Remnants 5: Half-Spent Candle

The remnants of a man with a love of museums might shOw the Apprentice something more about his role in the First and Last Place, but his puRpose, and that of the remnants he reads, remains unclear.

Content Warnings

- Themes of domestic abuse
- Child neglect and forced child labour
- Body-shaming of a child, specifically of a little girl for being too big
- Negative self-talk
- Child abandonment
- Death of a parental figure
- Non-graphic references to physical domestic abuse
- Violent, premeditated murder
- Allusions to the holocaust specifically in reference to Romani survivors

Transcript

TICKING, WHIRRING, A GENTLE ROAR WHICH MAY BE A FIRE

APPRENTICE
Hmm, what was that?

Sir?

THE APPRENTICE SIGHS EMPHATICALLY AND GETS TO HIS FEET

APPRENTICE
Look at all these letters. Wonder who they’re for?

PAPER SHIFTS AND MOVES. DISTANTLY, THERE IS A THUD

APPRENTICE
Hello?

IN THE DISTANCE, THERE IS MOVEMENT, BUT NO REPLY.

APPRENTICE
Don’t like that. Don’t like that at all.

FOOTSTEPS. PAPER RUSTLES AGAIN.

APPRENTICE
Now. Remnants are for reading. These are letters though, with words and stuff. Are these for reading too?

A FLUTTER, A WHOOSH.

SIR
I wouldn’t concern myself with those.

APPRENTICE MAKES A SMALL, STARTLED SOUND

APPRENTICE
Ah, right then.

SIR
You no longer wish to be away.

APPRENTICE
I suppose not.

SIR
Hmm.

APPRENTICE
What is all this stuff?

SIR
Remnants.

APPRENTICE
Even the letters?

SIR
In part.

APPRENTICE
The remnants, they're what people left behind, aren't they?

SIR
Yes.

APPRENTICE
And we're meant to judge them.

SIR
That is the idea.

APPRENTICE
Why?

SIR
Well, I suppose there is nobody else to do it.

APPRENTICE
But. I mean. Why do it at all, you know? What's it all for?

SIR
Ah.

APPRENTICE
So?

SIR
'So' *what*?

APPRENTICE
I asked what it's all for.

SIR
You did.

APPRENTICE
You’re not answering.

SIR
Your observation is correct.

APPRENTICE
Oh. Okay.

SIR
Quite.

APPRENTICE
Will you *at least* tell me what happens when a judgement is passed?

SIR
There is nothing ‘least’ about it.

APPRENTICE
I don’t even-- right. Fine.

SIR
After a judgement is passed, the remnants are either shelved or discarded.

APPRENTICE
I know that, don’t I! What I want to know is what it *means*.

SIR
To be set upon the shelf is to suppose some day you may be taken off it again. To be cast aside? Well. It suggests that you should not.

PAUSE

APPRENTICE
So it’s about… second chances?

SIR
Interesting proposition. What do you imply?

APPRENTICE
Like. Another go around; you get to try again.

SIR
Try again at what, do you think?

APPRENTICE
Well I dunno, do I? That's why I'm asking!

SIR
Are you asking?

APPRENTICE
Ugh. I'm afraid you've lost me, sir.

SIR
So many times. And yet? Here you are.

APPRENTICE
Here I am.

SIR
Now that matter is resolved, shall we get to the business of the task?

APPRENTICE
The remnants, you mean?

SIR
That is your purpose here.

APPRENTICE
Reading them.

SIR
Yes.

APPRENTICE
Alright. What do you want me to look at this time?

SIR
Whatever you wish.

APPRENTICE
Ugh! Anything?! I can pick up *anything* and--

PAPERS FLUTTERING AWAY INTO THE DISTANCE

SIR
Except for those.

APPRENTICE
Except for those. Right then. How do you pick?

SIR
I don’t.

APPRENTICE
So you just. You read them as soon as they come in?

SIR
Yes and no. I do not see things as you do.

APPRENTICE
How do you see them then?

SIR
I don’t.

APPRENTICE
But you just said--

SIR
I am not a thing that looks.

APPRENTICE
Oh, I see.

SIR
Very funny.

APPRENTICE
Why thank you.

SIR
Hmm.

APPRENTICE
What?

SIR
You seem yourself today.

