

## Author's Note

Some books are written rather quickly, with the author typing up a manuscript over a few months, spending another year or so polishing it up and then hoping (and often praying) an agent and publisher will pick it up. The story behind *Hanna Who Fell from the Sky* is slightly more complicated.

I first came up with the title for this novel the day I returned home from a trip to Europe in 2004. I reached into my suitcase and handed my then girlfriend (now wife) a hand-painted mask. She asked where I got it and —being playful and a little mischievous—I told her it was given to me by a little old man in a small antiques shop in Florence who refused to accept payment, so long as I gave the mask to someone I loved. “This is Hanna Who Fell from the Sky,” I said. “The old man told me she was an angel so beautiful that all the other angels grew jealous and cast her out of Heaven. That look on the mask is the sorrow, anguish and astonishment on Hanna’s face when she landed on Earth.”

My wife looked at me, mystified. “Really?” she said.

“No,” I said. “I bought it for \$3 from a street vendor. But I bought it for you.”

She eventually forgave me and has since become wise to my stories. (Far too wise, I think.)

The name Hanna and the idea of an angel falling to Earth stuck with me and in summer 2005, during three intense, sleepless days, I wrote the very first draft of *Hanna Who Fell from the Sky*. As it stood, the story was far too short and much too rough for publication. Instead of revising my novella-sized manuscript, I set it aside to work on getting my short stories published in literary magazines.

In 2007, when my first daughter was born, we named her Hanna after the girl in the unpublished (and still largely unfinished) manuscript. This is how I have a child (born in 2007) who was named after the main character in this book (released in 2017). And how, as amazing as it would’ve been, time travel was not involved in naming her.

In the following years, I wrote three quirky and (what I hope are) funny novels that were released by an awesome small press in Canada. As much as I put my heart and soul into those books, something inside me kept telling me to return to the story of Hanna in Clearhaven. To retell it. To rewrite it with the perspective additional years and fatherhood had given me.

Then fate intervened.

One evening I was playing hockey (like all good Canadians kids do) when I got hit in the head. It was bad. Really bad. I was chasing the puck, skating as fast as I could, when an opposition player rammed his shoulder into my head. The world went black. My feet left the

ice and my body hung momentarily in midair. I couldn't see. I could barely think. My vision returned immediately. But an hour later, I could hardly talk. I couldn't walk a hundred feet without collapsing.

I suffered a traumatic brain injury that night, one that left me unable to read a single sentence or even watch television for weeks. One that left me stuttering for ten months and with a chronic feeling that there was a bell inside me that wouldn't stop ringing. My brain injury left me unable to hold a proper conversation, let alone write a book.

All was not lost. It took over a year, but with the help of some heavy-duty painkillers, I returned to the manuscript I'd left behind years ago: *Hanna Who Fell from the Sky*. I reread what I'd written during that sleepless long weekend in 2005. The story—of Hanna being forced to marry Edwin and her mother's fantastical tale of her falling from the sky—was there. But the prose was not. I realized I had to rewrite it from scratch. And that's what I did. An hour a day was all my head would allow. If I tried to do more, my concussion symptoms would return tenfold and I'd be forced to go into a dark room and lie there in agony until, hours later, the sensation would pass.

Still, I kept writing one hour at a time. Then eventually, two hours at a time. I forced myself to focus and tell Hanna's story as best I could.

After many months, I had a brand-new version of the book. Only six words remained from the original manuscript. And I was thrilled with the result. Rewriting *Hanna* was one of the hardest things I've ever done. But it was also one of the most rewarding. If anything kept me sane through three years of the worst concussion symptoms you can imagine, it was telling Hanna's story in the way I always wanted to tell it. As much as I am Hanna's creator and the one who dreamed her up in the first place, she is the one who helped me get well again.

And I am well. My concussion symptoms are mostly a thing of the past. Some days I feel like I could step onto the ice and throw a body check just like old times. Although, other days I'm concerned a swift breeze might take me down. I'll never be able to play contact sports again. But I'm able to chase my kids around the park and watch their smiling faces as I throw them into the air. I'm able to write for hours and days at a time again.

I hope you enjoy Hanna's story. Publishing this book was my dream and one I never gave up on, even in the darkest of days. For the readers out there (if I'm lucky enough for you to read my book), at the risk of sounding cliché...never give up on your dreams. I am proof...Hanna is proof...that no matter what life throws at you, no matter the obstacles, you can do anything you set your mind to.