

Remnants, Episode 7

Content Warnings:

- Implications of child neglect
- Abstract inferences of mental illness
- Exploitative romantic relationships with a significant age gap between an adult and a teenager
- Implications of depression

Transcript

SIR
Apprentice?

APPRENTICE
Mm? Sorry, I think I nodded off.

SIR
You're awake now.

APPRENTICE
Yeah.

A TEACUP IS SET DOWN

SIR
What is that?

APPRENTICE
What? Oh, this? Tea.

SIR
Tea.

APPRENTICE
Would you like some? I can pour you a cup.

SIR
No thank you.

APPRENTICE
Right. Sorry, was I supposed to start already?

SIR
What were you doing?

APPRENTICE
I-- drinking. Tea?

SIR
I see.

APPRENTICE

Do you?

SIR

Why do ask this?

APPRENTICE

Because you-- oh, never mind.

SIR

And yet so often I do.

APPRENTICE

What?

SIR

Mind.

APPRENTICE

Oh.

SIR

Do you remember?

APPRENTICE

Remember what?

SIR

What we discussed?

APPRENTICE

Uh-- I-- I'm sorry, I--

SIR

No matter. Let's get on with it. Are you ready now, do you think?

APPRENTICE

For... what, Sir?

SIR

To pass a judgement.

APPRENTICE

Oh, I-- I mean. I only just-- I would if-- on what?

SIR

Remnants. That is your purpose here. You've taken the job, you must read the remnants, process them, and decide. Shelve or discard.

APPRENTICE

Oh, right. Why?

SIR

Why?

APPRENTICE

Yes.

SIR

Because that is the job.

APPRENTICE

Oh. Right. Okay. Will you show me how?

SIR

That is not for me to do.

APPRENTICE

Sorry. Whose apprentice am I, then?

SIR

Mine. I suppose.

APPRENTICE

You... suppose?

SIR

For once I would like this to be easy.

APPRENTICE

You sure know how to make a guy feel welcome.

SIR

That was an attempt at humour.

APPRENTICE

It-- ? You know what, just show me what I need to do.

SIR

I brought you this.

ITEMS RATTLE INSIDE A CARDBOARD BOX

APPRENTICE

Oh. A hat box? Thank you?

SIR

It is a remnant. But. I will not ask you judgement on this one. Last time, you. Well. Suffice it to say I think it will be of benefit, this time, to leave that obligation aside for this one.

APPRENTICE

Is this some sort of test?

SIR

Yes.

APPRENTICE

And if I pass, I get the job?

SIR

You will have the job regardless. You always have the job. This will not change, not until I see fit. There have been times before where we have begun and had to begin again immediately. Sometimes things... linger.

APPRENTICE

Like a stain.

SIR

Like bruises. With enough focused repair, they can be erased.

APPRENTICE

I don't know what you're talking about.

SIR

That is a promising sign.

APPRENTICE

Oh. That's, uh. Good then?

SIR

Quite. Shall we begin?

APPRENTICE

Yeah, if you like? I read through the stuff in this box, and then process it, right? Process it how?

SIR

As you would your own feelings.

APPRENTICE

Uh.

SIR

A challenge, as I understand it.

APPRENTICE

That's not really--

SIR

Trust that it will be clear to you once the task is begun.

APPRENTICE

And you say I don't need to pass judgement on this one?

SIR

No. Though if you feel compelled to do so, you may.

APPRENTICE

So, what happens I *am* compelled to?

SIR

The judgement is passed. It is shelved or discarded.

APPRENTICE

Discarded like...?

SIR

Discarded.

APPRENTICE

Uhuh, okay, grand, you're a riot, you are.

SIR

Not that I am aware of.

APPRENTICE

Sure, stellar.

SIR

Hmmm.

APPRENTICE

Okay. Let's process this stuff for you then, I suppose.

LID LIFTS OFF THE BOX.

APPRENTICE

Oh, it-- it's her. It's *her*.

WHOOSH.

Amelie's grandmother tucks her hair behind her ears. 'You look so pretty, just like your mama when she was a girl,' she says. She kisses her on the nose.

'Will go to see her soon?' Amelie asks. 'At the big house with all the old ladies?'

Amelie's grandmothers eyes are shinier than normal. She's crying. Amelie brushes away her tears. 'Grandmother, what is it?' she asks. 'Why are you crying?'

'We cannot go to see mama, Amelie,' says grandmother. She smooths Amelie's hair again. 'She's gone somewhere else.'

'Somewhere very far away?'

'Yes, in some ways. But in others she is closer to us than ever.'

Amelie frowns. 'I don't understand.'

Grandmother sighs. 'You remember the baby bird who fell from his nest last spring?'

