

*The*  
**STORY**  
**SHE LEFT**  
**BEHIND**

*A Novel*

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*Welcome*

Traveling to the places where my stories are set always brings new inspiration, and this time was no different. The landscapes and geography breathe life into my characters and scenes.

Join me as we explore the lands of **THE STORY SHE LEFT BEHIND** including, Bluffton, South Carolina; London; and The Lake District of England.





# Bluffton, South Carolina



Bluffton, South Carolina feels most like home to me and to my family. We've had a home in the Lowcountry for over thirty-five years. When we meet Bronwyn Newcastle Fordham in the opening chapter of *THE STORY SHE LEFT BEHIND*, she is leaving Bluffton by boat on a moonlit night.

Much of our family life has unfolded on the banks of the May River. I wanted this story to begin right there. Here are some of my favorite photos through the years.





# London

After you leave Bluffton,  
you'll travel to London!

I've visited this jewel of a  
city many times, yet I never  
tire of its aged beauty,  
sublime river, and rich  
history. In Chapter Clara and  
Wynnie first arrive. Here are  
some of the sights I visited  
that Wynnie and Clara see and  
talk about starting in Chapter  
Fourteen.





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England

I embarked on a fascinating research trip to the Lake District to infuse THE STORY SHE LEFT BEHIND with the beauty of this mystical land. After traveling all night, I arrived in Near Sawrey, where Beatrix Potter wrote much of her famous work and where Clara and Wynnie arrive by car.





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England



I had secured reservations at The Sawrey House Hotel, which is the Jameson's summer country home in the novel.

When I arrived on a wintry, blustery day, I felt an uncanny familiarity. After all my research, the place felt as if it had risen from the pages of my story.





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England

My traveling companions were eager for a nap, but I was buzzing with the desire to set foot on the land I'd been writing about—the shores around Esthwaite Water, the lake outside the hotel windows. This is where **THE STORY SHE LEFT BEHIND** unfolds; it is the lake that holds the secrets to Clara's mother's disappearance.





# *The Lake District, Cumbria, England*

I placed my things in my room and gazed out the window at the view I describe when Clara arrives at the Jameson home.





# *The Lake District, Cumbria, England*



Bundled in my coat and scarf, I walked to the shores of Esthwaite Water, marveling at the wonder of seeing the place where Clara, Wynnie, and Charlie came to life. I felt the soft ground beneath my feet and the expansive land rolling down to the lake, just as my characters had done the same.



Sheep dotted the pastures, and stone walls snaked through the land. I cut through the cottages I'd seen from my bedroom window.



# *The Lake District, Cumbria, England*

After a dinner of fish and chips at the hotel, we turned in early, only to rise for a long day of touring on a freezing, rainy winter day.

That next morning, with our tour guide, Anna, we drove through East Sawrey to Windermere Lake, the longest and widest lake of the district.



We crossed to the other side to drive through the countryside. My goal was to capture what Clara and Wynnie felt upon arrival.

I learned about the Crier of Claife, a phantom who calls for boats across the lake. Though this crier didn't make it into the novel, every fable and myth deepen my understanding of the lakes and it surrounding areas.

We started in Ambleside, a quaint village built on the wool industry, then drove past a Roman fort to Wray Castle, a neo-gothic castle where Beatrix Potter first stayed. It's now a display of her art and her father's photography.

Emerging from the castle, a rainbow bowed across the sky and we stood and marveled at it for a long while before moving on.





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England



Through twisty roads and  
with ghost stories from  
Anna, we reached  
Hawkshead, the village  
where you'll find a few  
scenes in the novel.

We visited St. Michael's, walked  
along Flag Street, and heard  
stories of William Wordsworth, who  
attended grammar school here. His  
desk, with his name scratched on  
it, survives!





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England

Then onto Tarn Hows, a stunning cluster of lakes. Despite the cold, we vowed to return for a hike when the weather improved.



Throughout our tour, Anna's sayings, like "honey pot of a village," slipped into the novel.

The next day, we took a nearly ten-mile hike to experience the land and views Clara and Wynn timeright see. The countryside's mystical feel can't be captured by photos alone and I wanted a way to describe it. There's something magical about turning a corner to find a vista of mountains, lakes, and gentle-eyed sheep, making me gasp at the beauty.



# *The Lake District, Cumbria, England*

One of my favorite moments was visiting Beatrix Potter's house and gardens. Though this novel isn't about Beatrix, she makes a few appearances. Her life, love story, art, determination, and coded language were profound inspirations.





# *The Lake District, Cumbria, England*

Later, we hiked around Esthwaite Water where the pivotal moments of this novel unfold. Imagining this lake was one thing, but setting my feet at its reedy edge, seeing the mirrored surface, hearing the geese call, and the water whisper through the grasses was another.



We ended the day with a proper tea—just as Clara and Wynnie often did.





# The Lake District, Cumbria, England



On my last day, I hiked to Moss Eccles tarn to reflect on how this land would shape Clara and Wynnies story. This pond, bought by Beatrix Potter in 1913, was her favorite evening spot with her husband. I imagined myself floating across the lake. Here, Clara solves part of the mystery of her mother's lost life and I sat still with the imagining.







# *Last Day*



A full moon rose over our last night. Watching it rise over the lake from my bedroom window, knowing my journey home would begin the next morning, I imagined my characters continuing their lives in this land as I returned to mine.



I hope you've enjoyed this journey through the lands of THE STORY SHE LEFT BEHIND.



*With Love,  
Patti*