older cousin, came through the door in his bike leathers, helmet in hand. Friday night. He and Graham were going to see a band in the next town.

'Graham won't be long,' said Mum. 'You'll have some pie, won't you, Flint?'

Flint grinned. 'I'd never turn down a piece of your pie, Mrs McGregor. You know me.'

He sat down at the table and leaned into me and whispered, 'I hear you're in the dog-house, little man.'

I forked another chip.

'If it's any comfort,' Flint went on, so Mum and Dad could hear, 'Auntie Sal gave Rob an earful when he got home. He was soaking wet, looked like a drowned rat. He went to bed without any supper.'

I finished my pie. Had Rob told his mum about Iona? I guessed not.

I tried to change the subject. 'Our family's farmed this land for over a hundred years, hasn't it?' I said.

Sky Hawk

Dad looked up. 'About that,' he said. 'Why?'

'Are there any secrets here?'

'Secrets?' said Dad. 'What sort of secrets?'

At that moment Graham walked into the room. He'd showered and changed into his bike leathers. He smelled of shampoo and aftershave. 'There's only one secret I know,' he said, looking right at me. 'It's the shallow grave I'll shove you in, if you *ever* make me late again.'

'Graham!' said Mum. But Graham was already on the way out through the door.

'Thanks, Mrs McGregor,' said Flint following Graham out into the yard.

Their motorbikes roared into life and I watched as the headlights zigzagged down the farm track.

'I can't think of any secrets,' said Dad. 'Why d'you ask?'

I shrugged my shoulders. 'It doesn't matter,' I said. But deep inside I couldn't help feel that there was something none of us knew about, a secret hidden somewhere in the hills and valleys of our farm.

And tomorrow, I was going to find out.