Amelie nods. She thinks of it's thin pink skin, it's nubby, featherless wings. In her palm it had barely weighed of anything. She glances across the garden to the tulips, where they buried him. 'I remember,' says Amelie.

'You remember how it went to heaven?'

Amelie nods.

'Your mama is in heaven now, too,' says grandmother.

Amelie looks over at the tulips. 'I am not sure there's room for her in the flower patch.'

Grandmother gasps and covers her hand, a little laugh tumbling out of her almost like it's an accident. Amelie isn't sure what's funny about it.

'She won't be buried here. She'll be buried at the church, in town. If I have my way.'

Amelie frowns. 'Oh.'

'Listen, Amelie,' says grandmother. 'I have a gift for you.' She hands Amelie a hat box with a large ribbon around it. Amelie tugs it loose and removes the lid. Inside the box is a pair of lace gloves; she recognises them.

'Mama's?' Amelie asks, lifting the gloves out.

'That's right,' says grandmother. 'And what else?'

Under the gloves is a small square of paper. On the bottom corner is a scribbled name 'Matine, 1955.' She turns it over. It's mama, but not like Amelie knows her. Her hair is long and hangs in shining dark curls over her shoulders. Her eyes are dark and lustrous, shining all the brighter with the smile on her full lips.

'Mama is happy,' says Amelie. She touches her mother's full cheeks in the picture. 'She's so beautiful.'

Grandmother is crying. She pulls Amelie close to her chest. 'You're just like her. Thank goodness,' she says into Amelie's shoulder. 'We're going to keep you safe, sweet girl. Don't worry. I won't let you down. I promise.'

WHOOSH.

There is shouting downstairs. Amelie is lying on her bedroom floor, pressing her ears to the floorboards, trying to hear it more clearly. A man arrived at the house a few hours ago. Amelie didn't recognise him.

The shouting stops. Amelie strains her ears, trying to press her face somehow closer to the floor, and then her bedroom door bursts open. She jumps, scrabbling onto her knees.

'What are you doing?' grandmother asks.

'Nothing,' says Amelie.

'No matter. Put on your shoes. There is someone who has come to meet you.'

Amelie puts on her shoes. She's marched down the stairs. In the drawing room, a young man is leaning against the table. He's dressed unlike anyone Amelie has ever seen, an expensive scarf hanging over his creased, half-buttoned shirt. His jacket is mint green.

'Amelie,' he says. He bends down to look at her.

'Yes?' she says. She looks doubtfully at grandmother, whose expression is stern and does not help at all.

'Are you alright? Are you happy?' He speaks in French smoothly, but he's clearly not French. He might be English, but Amelie isn't sure.

Amelie frowns. 'Yes?'

The man sighs with what seems like extreme relief. He pulls Amelie to his chest. He smells like wine and cigarettes and something expensive Amelie can't quite place.

She does not know what to do in his embrace. 'Excuse me, sir,' she says, timidly. 'Who are you?'

The man lets Amelie go. 'Goodness,' he says. He looks at Amelie's grandmother. 'Did nobody tell you? I'm your father,' he says.

'Oh. That can't be right,' says Amelie. 'Grandmother says my papa is a servant of the devil.'

The man snorts a laugh. He smiles. He's less frightening when he's smiling.

'I see,' he says. 'Well. I'm certainly not a servant of the devil. My name is—' he hesitates a moment. 'You can call me Teddy, how about that?'

'Teddy,' says Amelie. 'Like a Teddy bear.'

Teddy grins. 'Exactly.'

WHOOSH.

It's spring and they're cleaning out the garden house ready for guests in summer. Amelie, eleven years old, is sent up into the attic space. It's dusty and full of old boxes. She peers inside, checks their contents, and passes them down to her grandmother and Jaques, the valet, who are cleaning in the room below.

Amelie opens another box and peers inside. At first, it seems to be a load of old junk, poetry books, and notebooks, like all the others, but as she moves it, something catches in the bright spring sunlight pouring through the tiny attic window. Amelie look inside more carefully, reaching into the box. Something sharp snags her finger and she gasps in pain. It's a shard of glass, sticking out of a broken picture frame. Amelie pulls the photograph from inside loose.

It's her mama. She's beautiful here, like she is in Amelie's memory box. She's wearing an off-the shoulder white dress, floor length. The bodice is beautiful, covered in criss-crossing pleats. The skirt is shaped like an upside-down V, covered in white embroidery and finished with more pinned horizontal pleats, a few inches from the hem. From her head, over her shoulders, is arranged a long, lace-edged veil. She's a bride.

What's more surprising is the man standing next to her in a beautifully tailored tuxedo. It's Teddy, and he looks shockingly young. His bright, pale eyes gleam even in the black and white photograph. Amelie turns the picture over, hoping it's inscribed like the picture of her mother in her box. It is. 'Lord and Lady du Perier on their wedding day, April 14th, 1956'.

