

# THE QUARRY

## Chasing Eve

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The shop was small and quaint, maybe even cute – if you were into that sort of thing. It even had a thatched roof and soft cream walls *and* an inviting sign.

Demelza tugged at her woollen coat, squinting up through the rain. *Mrs Upton's Umbrella Repair Shop* greeted her in rose pink writing. It really was convincing. To all passers-by, it was completely, utterly human. Except umbrella was spelt with three L's. And she'd been able to smell the mash of creatures from a mile away.

Demelza glanced behind her, glaring at the scruffy, muddy hill she'd just dragged herself up from. Fields of mottled green spanned out in every direction, whilst the sun, golden and wavering, rested just above the hill. She had always wanted to visit Wales – she'd wanted to go everywhere. But now, like every other place, she left feeling even more hopeless.

When she'd arrived in Tenby this morning, she wasn't surprised when the taxi driver seemed reluctant to take her up here. Still, he'd hurried her to his cab, only to shove her out

halfway muttering “too steep, love” and left her stranded. Humans were always frightened of things they didn’t understand; they just didn’t know why.

The spring rain turned heavy, forcing Demelza to cower under her hood. Raindrops slipped down her cheeks and nestled in the knots of her dark hair. Of course, she loved the water. All Selkies did. But land rain was different, cold, bitter. Not home.

The last time she’d visited land she’d been with Eve. It’d been raining that day too and Eve had insisted they get chips as “all the Lanneys did.” Demelza watched as she giggled, drenching their chips in vinegar and then she’d run out into the rain, spinning and dancing. Her blonde ringlets swayed with her body and every human eye watched her. Demelza had stayed inside, until Eve dragged her outside too and they both splashed and danced in the puddles, chewing on hot chips and laughing. Eve had always been the more optimistic sister, carefree – beautiful. Even after mama died, Eve would still be the happy, smiling girl she’d always known and always looked after. Or so she had thought.

Demelza turned back towards the umbrella shop, the taste of vinegar turning sour on her tongue. Eve couldn’t be dead, she just couldn’t. She’d have felt it. Felt something, anything. Selkies have that sort of intuition.

Demelza held her breath and rapped on the shop door. Eve had been missing for six months, but she wouldn’t give up on her. She’d look for another six months, and another and another, until she found her. Demelza wiped her eyes, only causing them to sting further due to the mud on her fingers. She would find Eve. She had to.

The door swung open with a creak. Clearly Mrs Upton wasn’t home. A man, or what looked like a man, beamed up at her from under a mop of brown hair. His eyes were large and round like his belly and his clothes looked like they’d seen better days. Holes dotted the grey fabric, showing scuffed pink skin.

The man raised his eyebrows, looking expectantly at her. She hadn’t realised she’d been staring.

‘Can I help you with anything, Miss?’

Demelza cleared her throat, readjusting the tight strap of her bag. “Oh yes—sorry—yes I’d like to purchase...” She looked up at the sign. ‘I have an umbrella...an umbrella that needs fixing.’

The man chuckled. ‘Right you are Miss, come on in. Come out of the glaw.’ He gestured to her, stepping aside so that she could squeeze through the doorway. ‘Mrs Upton’s just nipped out for a bit, so she’s left the store in my capable hands.’

Demelza didn't know where you could 'nip' off to out here. Unless you were visiting a family of goats. She'd seen plenty in the taxi ride over.

Safely out of the rain, she pulled down her hood, raking a hand through her messy hair. Someone had sprayed perfume in an attempt to hide the smell; but it just smelt of fur laced with cheap lavender. The man winked at her.

'Call me Mayhew, Miss, Mayhew.' He waved a hand so she would follow him. 'I'll soon have your ambarél fixed.'

Demelza nodded and smiled, feeling blood rise to her cheeks. She decided to ignore the wink. A little flirting would be fine. Besides, if she were friendly, it would be better for her. It got them to trust you.

Mayhew lead her down a narrow hallway, passing a cluttered room and faded blue stairs. As she got closer, Demelza realised that the blue was a series of tulips edged in gold, weaving and looping around each other. The stairs would've once been quite lovely, grand even, but now they were worn and dull. It was a shame, really.

They'd arrived at the back of the house, in a small room lit by a flickering bulb. Rows and rows of pale umbrellas gawked at her. A peeling clock was perched on the wall. There were no windows.

'So,' said Mayhew, holding out a pudgy hand. 'Where's your ambarél then, Miss?'

Demelza hesitated, trying to keep her breathing steady. Now that she was further inside, the smell of creatures was unbearable: soggy fur mixed with burning scales, excrement smeared in vomit. Pain. Fear. All her instincts were screaming at her to run, to get out now. But she couldn't. She wouldn't leave. Not without checking first.

