

Dear reader,

A fox hunts in the marsh behind my house. Whenever I see him now, I stop and wonder: What would he think of human war? What does love feel like to him? What if we could connect?

*Pax* is the book of my life – probably the one I’ll be most proud of, and certainly the one that challenged me the most, right from its slow germination. For many years I had wanted to write something addressing the terrible things that happen to children in the shameless name of War. That book didn’t come – my writer’s heart never felt fit enough to lift a story that heavy. Throughout the same period, I’d always wanted to write something celebrating the glorious, boundary-denying bonds of radical empathy that kids can forge with animals, even wild ones. The beauty of those relationships left me breathless, but that story hid itself also.

And then six years ago, a chance remark triggered the idea of merging the two projects. It struck me that to tell each story, I needed the other. Working out the dual-narrative structure and auditioning animals for the lead role took a whole year, and writing the book spanned another four. The plot’s emotional territory meant a lot of tears were spilled at the keyboard, but looking back on that time, I was never happier to be a writer.

And now it’s a book. I am so grateful to all the people at HarperCollins who shared their support, their vision and their talents to make it one whose form exceeds my dreams. And to Jon Klassen – for saying Yes, and for creating a cover that children will press to their chests.

As *Pax* is about to go out into the world, I have many hopes for it. A book is the opening remark of a conversation. I hope it’s joined by diverse voices of varied backgrounds in many languages. I hope it’s a conversation comprised of questions: What are the true costs of war? Is it ever worth it? How do we strike a balance between wild and tame? How do we let go of something we’ve loved? These questions came up for me– I hope even more will come up for readers.

And one more thing. When a reader encounters a fox after finishing *Pax*, I hope that she or he stops to look into its wild eyes, to try to connect, and to wonder.

Thank you for reading.

Sara Pennypacker