

## ***Ten things I loved about The Messenger Bird*** **by Vikki Wakefield**

- 1 Tamar and Nathaniel.** These are characters I've missed in recent YA literature. They have such a pure friendship. I loved the idea that Nathaniel had been summoned to the future to help Tamar, and that Tamar was stuck in the past. It was as if they'd passed each other heading in the wrong direction, turned one another around, then went on their way.
- 2 Cornish folklore.** Throughout the novel there are snippets of deliciously gothic tales woven through the narrative. My grandmother was Welsh and she used to tell me old stories about fairies and goblins. Birds were often a symbol of death in Welsh folklore, so while I was reading *The Messenger Bird* I had this awful sense of foreboding and the hairs on the back of my neck were standing up. And something strange, I usually read in my own voice—I mean, that's the voice I hear inside my head. But from about chapter three, my narrator started speaking with a Welsh accent and I realised I could hear my grandmother's voice. She died when I was seventeen.
- 3 Glanville Park 1886** – reading this book I started to wonder whether places have memories too. Rosanne's descriptions of the house and its secret rooms made me want to rip up my floorboards to see what's underneath. And this: 'He gave no thought to how the house would react with its secrets bared like white roots in the cold air'.  
In 1886 the underground rooms at Glanville Park were sealed up to contain their ghosts, and in the present-day Tamar's father smashes through to open them up again. In 1886 Nathaniel smashes his mother's crockery in anger and despair and the pieces are buried in the garden. In the present day, Tamar's mother digs up the pieces and tries to put them back together again. Just beautiful.
- 4 The olive tree.** I love trees as symbols in fiction. *The Messenger Bird's* olive tree is very old and wise and it's witnessed birth and death and love and grief throughout the history of Glanville Park. Every time I pictured the landscape surrounding Glanville Park, I imagined this colossal tree like the Tree of Souls in the movie *Avatar*. For me, the olive tree was the true heart of this story.
- 5 Gavin.** He's so solid and grounded in contrast to Tamar and Nathaniel, who seem to be such ethereal characters. All through, Gavin fights for Tamar and I wanted him to reach her and pull her back to her own time.
- 6 Time travel vs. Ghosts.** The notion of time travel belongs in science fiction, and I can't ever get my head around it. Somehow, Rosanne made me forget that there was anything to figure out and I just got caught up with the story. Sometimes I thought of Nathaniel as a ghost from the past, other times I imagined that it was entirely possible that he came from an alternate universe and he was just as alive as Tamar. I never did decide whether he was a ghost or a time traveller, but it didn't matter.

- 7 Gavin's brother Phillip.** He's almost grown but with the mind of a child, innocent and wise at the same time. He and Tamar have a special connection because they see things others can't. I saw Phillip as the bridge between Tamar and Gavin.
- 8 Images like this:** A black and white fantail danced slowly in the shadow of the olive tree, dragging one wing as he circled.
- Tamar's voice:** It was as if I had X-ray vision and I could see through to their fearful bones, clattering and shaking inside them, making them dance to whatever happened.
- And Gavin's:** 'What I wouldn't give to kiss that half-moon mouth. Bet I'd get a black eye.'
- 9 The music.** Music is a language I appreciate without fully understanding it. I can't read music or play an instrument, so I'm in awe of people who can. I had the pleasure of hearing Jeri play *Nathaniel's Waltz* and *The Maiden's Prayer* some time ago, before I'd read the book, and even though I'd only heard it once, I heard its echo as I read.
- I believe music attaches itself to memory and it can bring back emotions and images tucked away in the mind. After reading Rosanne's book I'm halfway to believing it can bring people back, too.
- 10 One word: Tamara.** Not Tamar, Tamara. She was the dangling thread that pulled the whole story together for me. This will mean nothing to anyone who hasn't read the book, so now you'll have to read it.

Thank you, Rosanne, and congratulations on your beautiful book, *The Messenger Bird*.