Amelie's hands are shaking.

WHOOSH.

Amelie and Teddy wander around the Louvre. She has just turned 14, and her visits with him are less frequent than they used to be, but she relishes them more than ever. He buys her expensive clothes and lets her wear whatever she likes. Sometimes she even gets to spend the night with him in Paris even though its only a short car ride back to grandmother's house. In the mornings, they sit on his roof terrace and have coffee together. Teddy even lets her try his cigarettes.

This visit, though, he looks tired, frazzled. He takes her to the theatre, and for dinner afterwards. He's less good than usual at pretending he's interested in what she has to say. He cuts in with strange interjections. 'Do you have enough clothes?' he asks, when she was in the middle of explaining about her best friends at school. 'Do you think you'll grow your hair out?' he asks when she is recounting the Easter Fete at church.

After dinner is finished, they go back to Teddy's flat. This place, usually so neat and well maintained, is in as much disarray as Teddy himself. There are clothes strewn across the furniture. Not all of them are Teddy's, Amelie guesses from the sparkling beads on some of them.

They drink hot chocolate on the terrace in the relative dark of the city at night, listening to the bustle in the streets below. Teddy takes out a small key, presses it into Amelie's hand. 'It's for the apartment,' he says.

'Why are you giving it to me?'

'I'm going away. Business. I'm sorry to cut our visit short. In the morning, Michel will drive you home as usual. I want you to know this apartment will always be here for you. Do you understand what I'm saying to you, Amelie?'

Amelie nods. She looks at the key in her hand. 'When will I see you again?' she says.

Teddy smiles. 'Soon, I hope,' he says.

When Amelie wakes in the morning, Teddy has already gone. The disarray in the apartment the night before has vanished with him. Everything except the breakfast table has been covered in white drop cloths, as though the place has overnight become filled with oddly shaped ghosts.

WHOOSH.

Amelie strokes each item in her memory box. Pretty pebbles, a conker, a button from her favourite, too-small blouse, a bright orange ribbon from two birthdays ago, her mother's gloves, her father's apartment key, the photograph of them both at their wedding. She puts the lid back on the box and stuffs it into her suitcase, cushioning the sides with her clothes. The thing barely closes and for a moment she's worried she won't be able to lift it, but she can, just about.

It makes sneaking down the hallway extremely difficult and cumbersome, but she somehow manages to get out of the house without waking grandmother. She runs down the gravel drive, slips out of the gardener's gate, and into the headlights of a car whose engine is already rumbling, waiting for her.

Amelie slips into the back seat. The producer she met in Paris two weeks ago, Jean, is wearing a tuxedo and has a cream scarf over his shoulders. He has the window rolled down, smoking. He offers Amelie a cigarette. She accepts it.

'Are you ready to be a star?' Jean asks, as he lights her up.

Amelie smiles. 'I am.'

They drive to the airport. It's a long flight to LA, and Amelie has never been on a plane before, so she spends the whole time staring out of the windows in wonder. Jean is charmed, laughing with delight at her. Amelie feels like she's glowing from the inside out.

She met Jean after a late night screening of one of his new films. Amelie had gone into Paris to see a play, but the evenings are boring on her own in Teddy's apartment, so she found herself wandering about the city, and came across a small theatre playing independent films.

At the end, she'd stood up, and the man in the row behind her gasped. It was Jean. He took her hand and told her she was the perfect fit for a new film he was producing in LA with big money. He'd been responsible for the film she'd just seen too. Although Amelie had not understood that much of the film and in fact found it extremely baffling, an offer to go to LA to be a film star was too much for her to overlook.

The next morning, she'd told her grandmother, who was furious. She told Amelie that not only could she not go to LA, she was now banned from visiting Paris on her own. 'Sixteen year old girls should not be wandering the city streets at night alone,' grandmother told her.

She'd phone Jean late that night and they'd hatched the plan they were now executing, and she was whisked away to America to start a new, exciting life.

WHOOSH.

Amelie wakes up to a violent knock on the door to the apartment. She shares it with three other girls, all actors, though they've not been any films Amelie recognises the names of. It's late morning, already sweltering hot. Nobody else is in so Amelie trudges to the door herself. On the doorstep is Jean. In one hand he has a bunch of roses and a bottle of champagne, in the other, a lit cigarette.

'Where have you been?' she asks him, stepping aside to let him in.

'Busy with work, baby, you know how it is,' Jean kisses Amelie's cheek and slams the door shut with his heel. He sets down his offerings on the counter and starts opening and closing the kitchen cupboards.

'It's been three months,' says Amelie.

'Don't you have any champagne flutes?'

'What have you been doing?!' Amelie asks.

