

THE QUARRY

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Chapter One: When the World Turned Grey, from *Bringer*

Bringer is a Young Adult Fantasy that begins in the real world and takes Jemima Jennings into the mystical world of Maladria where she meets Lamasuard Ingan and his horse, Amicus. Both of them are searching for something but they will both find more than what they are looking for.

When the clouds rolled in and the rain wouldn't stop, Dad knew there was something wrong with Mum. He insisted the weather was the barometer of Mum's moods. No one believed him. Not even me. Why should I? He was the pragmatist in our family: the engineer, the scientist. Facts only, not omens of impending doom. That was Mum's domain: the artist, the writer, the gardener. She was the one who looked to the sky or put her hand to the dirt, and could tell you how your day would go. Anyway, only Dad had dark moods. Mum made them evaporate. She was the bright light.

No, there was nothing wrong with Mum. But what did I know, until *that* day when Mum finally cracked it.

Two more wake-up calls and then I'd get up.

Mum was so predictable. Every morning it was, ‘Jemima, dear, time to get up. Wakey, wakey, you’ll be latey.’ And she did that three times, five minutes apart.

Yes, ten more minutes. I huddled under my covers and took in the smells of cooking bacon wafting from the kitchen.

Stomp, stomp, stomp. My covers disappeared.

‘What?’ I spun around and sat up. ‘What was that?’

Mum thumped out of my bedroom door.

‘Psycho,’ I mumbled, rubbed my eyes, and swung my feet to the floor.

I don’t know how, but hair has a way of spending the night tangling itself into impenetrable knots. I tugged at the brown bird’s nest twisted down my back. CRASH! I winced at the noise from the kitchen.

I twisted up the tousled mess and shoved a beanie over it.

Lingering over a cold bowl of cereal, I eyed off the burnt bacon and eggs still filling the kitchen with grey smoke. Shards of crockery intermingled with a splatter of porridge on the lino floor.

The rain streamed down the kitchen window. Great. Another day fighting with umbrellas and wet raincoats on public transport. But today it was really pouring; torrential.

‘It’s raining again,’ I said.

‘Yes,’ Mum said, peering out the window and clutching a steamless cup of coffee.

‘The bus is going to be crowded with wet people, again. And I’ll get soaked walking to the bus stop.’

‘Probably,’ Mum droned, not moving.

‘You could drive me to school?’

Mum spun. She blinked as though not expecting to see me sitting there. Then she returned to looking out the window, at the greyness.

‘Ask your father.’

‘Dad’s at work!’ I scraped the chair back from the table, making as much noise as possible. ‘You don’t care.’

Mum still didn’t move. She just stared. I stomped from the kitchen.

It bucketed all day; I had wet shoes. After the walk home from the bus stop, I was soaked through to the skin. Mum was still in the kitchen, staring out the window, with three half-finished cups of coffee beside her.

Water dripped from the tips of my long hair and uniform onto the kitchen floor.

‘I got wet.’

‘Mmm.’

‘I’m soaking wet and you’re just sitting there. I could get the flu. I could die.’

Mum turned, and again she blinked at seeing me in the room.

I held out my arms. Hello! Wet here! Soaked through and it’s your fault.

Mum took a deep breath and returned to the window.

‘ARGH!’ I dumped my sodden bag onto the tiles and squelched to the bathroom with an armful of dry clothes. Ah, a hot shower. The best thing after being damp all day.

Amid the welcome drops of warmth, I remembered: Miss Wendy's today! Miss Wendy was my fastidious, perfectionist violin teacher. She wasn’t even a great violin teacher. Most other teachers have students who win Eisteddfods. Not Miss Wendy. I could have won Eisteddfods, if only she had been a better teacher.

I turned off the shower. If I could just get dressed and hide in my bedroom, maybe Mum, in her staring-out-the-window state, would forget, and not take me to another hour of useless torture with Miss Wendy.

I snuck into the hallway. No movement in the kitchen. Sliding along the wall, I backed into my bedroom. With an ear to the gap, I eased the door closed, until it clicked shut. No violin lesson! I spun in triumph. Mum stood up from my bed. My back slammed against the door.

Mum’s purse was over her shoulder, my violin case by her feet.

‘Time for violin.’

‘Why? I hate Miss Wendy. She’s annoying. She makes me do things over and over and again, and she doesn’t even tell me why!’

Mum’s nostrils flared. ‘I need you to go to violin today.’

I crossed my arms. ‘I’m not going. You can’t make me.’

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. We stood in silence. She then released that breath, slowly, through clenched lips, and sucked it back in through her nose. Her eyes snapped open. ‘Pick up the damned violin and get in the bloody car!’

Was it Mum’s first ever swear word, or was it her first ever yell? Whatever it was, I had that violin case in my hand and was in the car before I’d given it a thought.

Most parents would drop their sixteen-year-old daughter off to a violin lesson and go home or wait in the car. Not my Mum. She insisted on coming inside. She sat

behind me, in the same chair, every lesson, and faced the stairs, or, more exactly, a round, stained glass window under the stairs.

The window was beautiful. It contained vibrantly coloured glass: a unique round bottomed chestnut violin with leaf ended F-holes on a field of jade-green grass framed by ruby red and golden yellow flowers. In the background, stretched violet and indigo mountains beneath a sky the colour of Mum's eyes: cobalt blue.

When it was sunny, the picture's colours would project onto the floor at Mum's feet. As the lesson progressed, the colours would climb up her legs and rest on her lap.

