

A NOTE FROM
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When I was fifteen, I trekked from the west coast of Scotland to the east coast—a journey similar to that made by the characters in the book—with nothing but a tent, a sleeping bag, and a (much-needed) waterproof coat. When it stopped raining long enough for me to appreciate the views, I was taken aback by how incredibly beautiful the country was: stark, sweeping landscapes punctuated by shimmering lochs and dramatic rock formations. There’s something about the brisk air and sheer vastness of the countryside that is incredibly humbling, especially when walking across it on foot. Being at the mercy of Scotland’s uncompromising weather is also an extraordinary experience, with its ability to demoralize one moment and invigorate the next. I found this dichotomy intriguing, that a place could simultaneously be both desperately bleak and incredibly beautiful. I’ve visited and worked in Scotland many times since that first trip, and I’ve always known that it was going to be the setting for my debut novel. I also knew that the book would feature one of Scotland’s most iconic animals: the Highland bull. They are such stunning creatures, and they share Scotland’s contradictory nature, being as rough as they are regal. The first time I came face-to-face with one, it was easy to imagine I was looking at a mythical creature, and I instantly fell in love with them as a result.

For me, the story of *The Good Hawk* started with the image of a girl, which popped into my head out of nowhere. She stood on a wall, looking out to sea, while a harsh wind whipped at her hair. The only things I knew about her were that she was brave, was incredibly loyal, and had Down syndrome. What followed next was a series of questions: Who was the girl, and why was she there? What was the danger she was looking out for? Who was she trying to protect? As I answered these questions, a whole world started to unfold, an alternate Scotland, uncomplicated by modern technology and peppered with hints of magic, because who doesn’t love magic?

Children with additional needs have always been a big part of my life. When I was young, my parents provided respite foster care for children with special needs, and one of my first ever jobs was working in a holiday daycare for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. After graduating, I went on to work as a teaching assistant at Westminster Special Schools, a job I adored for the five years I spent there. As my experience grew, I started teaching a few subjects, including drama and photography. The job was tough at times, but also incredibly rewarding, especially seeing how the pupils grew in confidence from one term to the next. Many of them also had a fantastic sense of humor and made me laugh every day. Agatha, the heroine of *The Good Hawk*, was inspired by some of the incredible children I worked with during that time, particularly those with Down syndrome.

In Agatha’s world, her condition is unnamed, but I felt it was important to show the hardships and prejudices she has to overcome on account of it. My hope is that she will inspire a generation of readers not to judge someone by first appearance and to realize that no matter who you are or what your strengths and weaknesses, you can achieve remarkable things.