'I-I'm here,' she tried to control her voice, but it came out as more of a squeak. 'H-here to trade.'

Mayhew narrowed his eyes.

Demelza's cheeks burned and she pulled off her bag, ripping open the zip. Carefully, she reached inside and pulled out an orb. To a human, it would've looked like a normal object, an ornament you might add to your antique collection. But to a creature, magic radiated from it – Selkie magic.

Demelza rolled the orb in her hands slightly, letting the cool surface nibble her skin. Inside, she could see the miniature waves of her home, crashing against the pebbled shore. Their little white hut sat far out in the water. Mama had given it to her before she died. She said it would keep Eve and her safe. She'd made them promise that it would never leave the

family – to keep it safe, always. They had nodded wildly, their wide, bright eyes taking in its beauty. Mama had smiled

Demelza watched as the waves swelled and fell onto the shore again. And now, she was breaking that promise.

Mayhew's eyes somehow stretched wider and he grinned. A few gold teeth winked at her.

Without taking his eyes off the orb, he clicked, moving his hands in a circle around him. The umbrellas surrounding them seemed to shimmer and melt, slipping away to reveal what hide beneath: boxes and cages, in every size, in every colour, with every breed of creature trapped inside. Demelza gulped.

'Finally, a *real* customer,' said Mayhew, sighing. He shook his head and flicked his nose until all the magic was gone. Now his nose was green and lumpy, and he had pointy ears. Demelza guessed he was some type of troll.

'I've been serving them rats all week.' He rolled his eyes. 'Pft, *tourists*. You know, I think I'd have keeled over if I heard one more ruddy thing about the weather.' Mayhew leaned towards her with outstretched hands. 'Now Miss, give us that here and I can see —'

Demelza flinched back, cradling the orb to her chest. The waves inside had turned dark and angry and lightning cracked across the water. She shoved it back in her bag quickly, ice scratching her fingers. Mayhew scowled.

'A-Actually I'm after something else – a gift.' Demelza scanned the room, pretending that she couldn't see the gloomy eyes watching her. Dirty fur prickled her nose. 'What have you got that's rare?'

Without another thought, Mayhew bounded towards her, chattering furiously. He grabbed her by the arm and steered her to the back of the store. Demelza tried not to pull away.

'And over here we have Knucker scales, all the way from Sussex.' He pointed a green finger at a silver bowl. 'These beauties are very rare and flamin' hard to capture.'

Demelza peered forwards. The scales sat in a cluster, midnight blue glinting in the low light. But they weren't all like that. Some were pale and brittle: lifeless.

Knucker dragons were Eve's favourite. She'd begged and begged mama for one, but she always said no; that it was cruel to keep a creature, no matter how much you wanted one. Eventually, Eve had given up, but there had been a hint of sadness in her eyes.

Mayhew nudged her, and Demelza turned, quickly shaking away her tears.

‘Plus, Knucker scales are a great aphrodisiac.’ He winked again. ‘Not that you need any help with that, Miss.’

He laughed and when she didn’t join in, he slapped a hand on her back, hard. She forced a smile, pulling her bag closer to her. She could feel his eyes lingering on it.

‘Now, let me show you this.’ He herded her to the left, where a rusty cage stood. ‘What you think is in there then? Hm?’

The small cage was empty, aside from a bowl of – what looked like flour – next to it. The white substance decorated the cage, coating the thick black bars.

‘Erm...’ She bit her lip. ‘Some sort of...shadow spirit?’

Mayhew chuckled but didn’t respond. Instead, he pinched the white powder and threw it over the cage.

Instantly there was movement and she jumped, instinctively reaching for her bag.

Whatever was in the cage was now screeching, its dark eyes blinking violently. It shook the cage, whilst Mayhew poked at its little clawed hands.

‘This here is a Leery. Now, don’t get too close. The bitch has a nasty bite.’

Demelza watched as he poked his finger in again, pulling back a second later as the Leery chomped down on the empty space. She couldn’t have been more than four inches tall, with tiny black ears. The Leery leapt around the cage, shaking the bars and snapping her teeth. Demelza wished she had bitten him.

‘Leeries are invisible to the eye till’ you have this stuff.’ He shook the bowl. ‘Crushed Leery bones. Perfect for the little buggers.’

She felt like she was going to faint.

‘So—’ he turned to her, searching her face. His eyes flickered to her bag. ‘Anything taking your fancy, Miss?’

Demelza hesitated. ‘I was wondering if y-you have—’ She swallowed. ‘If you had a...flibberty...jam...baroo.’

Mayhew looked like she’d slapped him. Red grazed his cheeks and beads of sweat rolled down his temple. She had no idea what she’d just said. The words just came from nowhere. But it had worked, she’d said something right.