Today, though, there was no sun and no colours. It was as grey outside as it was inside Miss Wendy's. Yet, Mum took her seat and watched the darkened window.

There was this one music piece in particular, that Miss Wendy was forcing me to learn. I know Mum asked Miss Wendy to include it in my repertoire, but it was not on the list of 'allowed' pieces for my studies, yet, Miss 'everything must be done by the rules' Wendy was still forcing me to learn it. It was a really hard arrangement of Gustav Holst's 'Jupiter'. Mum loved it. I hated it. My fingers couldn't get across the strings fast enough, and my bowing was messy and the violin squeaked and squealed. But, I'd played it enough times that I could see the music in my head without needing the manuscript in front of me.

Miss Wendy asked me to start playing 'Jupiter' that day.

She frowned. 'I can tell you have not been practising every day.'

She was right. Mum hadn't been on my case, lately, so I hadn't practised. I hated practising; it was a waste of time.

'Start again! No sighing.'

Yet, I sighed anyway, and looked around at Mum. At that point, I would have forgiven her for the harsh awakening that morning, and allowing me to get sodden in the rain, if she would just turn and look at me. I needed one of those encouraging smiles with her cobalt blues – that's how Dad described her eyes, 'the first time we met, those cobalt blues saved me. They still do.'

No. Mum's eyes were fixed on that stained glass window under the stairs. But the gloom outside was not going to allow any coloured light to play at her feet this afternoon.

Mum! Look at me! I thought. Damn her. Snap out of it! Come on, this was stupid. Nope. She wallowed in her own private self-pity. She deserved my anger.

I jabbed my bow onto the strings and played the first few un-jolly notes. I squinted at the music, intent on making it through ‘Jupiter’s’ tricky part without Miss Wendy interrupting and telling me to repeat it again.

My shadow appeared across the score. I glanced over Miss Wendy’s shoulder at the window onto the street. No sun. Rain was still pounding the pavement. Where was the light coming from?

I played on. The light grew warmer. The paper seemed to shine as the room filled with a golden glow. Mum’s chair creaked. Bowing, I began to turn, but Miss Wendy tapped her fat 2B pencil on my music.

‘You must keep your violin pointing forward and pay attention to –’

I thought Miss Wendy was going to poke my eye out, but she thrust the pencil over my shoulder to point at the stairs.

‘No, Mrs Jennings. You must not touch my window, it is very special to – Oh no!’

It feels so clichéd to say it, but time actually seemed to slow down at that moment.

The pencil dropped from Miss Wendy’s hand and spun its long way to the thread-bare carpet. Her hands retracted to grip her face. I stopped playing and my long plait flew outwards as I turned my head. Golden light shone from under the stairs.

And then time resumed its steady progress. I could have sworn that the stained glass window was projected onto the chair where Mum had sat. But where was Mum? The room faded to the dullness of outside.

‘Mum?’ My eyes wandered the room. ‘Mum? Where are you, Mum? Miss Wendy, what happened to my Mum?’

My teacher was still frozen in her own pocket of time; her mouth open, eyes wide.

‘Miss Wendy?’

Blinking, she returned and dropped her hands. She looked me up and down. ‘Lesson over, time for you to go home.’

‘But, Miss Wendy, where’s my Mum?’

Miss Wendy already had the phone’s receiver in her hand and was dialling.

‘Mr Jennings, Sir. I need you to come and pick up your daughter. Your wife has... ah... done a very strange thing. She just walked out the front door and has disappeared down the street...’ Miss Wendy drew back the curtains to peak out onto

the street. ‘Yes, she just left her car outside... No, Sir, she does not appear to be coming back. This lesson is over and I have another student coming soon. You must come and pick up your daughter now... Thank you.’

Miss Wendy’s eye’s wandered over towards the stairs and snapped back to me. ‘Pack up your things and wait on the porch. Your father is on his way.’

‘But Miss Wendy, my Mum didn’t walk out the front door.’

She puffed air from her cheeks. ‘Don’t be ridiculous, girl. Did you not see her walk past us and out the front door? That will be enough.’

With my violin shoved into its case and before I could argue, I was on the porch with the front door slammed behind me. The rain had stopped; the first time in ages. Water dripped from the leaking gutter and bounced from the tiles to spray my violin case, sneakers and calves.

Had Mum gone out the front door? Had I missed her walk past? No. Miss Wendy had pointed to the stairs, hadn’t she? But I didn’t actually see Mum walk towards the stairs. But there was light from the window; the colours projected onto the chair, even though it was grey outside. Impossible!

Dad arrived in a taxi half an hour later. No new student arrived for tuition with Miss Wendy. Dad paid the driver and beckoned me from Miss Wendy’s porch. We sat in Mum’s car, abandoned on the side of the street.

‘Dad, Miss Wendy’s lying –’

He held up his hand and shook his head.

He was silent as he drove us home. His concentration was on the road. I watched him. Was that a tear dropping from his eye, or just a drip of water?

He pulled into the driveway and his hand went for the door handle.

‘Dad, don’t you really want to know what happened to Mum?’

‘She’s gone,’ Dad said, his face downcast. With a big sigh, he opened the door.

‘Yes, she’s gone. But she didn’t go *‘out the front door’* like Miss Wendy told you. She’s lying.’

Dad turned on me. ‘It’s not nice to call someone a liar.’

‘But she is. Mum went under the stairs.’

Dad put a foot into a puddle. ‘Then Mum is gone.’