



A Note from Author

CLAIRE McFALL

I get asked a lot where the idea for *Ferryman* came from, and I really (*really*) wish I had a cool answer: a near-death experience that made me wonder what was on the other side, or a tragically fated long-lost love from my youth who I wanted to capture on paper. Nope. Instead, the truth makes me cringe: I had a dream. I know, massive cliché, but it's what happened. I dreamed I'd woken up alone on a train that had been super crowded and I'd no idea how I'd gotten there.

At the time, I was living in Peebles in the Scottish Borders and working as an English teacher across the country in Lesmahagow. It was a long drive, with nothing bar the sheep and the occasional tractor to entertain me. I started unpacking the dream, expanding it. I got a handful of lines stuck in my head that I kept coming back to—those now make up the beginning of chapter 3. Eventually, I decided I needed to start writing it down, to get it out of my head if nothing else!

I had no idea if I could actually write a novel. I'd written short stories, but that's hardly the same thing. A hundred-meter sprint versus a marathon. I didn't know how to go about it, hadn't heard of plotters and pantsers at that point, so I just started with a blank page . . . and bashed on. Three months later, I had a tenuous draft. So what to do with it? I Googled and decided to try sending it out to agents. I carefully picked a small selection and sent it out with my stomach in knots. I mean, my mum said it was good, but mums have to say that! A little (long) while later, the result was in:

Thanks, but no thanks.

I realize now that two requests for a full manuscript out of eight queries was, in reality, really positive, but at the time, I was crushed. So I shelved it and kept on writing. One year and eight manuscripts later, I met my agent, Ben Illis, and he asked to read other things I had written. Including *Ferryman*. He loved it. "That's it," he told me, "that's the book we go with."

From there things went . . . well, they went awfully well. *Ferryman* was taken up quickly by a UK publisher and then won the Scottish Children's Book Award. I was an English teacher at the time, and I'd actually done the awards with one of my classes a couple of years before, and now there I was, winning it. *Ferryman* was short- and long-listed for a host of other awards, including a nomination for the Carnegie Medal. I was delighted. Over the moon.

But that was only the beginning. The real change came when *Ferryman* was translated into Chinese. I was excited about the release, because how cool to see my little book written in an entirely different language! I didn't have any expectations at all for it. The book came out in June 2015, and in October of that year I did a bit of Googling. Just to see if I could find it. Just to see if anyone had reviewed it, whether they liked it. I found it on the Chinese website Dangdang . . . with fifty thousand reviews. *Wowzers*. I did a little investigating and found it on the OpenBook top ten fiction chart. That's the top ten chart . . . for fiction . . . for the whole of China.

Ferryman stayed in the top ten for eighteen months, and it stayed in the top thirty for three years. And because of its incredible popularity in China, it was translated into a whole bunch of other languages. Then one book became two books became three, and *Legendary—Legendary!*—bought the film rights. The *Ferryman* series has sold more than four million copies worldwide. Now it's coming to America!

And quite frankly, that has blown my little Scottish mind.



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