APPRENTICE
Who else would I be?

SIR
Hmm.

APPRENTICE
If you want to be like that, fine. Okay. If you don't see, how do you read the remnants?

SIR
Do *you* see them?

APPRENTICE
Like now, looking at these shelves, yeah?

SIR
When you read them. Is it like seeing?

AS HE ANSWERS, THE APPRENTICE WALKS BACK AND FORTH, PICKING UP AND PUTTING DOWN OBJECTS.

APPRENTICE
Um, no. Sort of? But not. It's more like. I don't know. You know how it is when you smell something and you know right away where you smelled it before? Or when you touch something

hot enough to burn you, but you snatch your hand away before you even notice your hand's on it?

SIR
Those to me seem quite different.

APPRENTICE
They are. But that's what it's like. Both of those things. Except, it's not me. It's like I'm them, and it's not as though it's happening, it's like I'm them, remembering. Does that make sense?

THE APPRENTICE STOPS PICKING STUFF UP.

SIR
What do you suppose sense is, in regard to this?

APPRENTICE
Dunno.

SIR
Well. If we can't determine that we have no hope of making it.

PAUSE

SIR
What have you chosen?

APPRENTICE
Oh. I just. I didn't really, I just-- it's this stump of a candle, you know, one that's been burnt down but blown out half way down. There's something off about the bottom, look, like a second wick is pointing out. It's all frayed, like it's been cut with something blunt, or maybe, I-- I--- I don't know…

SIR
What?

APPRENTICE
I… Molly.

WHOOSH. THE QUIET AMBIENCE OF A SHOP ON A RAINY DAY.

Grandmother's shop smells like tea and herbs and dust. The smell clings to all of Molly's clothes when they go upstairs to bed every evening.

That morning, her her grandmother is burning incense, the heavy, oily scent thickening the air, almost cushioning it. She asks Molly how it makes her feel.

'Sleepy,' she says.

'It's lavender,' says her grandmother. 'Lavender is good for sleep. Well done.'

Molly beams with the praise. She helps her grandmother set up the shop for the morning. She touches the rough twine binding bundles of herbs; crunchy paper bags of tea; smooth boxes of tarot cards; the cold edges of gem stones.

Most people don't come to the shop to buy her grandmother's wares, though. Sure, they'll pick up a bunch of herbs, a bag of tea leaves, but they barely look at what they pick up. They come for the backroom.

Grandmother calls it the Seeing Room, which Molly thinks is funny because it's hard to see anything at all in there. Her grandmother lights the place with a few guttering candles dotted around the room, and a large candelabra in the centre, sat on a small table draped in a velvet cloth. Stalactites of wax hanging from its spindly arms.

Once a client enters the room and a price has been arranged, Grandmother lights the three long candles on the stand, calling forth the ghosts.

The sway of her wrists is percussion, the new flickers of orange flame a bright harmony to her words. Strike a match, 'those beyond the veil,' flame, 'I bid you hear my call', flame, 'and step into the light', flame.

There is a second door into the Seeing Room, a little hatch behind the desk in the shop. This is where Molly's work comes in. She crawls inside into the dusty space below what might look, in the dark, to be cabinets. Above her is a line of strings; the wicks of the candles that light the Seeing Room. She grabs one and pulls, on the last word of Grandmother's chant.

'Light,' Grandmother says, and one candle from the edge of the room goes out. goes out.

Further down the tunnel, there's a loose board in the floor. Push it, the table shakes. There's an art to knowing when and how to punctuate her Grandmother's performance. Molly has practised with Grandmother for hours to get it it right. She hears Grandmother's chant in her head as she goes; 'stupid, stupid girl, hit your marks'. And she does hit them. With *flare*. Sometimes when she pulls a wick, she'll go slow, push the wick back up a moment to let the flame flicker for just a fraction of a moment, before pulling the wick down properly.

When the séance is done, the client leaves, often in tears. When the bell on the door of the shop rings, Molly crawls out of the tunnel. Grandmother gives her a lolly-pop. They wait for the next one.

WHOOSH. CARS AND PEOPLE PASS THE SHOP'S EXTERIOR.

Molly slides through hatch into the tunnel in the Seeing Room.

