

A Note from MEG ROSOFF

Did I offer to finish Mal's book or did he ask me? I can't remember.

At the time, it seemed a simple thing to do—his death was unimaginable, so the promise would never be cashed in.

But he did die.

So I read the manuscript and went to work. It helped that I loved it, and loved hearing Mal's voice in every page.

I knew from the start that I couldn't write the way he did, but I could write alongside him, shape the narrative, develop the characters he'd just sketched in. I knew exactly what to do, not because he'd told me (we never discussed it), but because the manuscript read like a guide to a landscape I intuitively understood.

It's a strange process, finishing someone else's book. If Mal had been alive, I'd have phoned him every ten minutes to ask if it was okay to change something here, edit something there, make a decision about plot or dialogue or character development. Instead, I was left to raise the baby as my own—with the invaluable help of Mal's wife and creative partner, Elspeth Graham. We made decisions that we hoped he'd have countenanced, perhaps enjoyed. The best thing about working on the book was how present he still felt in my life. Writing together was a conversation we could still have.

By the time the book was finished, I couldn't always remember which parts I'd written and which Mal had. The story and the characters and the most original beautiful turns of phrase were obviously Mal's. Could anyone else write a line (muttered by the young Beck upon discovering one of the Christian Brothers in the bath) like "Jaysus, yer lookin' at a priest in the nip!"

Beck is Mal's book. Like all his work, it's bold and compassionate, unsparing, moving, and joyously, mordantly funny. Each page is shot through with Mal's sharp observations, his affection for human frailty, and his own gigantic passion for life.

I hope you like it.

I hope he likes it, too.

Meg Rosoff