Demelza winced as his sweat rolled from his temple to his chin and splashed onto the floor. Creatures had the strangest names and whatever she’d said must be dangerous. She hoped he would go look for it. She had to see if Eve was here.

‘I-I’— Now it was his turn to choke on his words. ‘I—well you see Miss—I don’t think...wouldn’t you prefer something else—’

BANG.

Mayhew stopped. His mouth hung open. What was that?

There it was again. A creature howled from a nearby box. The Leery screeched. Demelza slowly looked up, watching as plaster from the ceiling drifted onto them like snow.

‘Take no notice,’ said Mayhew, trying to shove her behind a cage so she couldn’t see. ‘I’ve got a goblin upstairs. You know how they are. The blighters are always making a racket—’

Another bang. And then a different sound. This time it sounded like wailing, or to the more inclined ear, muffled cries.

She turned to Mayhew, but he was already gone, running out of the store. ‘Apologies Miss!’ he yelled. ‘Be back in a tick.’

Demelza froze, listening as he thumped up the stairs. A door slammed.

Silence.

She breathed out.

Now was her chance.

Demelza ran, tripping over a pile of boxes as she reached the nearest cage. Wilted eyes stared back at her, its violet fur matted and dirty. The creature slouched forward, pushing its long snout through the bars. Demelza couldn’t help but reach out.

But she couldn’t help him – help any of them. She bit her tongue, forcing back the tears. She had to find Eve.

Demelza turned away, hurrying on to the next cage. The creature yelped at her. But when she reached it, it was empty. She slid the cloth back over it, noticing that a box lay open next to her. She pounced on it, but found it was filled with torn up papers and at least a dozen books on beard growth: troll edition.

Eve loved to read. She remembered the many hours they would sit huddled together, pouring over every Selkie story that she’d managed to find.

Demelza shoved the box away, reaching for another that was also bursting with books.

Eve always chose the ones involving humans – she preferred creatures. Mama always worked late, in fact, she was barely ever home. So every night, they would read and wait for her. Every night she would come home smiling, her long hair full of salt and moonlight. Until one night, she didn’t.

Demelza rubbed her eyes, hurrying past a crate labelled as *Ignis Fatuus*.

That had been when the arguments began. Which turned into fighting, which then became screaming matches. Eve would slip out at night and not return for days at a time. Demelza would yell at her. Eve would leave again. When Eve finally returned home after a week away, Demelza couldn't take it. She shouted at her, pleaded with her, cried; but Eve only screamed back and slammed the door as she left, shattering the glass. She cried at her to come back, sobbed. But she didn't come back. Eve never came home.

Demelza stiffened. Something had moved upstairs. Was that...a footstep? She didn't dare breathe. The eyes watching her also seemed to freeze. From where she was standing, she could just make out the hallway that lead to the front door. The last of the sun's rays were seeping through the stained-glass window, creating splotches of blood on the carpet.

Demelza finally moved, shaking her head. She had to get out of here.

Clutching her bag, she stumbled to the desk at the front of the store. There had to be something here. Anything, anything, to show Eve had been here. Demelza frantically pulled open drawers, tearing open books and boxes.

It didn't take her long to find his record book. It was leather bound, dating back to purchases from the last three years. She skimmed through the 'S' section.

Serpent

Siren

Sphinx

Spriggan...

But no Selkie.

Demelza slammed her hands against the book, slumping across its thick pages. She wasn't here. She wasn't...here. It was all her fault she'd run away. She shouldn't have yelled so much, shouldn't have tried to be like mama. She should've just... listened. But she was scared of losing her.

Demelza screwed up her fists, letting her nails dig into her skin. Nothing mattered anymore, not without Eve, not without mama. She was alone. And she deserved it. Demelza finally let all her tears spill out, the tears she'd been holding back for months. The words beneath her cheek turned blurry, the ink clutching at her skin. Some big sister she'd turned out to be.

But then, something furry touched her palm. And Demelza sprung back. Something was poking out of the back page. Something she'd felt a hundred times before...

Madly, she flipped to the back and there squashed in between the pages, was fur.

But it wasn't just fur.

It was a cut out of someone's skin.

Eve's skin.

Demelza's blood ran cold. She barely noticed the orb in her bag stabbing ice down her thigh.

And then she couldn't breathe. A sweaty hand grabbed her from behind, pinning her mouth shut, stopping her from screaming.

She thrashed and kicked but she couldn't move. The creatures in the room were screaming for her, banging and shaking in their prisons. And then, above the noise, a voice lapped against her ear.

'I was wondering when you would show up, my love. You're mine now, Miss Demelza.'