On the other side of the thin plywood wall, Grandmother is beginning her usual spiel. Molly pulls on a candle wick at the proper moment, but it doesn't come down when she tugs. There is a pause in Grandmother's speech, meant to be filled with the client's soft, awed gasp at the small proof they have been provided of the existence of the other side, but the gasp does not come.

Molly's throat tightens. *Stupid, stupid girl; hit your marks*. She shuffles up the tunnel and rattles the table, but it's at the wrong beat in the conversation. It's taken as odd, but not entrancing. Grandmother tries to cover for it. 'The spirits dally this morning, it seems,' she says.

Molly tries to swallow, her throat is thick. She barely hears what Grandmother says next, she's too busy muffling her mouth with the crook of her arm. It's difficult to turn in the tunnel now. She's grown so much since Grandmother first showed her how to use it. It was built for her mother. She's taller than she was, broader too. Grandmother reminds her of this often. 'You're getting to be a great galumphing thing,' she says.

Molly tries to recover herself from her transgressions. She hits every mark as she is meant to from that point on. It seems to take the client a little longer than normal to set in, but eventually they do, picking up everything Grandmother carefully lays down for them.

When the client leaves, Molly stays in the tunnel. She lies there until she hears the door open and sees a little square of light around her feet. 'Come on, then,' says Grandmother, tapping her ankle. 'You great, galumphing, stupid, stupid girl. Look at the size of you. Almost a woman already. How old are you, again?'

'Nine,' says Molly as she shimmies her way out of the tunnel.

Grandmother dusts off her shoulders and hands her a lolly-pop. 'Nine. You're already half-developed. Look at those hips. Terrible. No wonder you can't do the job right, you can probably barely move in there.'

‘The wick was stuck,’ Molly says.

‘No matter,’ says Grandmother.

‘It wouldn’t come even though I tugged,’ says Molly.

Grandmother sighs. ‘I said it was no matter.’

She turns her back to Molly, opens the till. Without looking at Molly’s face, she drops a handful of coins into her lap. ‘Go to the park to gather flowers. On your way home, stop at the shop. Buy things for lunch.’

Molly puts the coins in her pocket and does as she is told.

WHOOSH.

Molly opens the case that Grandmother packed before she sent her off to school. It smells of lavender and tea and home, but only when she kneels right next to it. The school smells of dust and old rocks. Her bed is a squeaky metal thing, nothing like the large wood frame she left behind. It rattles when she sits on it; she can feel the wire base through the thin mattress.

At night when she lays in bed, she pulls her pyjamas over her head and nuzzles into fabric, breathing the smell deep. But on the third day, she goes to bed to find her pyjamas neatly pressed and folded on her pillow. She picks them up. They smell of the same plain detergent as her sheets. She pulls them over her head anyway in the hopes it will stop the other girls noticing when she weeps.

WHOOSH.

Halfway through maths class, the headteacher comes to the door and calls out Molly’s name. The other girls whisper as she stands and leaves the room.

Already she's panicking; has she done something wrong; how badly has she miscalculated; has she been falsely accused of something? The thoughts race around her head.

She balls her hands into fists at her sides on the walk the headmistress's office. It seems to take an absurdly long time, each footstep echoing in the empty hallways she's certain the entire school must know she's in trouble. They'll all be saying 'she's a bad girl'. Stupid, stupid, great, galumphing, bad, bad girl. Hit your marks.'

The headmistress holds open the door. Molly is already almost crying, but when she spots a policeman standing by the bookcase, the tears spill over at once.

'I'm afraid I have some bad news,' says the headmistress.

'I'm so stupid, I'm sorry,' Molly says, at once, her lips shaking.

The headmistress frowns. 'You're not in trouble, Molly. Do you think you ought to be?'

Molly shrugs. Her lip is wobbling. The tears on her cheeks are hot, and her head is hurting.

'Here, have a tissue,' says the headmistress. 'Goodness gracious, girl. What on earth is this about?'

Molly shakes her head and blows her nose as quietly as she can. *Stupid, stupid, girl*, she tells herself, silently. *Bad, bad girl.*

'You're not in any trouble, you daft thing. I'm afraid there's been an accident. I'm very sorry to have to tell you this, but your aunt has passed away.'

'My… aunt?' says Molly, sniffling. 'But I don't have an aunt.'

