

Sky Hawk



I sprinkled brown sugar onto my porridge and watched it melt into sticky golden pools.

‘That’ll rot your teeth,’ said Dad. He sprinkled salt and a small lump of butter on his own porridge and swirled it round. He looked tired and grumpy. I guessed he’d been up in the night checking the ewes that were due to lamb.

‘You were late coming back from football yesterday,’ said Dad. He flicked through a farming magazine beside him. 5

‘Graham and I could’ve done with some help.’

I wanted to tell them I was up on the hills watching an osprey come back. I was bursting to tell them we had ospreys nesting here, on our farm. But it was a secret, Iona’s and my secret. We’d promised to tell no one. 10

Graham poured a cup of tea and laughed. ‘He wasn’t playing football yesterday. He was up on the hill flapping round like a wee birdie. I saw him with a girl up there.’ He turned to me. ‘Your girlfriend, is she?’

I hit him on the arm and tea spilled across the table.

‘Och! Grow up, you two, for heaven’s sake,’ said Mum. 15

‘Graham, you’re old enough to know better.’ She mopped the tea from the table and sat back in the rocker chair warming her feet on the cooking range. ‘Which girl’s this?’

Graham raised his eyebrows. ‘It looked like Mad Old McNair’s granddaughter to me.’

‘I heard she was back,’ said Mum.

‘Fiona McNair’s child?’ said Dad. He turned to Mum. ‘You were at school with Fiona, weren’t you?’ 20

Mum nodded. ‘Aye, that was a while ago. There’s a lot of water gone under the bridge since then.’

‘Rob hates the McNairs,’ I said. ‘He says Iona’s mum stole from his dad and ruined his business. Is it true?’ 25

Mum started clearing the table. ‘It’s true that a lot of money went missing the day

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Fiona left,' she sighed. 'But truth be told, Rob's dad was never much of a businessman anyway.'

'He was trying to build an adventure park,' said Dad, 'bike trails through the forest, and high wire stuff in the trees. It was losing money before Fiona worked there.' 30

'She's a dancer, isn't she?' I said. 'That's what Iona says. She's in the big shows down in London.'

Mum and Dad exchanged glances and Dad went back to reading his magazine. 'Well, I haven't heard from her for a while,' said Mum. 'But I heard she did a bit of dancing.'

Graham gave a snort of laughter. 35

Dad glared at him. 'Haven't you got sheep to feed?'

Graham reached for his coat and gave me a slap on the back. 'Off to school now,' he grinned. 'Don't be late.'

It wasn't fair. Graham was eighteen. He'd finished school and was back on the farm where he'd always wanted to be. Mum and Dad even let him live in the cottage up the track which had been Grandpa's before he died. Graham said he needed his own space. I didn't think Mum should cook his meals and wash all his clothes too. 40

'What's she like?' asked Mum.

'Who, Iona?' I said. I shrugged my shoulders. 'How should I know?'

I whizzed into school as the bell rang. It was Monday morning and I was late. 45 I pushed my bike into the rack next to Rob's and raced to the classroom. The rest of the class were already in their seats. The teacher gave me a hard stare and tapped her watch as I sat down next to Rob and Euan.

'What happened to you on Friday?' whispered Euan. 'You didn't get home for hours after we left you. Mum made me tell her where we'd been.' 50

It seemed ages ago, although it was only three days.

'I was checking on sheep,' I lied.

'You'll never guess who's in our class,' said Rob. His face was dark, like thunder. He nodded to the tables at the front of the class. 'It's her.'

At that moment Iona turned round. It was as if she could feel us looking at her. 55 She looked strangely out of place in the classroom, in her grey uniform and blue fleece. Her hair was tied in a ponytail, but thick clumps and tangles stuck out at the back. She smiled at me, but I looked away.

From *Sky Hawk*, by Gill Lewis

*An **osprey** is a bird of prey.

Questions

Read the story on pages 1 and 2.

1. Compare how Dad likes his porridge with how Callum (the narrator) likes his porridge.
2. Where was Callum on the previous evening?
3. Where should Callum have been?
4. What holds Callum back from telling the truth?
5. Mum says 'There's a lot of water gone under the bridge since then'. What does she mean by this expression?
6. Which of the following statements are facts and which are opinions, according to the text:
 Fiona McNair has a child.
 Fiona McNair used to work locally.
 Fiona McNair took money from her employer.
 Fiona McNair moved away.
 Fiona McNair is a great dancer.
7. What do we find out about Graham in the extract? Find **three** things, using evidence from the text to support your answer.
8. How can the reader tell that Iona is new to the school from the extract?
9. What impression do we get of Rob's feelings towards Iona? How do we know this?
10. Which words suggest Callum is embarrassed to see Iona?
11. Why do you think Callum prefers to keep his meeting with Iona a secret? Give at least two reasons.
12. What do you predict will happen next in the story?

Extra activities and discussion points

- Find out more about an osprey or another bird of prey. Make a fact-file including details about its habitat, diet, behaviour, etc.
- Have you ever been the 'new person' at a new school or club? How did it feel? Discuss how the boys in the story react to Iona. Write a list of some ways they could help Iona to feel more at home.