The headmistress frowns. 'You lived with her before you came here, didn't you?'

'No, I lived with my grandmother.'

The headmistress glances over Molly's shoulder at the policeman.

'Molly. Can you tell us what you know about this woman you call your grandmother?'

Molly sniffles. 'Um,' she says, but she tells them all she knows. It isn't much and she can tell they're disappointed.

'Thank you, Molly,' says the headmistress. 'You can go now.'

'Back to class?' Molly asks.

'No. I think it's time for bed for you, dear. I'll ask Mrs Potter from the front desk to bring you a nice cup of tea and maybe some biscuits. Is that alright?'

Molly's lip is wobbling again. She nods.

WHOOSH.

Molly's grandmother was not her grandmother. It's all in the papers, but Molly tries not to think about it. The fire at the shop was too bad. They think it was an accident. The fire started in the Seeing Room.

The school is kind to Molly. When she turns fifteen, they help her get registered with an agency to find some work. She's teary often, but good at doing as she's told. After a few weeks, the Watsons – one of the families whose homes she's been cleaning with the agency – offer her a permanent post. The money isn't great, but it's better than what the agency was paying her, and they've given her her own little room in the attic. It's small but neat and tidy, and most importantly, it's hers.

The work at the Watsons' is boring and laborious but like her tiny bedroom, Molly appreciates it because it's her own work. As the months wore on, she's given more responsibilities. Now she's not just a cleaner, she does laundry, fetches groceries, walks the dogs. With each new duty comes a little bump in pay. Molly keeps her earnings in locked tin box under her bed.

She pulls out the box and tips the money out onto her bed. She counts it all out, coin by coin. She's about to hit her next fifty pounds. When she does, she'll take it all to the building society.

When she's put the money away in neat rows, she lies on her little bed. She loves how the smell of the pennies clings to her fingers.

WHOOSH.

On her walk back to the Watsons' house, Molly catches a scent on the wind; lavender incense. For a moment, she's paralysed by fear. Then she remembers; Grandmother is dead. She's dead

and buried. Lavender helps with sleep, she remembers. It's supposed to be a soothing smell, a cosy smell. So, Molly follows it.

It leads her to a small grassy area at the corner of the road over from the Watsons'. It's about the right size to be the plot of a house, but there's nothing there, just grass and bramble which looks like it's often traipsed through by the local kids. And now, there is a caravan.

It's not a caravan like the ones she's seen in magazines. It doesn't look like a train car on wheels or a garden shed or a tin can. It's round and made of wood and it's beautifully crafted. It's been hand-painted with looping floral designs, and between the froth of painted leaves, Molly spies a carefully brushed on squirrel, a mouse, and a rabbit. Under the flourishes, the caravan is a deep, rich green, but its wheels – huge and spoked like cartwheels – are painted bright yellow.

A little way into the field, a thick set pony is grazing at the lush, knee-high grass. He's patterned like a cow in splotches of black and creamy white, and has huge fluffy feathers on his legs, from the knee down.

Molly stands just inside this tiny field, holding her basket of things from the shop. She's been so distracted by everything else that she hadn't noticed the woman inside the caravan's open door until she stands up and comes closer. 'Have you come for a reading?' she says.

Molly shakes her head.

The woman frowns at her. 'Are you alright?' she asks.

Molly doesn't know why but she's crying. She shakes her head and says 'yes'. The woman in the caravan frowns even deeper.

Molly turns and bolts out of the field.

WHOOSH.

There is a knock on the Watsons' door two days after. The woman from the caravan is there. She's smiling. She has a basket on her hip with eggs, milk, and bacon; the very same items Molly had been carrying when she'd gone to the field.

'May I come in?' asks the woman.

Her name is Rosa. She helps Molly put her things away, comments on how lovely her home is.

‘It’s not *my* home. Or, it is, but I’m just the maid.’

Rosa laughs. ‘Oh, I see!’ she says.

Molly feels a crushing disappointment in her stomach and it must be plain on her face because Rosa stops laughing at once and rests her hand on Molly’s arm. ‘I’m sorry,’ she says. ‘I’m just relieved. When you came to my field, I thought something terrible might have been happening to you,’ she says.

Molly shakes her head. Rosa tilts hers to the side, smiling. She’s very beautiful, and it strikes Molly all at once. She stops looking at her and goes the fetch the laundry from the parlour.

Rosa follows her. ‘How long have you been a maid?’

‘Three years,’ says Molly.

‘Do you like it?”

Molly pauses in her sorting of the laundry. ‘I like that I know what to do. I like that I have my own room, my own space. The Watsons pay me well. I’m saving at the building society.’

‘That’s nice,’ says Rosa. She is looking at the photographs on the mantel in the kitchen.

‘What did you think was happening to me?’ Molly asks.

Rosa hesitates. ‘We don’t normally travel alone, people like me. But I had to break off from my family. A man. My husband.’

Rage wriggles like a worm in Molly’s stomach. It surprises her that she feels it as strongly as she does. She starts sorting the laundry, ignoring it and then she starts to speak. She tells Rosa about Grandmother, about the lavender and why she’d gone to the field.

It is a long while before Rosa responds. ‘Would you like me to read for you?’

‘What? Tarot?’ Grandmother sometimes used those cards in the Seeing Room. She knew all the names from hearing them called out and described. The cards always seemed to foretell some looming doom. Molly tells Rosa this, and Rosa laughs again.

‘It’s nothing so grand as that,’ she says. ‘Believe what you like. I don’t know if the cards can tell the future. But they can certainly help in the present, and that’s far more important.’

Molly frowns. ‘I don’t know what you mean,’ she says.

Rosa takes Molly’s hand and leads her to the kitchen counter. There’s a small rectangle of cloth in the corner. She takes it out, slides a set of worn tarot cards into her palm, and starts to shuffle them.

‘Those cards look just like my Grandmother’s,’ says Molly.

‘I’m not surprised. They would have been very new, when you knew her. They call this a Rider-Waite deck,’ says Rosa. ‘The pictures were drawn and coloured by a black woman, Pamela Smith.’

Molly watches Rosa’s nimble fingers as she shuffles the cards, splitting and turning them multiple times as she goes.

‘This decks not the first deck. The real history of tarot is muddy and lost. So much of it is tied up with my people.’

‘Your people?’

‘The Romani,’ says Rosa. ‘Most people have come to understand these cards almost as standard. It helps to explain things, a little. But the purpose of all tarot is the same. It’s not the cards themselves that matter, it’s the conversations they have with each other, and with you.’

Rosa lays several cards down on the kitchen counter. ‘It is the meaning we make of them that gives them their significance, that’s what I think.’

She reads Molly her fortune, and then leaves the Watsons’ house. On the doorstep, she briefly touches Molly’s cheek.

When Molly goes the little field the next day, the caravan is gone, and Rosa with it.

WHOOSH. WIND THROUGH LEAVES.

The next summer, as Molly walks home from town, she catches a scent on the wind; lavender incense. Her heart squeezes. She hurries to the little field, sees smoke rising over the hedges, and runs to the gate.

Instead of one caravan, there are two. One of them she recognises as Rosa’s. Her hefty pony is grazing next to it, accompanied by a similarly set steed in chestnut A few children run under a criss-cross of washing lines hung with clothes and sheets, blowing in the warm summer breeze.

Rosa is braiding a small girl’s hair. She looks up, sees Molly and almost smiles, but doesn’t quite. There is a bruise over one of her eyes.

A man emerges from the caravan behind her. He's small and well-muscled. He pats the top of Rosa's head like she's a dog.

Bile rises in Molly's throat. She turns and walks home fast. *Bad, bad girl*, she tells herself. *Stupid, stupid.*

She gets in and sets the empty basket down on the kitchen counter, only then realising she has not been to the shops to fetch the groceries. She should go back out, but her hands are shaking, she can't breathe, she thinks she might throw up in the sink. She turns on the tap, the water running cool, then warm, then hot, so hot it might scald her fingers.

A sudden rap of knuckles against the window.

Molly looks up. Rosa is there, pulling her shawl tight around her shoulders. She waves shyly.

Molly lets Rosa inside. She makes herself and Molly a cup of tea and sits down at the large wooden table in the centre of the Watsons' kitchen. They sit in silence for a moment, and then Rosa begins to talk. She tells Molly how she met her husband, how he could be disarmingly kind. About the first time he hit her. How she'd left last summer, but hadn't taken the children. How it was guilt in abandoning them that stopped her from running again when he finally tracked her down. How she was not happy, but it was fine.

Molly sis and listens. When Rosa is done, Molly hugs her. Rosa thanks her for listening, kisses her on the cheek, and leaves.

The next morning, she goes to Rosa's little camp. 'How long will you be here,' she asks.

'Three days more,' says Rosa. 'Then we're headed to the coast.'

'Perhaps I'll visit you there,' says Molly. 'But we need to make a plan.'

Rosa frowns. 'For what?'

'Tell me about the place you camp near the beach. I need details; be specific.'

WHOOSH. THE SOUNDS OF AN UNSETTLED SEA.

Molly catches the train to Scarborough. The air is cool and salty, a stiff wind making her loose hair fly about her face. In her little bag under her arm, she has all the money she took out of the building society.

It takes her a little while to find Rosa's caravan. Once she does, she doesn't approach. She walks down the promenade, buys herself an ice cream, and sits on a bench. The sun is already setting. She set off from home on the train at five, missing most of the excitement of the day. Now it's gone eight. Molly sits until the sun slips over the horizon.

Then, she makes her way to the place where Rosa and her husband's caravans are parked. Rosa's heavy horse is nibbling the grass, tethered to a stake hammered into the ground. Rosa is at the window hatch, spots Molly standing there.

Molly opens her bag. Next to her carefully filed money is a small candle. She rigs a candle in the trees at the edge of the small field where the caravans are stopped. She mushes the bottom of the candle into the bark so it stays upright. The wick from the candle's base is very long, and she trails it carefully into the treeline. Then she looses the chestnut pony free.

It takes a moment for anyone inside the caravans to notice what's going on. Molly runs to her candle, lights it, and runs to the treeline, holding the long wick firmly in her hand.

Rosa shouts first, then her husband. He calls her name, blaming her for the pony coming untethered. Molly's stomach flips with nerves, but she grips the wick tighter. Not long now, not long. *Hit your marks*.

Rosa's husband catches the pony. As he strides back to tether it in the earth, he stops in his tracks. He's staring at the candle. 'Hello?' he calls.

Molly whispers her own name, backwards.

'Hello?' Rosa's husband calls again. He takes a tentative step towards the trees.

Molly pulls the candle wick. The flame is gone. Rosa's husband takes a few more steps towards where it had been.

Behind him, Molly sees the shape of Rosa, her arms high above her head. She brings down her rolling pin *hard* on the back of her husband's head.

For a moment he does't react except to freeze, then he hisses with pain, raising his hand and turning to where Rosa stands, still clutching her rolling pin. In the dark, Molly can just about tell Rosa's eyes are growing wide.

'I'll kill you,' says Rosa's husband.

'Not likely,' says Molly, and she stabs him in the back with a knife from the Watsons' kitchen.

WHOOSH. THE DISTANT VOICES OF CHILDREN.

Rosa comes out of the caravan and sits wordlessly beside Molly. They have been camped on the outskirts of a small french town for three days. It's late summer, and already the sun is growing warm on Molly's forearms.

The children are not far away; their voices and laughter carry on the wind from the beach.

Rosa drops her head onto Molly's shoulder.

'It's the anniversary today,' says Rosa.

Molly hums. It's been four years since they killed Rosa's husband. The early days were frightening. Every moment they were afraid they would be caught, thrown in jail. That Rosa would never see her children again. They rarely think of him now.

'Shall we walk into town for some bread?' Rosa asks.

'Hmm,' says Molly. She swipes stray hair from Rosa's cheek. In the early sunlight of the morning, her skin glows a deep shade of copper, the dusting of freckles like dark stars over the bridge of her nose even more pronounced from yesterday's day in the sunshine.

'You're so beautiful,' says Molly.

Rosa laughs. 'Thanks, but do you want bread or not?'

'What's that poem?' Molly says, 'a sharing of life's glories; bread and Rosas?'

'Bread and *roses*, you hopeless romantic,' says Rosa. She kisses Molly on the cheek. 'Come on. I read our tarot this morning. It's a good day to start early. We're going to make our fortune!'

Molly laughs. 'You say that every morning,' she says.

Rosa smiles. She does. And everyday, she is right.

WHOOSH. WIND BLOWS AND THINGS RATTLE, DISTURBED BY IT.

They huddle together in the chill of winter. It's the first since the end of the war. What's left of Rosa's extended family have come together here, to this quiet spot on the wild hills of Northern Spain, to celebrate.

The two of Rosa's children who survived the war flank their mother, two girls, almost carbon copies of her. They look nearly exactly the way Rosa had looked when Molly first met her. Now her mass of dark brown curls has begun to turn grey at the edges, and her beautiful face is lined with beautiful creases, a hundred thousand smiles remembered on her skin.

Rosa stands then, and she tells the story of her husband. How she escaped him. How Molly helped. Her family cannot truly know of the real love Rosa and Molly share but this shared history is as close as they can come to telling them. Molly eyes prickle with tears.

WHOOSH. THE AMBIENCE OF A TOWN AT NIGHT.

Rosa and Molly's eldest daughter runs a hand over her domed stomach. It's late at night, but at their camp on the southern coast of Italy, it's still warm. Candles flicker on the long table set up between Molly and Rosa's caravan and their daughter's.

'You were born by a river,' says Rosa. 'Your son was born by a lake. I wonder where this one will make you have her.'

Their daughter laughs. 'You're so sure it will be a girl?'

'So sure,' says Rosa.

'She's asked the deck a dozen times, it always tells her the same,' says Molly.

'What do you think, Mama Moll?' asks their daughter.

'I think we need more wine,' says Molly. She gets to her feet.

Molly gets up and goes into hers and Rosa's home. She pulls aside the little curtains on the shelf where they keep the wine. Outside, Rosa is talking. In the adjacent caravan, Molly can hear their daughter's husband singing softly to their first baby.

Molly reaches up to grab the wine bottle, and something in her feels like it breaks in the back of her neck. Her head is warm as though under the stream of a hot shower, the sensation spreading outwards down her neck, across her shoulders.

Distantly, as though shouting to a boat drifting out to sea, Molly hear's Rosa call and ask if Molly needs anything.

'No thank you,' she wants to say, but she cannot move her mouth to speak the words.

She can smell the rich wine from the shattered bottle lying beside her on the ground, the sweet smoke from the fire, and the lavender incense Rosa burned earlier that afternoon.

And then, like a wick pulled suddenly through a candle, she is gone.

WHOOSH.

FOR A MOMENT, THE APPRENTICE ONLY BREATHES.

APPRENTICE
Did you… *make* me choose that?

SIR
What compels you to ask this?

APPRENTICE
I was thinking, maybe it’s killers, you know? Killers and their victims. But.

SIR
But?

APPRENTICE
Molly and Rosa, they’re killers. But. I don’t think they’re bad.

SIR
So that is the criteria, do you think?

APPRENTICE
What, whether people are bad or not?

SIR
If you like. Though that’s not what you said.

APPRENTICE
What did I say, then?

SIR
You don't *think* they're bad.

APPRENTICE
So that's what-- oh. *Oh*. I am the operative. It's what I think. Whether I think they're bad or not. That's it? That's the criteria?

SIR
Perhaps.

APPRENTICE
But. How is that fair?

SIR
To who?

APPRENTICE
To anyone?!

SIR
I am not sure that it is meant to be fair.

APPRENTICE
I… Don’t you think it should be?

SIR
Why?

APPRENTICE
If we’re condemning people, then--

SIR
Is that what we are doing? Which, to shelve or discard, is the condemnation, do you think?

APPRENTICE
I-- I mean. I don’t know. I-- I don’t-- what happens, when they’re re-shelved?

SIR
To be shelved it to suppose one will one day be plucked off it.

APPRENTICE
So. They. What? They live again?

SIR
I suppose.

APPRENTICE
Don’t suppose! Know!

SIR
I am not a thing that knows.

APPRENTICE
So what is the point of you?!

SIR
What is the point indeed.

APPRENTICE
Did you ever think maybe this is too much to ask? Maybe this is wrong, what you're doing? By making me-- by forcing me to--

SIR
To what?

APPRENTICE
I don't know! But that's part of the problem, isn't it?

SIR
Perhaps, and yet, I find in this matter, it is our only viable option.

APPRENTICE
What is that supposed to mean?!

SIR
That I've had enough of this, for now. And you should sleep.

[END]