Jean's shoulders slump. He turns to Amelie, gets down onto his knees, clasps his hands in front of his chest. 'I've been a bad, bad man, I know,' he says.

Amelie sighs.

'Can you find it in your pretty little heart to forgive me.' He pouts, wobbling his lip comically.

Amelie laughs. 'Okay, fine, *fine*.'

'I do have some good news,' says Jean. He gets to his feet again. 'Hence the champagne.'

Amelie gets two mugs out of the cupboard.

'Is that the best you have?' asks Jean.

Amelie shrugs. 'At least they're clean.'

Jean pops the champagne and fills the mugs with it. 'You've been cast.'

'I have?!' says Amelie, her heart leaping in her chest. 'In what?!'

'A new picture, and it's fabulous, too, baby, let me tell you. You're going to be the leading man's great love. We're shooting in Egypt, starting in two weeks.'

Amelie squeals. 'Egypt?! Really?!'

'That's right, baby! What'd I tell you? I'll make you a star!'

WHOOSH.

Egypt is hot in a way Amelie has never experienced before. There's something magical about it, something entrancing, particularly when you get out of the city. In LA she's found the heat suffocating and unbearable, but something about the Egyptian heat is different. She thrives in it, loves the way it hangs on the breeze, but still, she finds her favourite time of day is very early in the morning. She'll get out of bed hours before she has to be in hair and makeup and make herself a coffee and sit out on the deck behind the hotel she's been put up in, and look up at the pale blue early morning sky.

The rest of her days is a pendulum swinging from frantic action to unbearable stasis. On a film set, it seems things are not happening at all, and then all at once. It's extremely frustrating to yoyo from having no sense that anything is happening, or that she has anything to do, to then suddenly feel as though she is late. But she's learning this is the norm on this set.

The leading man is quite beautiful. She's seen him in films before. Off set they don't speak much, but when he's reading his lines, his performance is beautiful, entrancing. She really feels like a princess who's taken in her husband's wounded would-be assassin, who is falling madly, deeply in love with him.

The day comes of their on-screen kiss. Jean has the script in his hand. 'Amelie, you'll be in the shower, over there.'

Amelie frowns. 'What am I doing in there?'

Jean laughs. 'Why, showering, of course.'

Amelie thinks this over in her mind. 'Jean. You don't mean I will be naked, do you?' she asks. The only people who have seen her naked are her grandmother and her nursery maids. She clutches the cuffs of her shirt dress.

'Don't worry, baby,' says Jean. 'You'll look beautiful. Why do you look so upset? You've not got a third nipple have you? Hairy tits?'

Amelie gasps.

Jean laughs. 'Really, what's wrong?'

'I can't do it,' says Amelie.

Jean's expression softens. 'I get it. You're nervous. It'll be fine, though. I promise. Hey, how's about I come to your tent before we go to set? I'll help you undress, show you there's nothing to worry about.'

'No thank you,' says Amelie.

Jean shrugs. 'Whatever, baby. Just be on set in ten minutes.'

Amelie walks stiffly to her tent. She sits in front of the big mirror at her dressing table. There's movement and action around her, women pulling at her hair, unfastening her dress.

'Excuse me, please take off your brassiere so we can apply make up.'

'Why would I need to take my underwear off for you to do that?!'

'Madame, the make-up is for your body, not your face!'

Amelie stands up at once. 'I can't do this,' she says. 'I just can't.'

WHOOSH

Three days later, Amelie is sitting on the floor in a museum. There are fans whirring overhead. Jean has been shouting at her for what feels like the entire time since she walked off set. He tells her she won't even be paid for the time she's already put in, they've had to recast her role and they'll be reshooting everything, adding two weeks to the schedule.

Amelie sniffles. She rubs her cheek with the back of her wrist.

A hand reaches down from behind the display. It's holding a handkerchief. 'Here,' says a man's voice, in English.

Amelie takes the handkerchief. 'Thank you,' she whispers. She pats her eyes.

'No problem,' says the man. He comes around the display and leans against the wall opposite Amelie. He smiles at her kindly. 'Are you lost?' he asks.

Fresh tears spill out over Amelie's cheeks. She shakes her head. 'I don't think so,' she says.

The man frowns a little. 'My eldest daughter is about your age. If someone found her in such a state, I'd like to think they'd help her. Your English has an accent. I'm Halim. I live not far from here. Where are you from?'

'Just outside of Paris,' says Amelie.

'Long way from home,' says Halim 'Are you on holiday?'

Amelie shakes her head. She's crying again, now. 'I came for work. I'm an actress, or I'm supposed to be, but. Oh. It's awful. I've ruined everything.'

'I'm sure you haven't. Is there anything I can do to help? Someone I can call for you?'

Amelie shakes her head again.

'Well. I'm afraid I'm going to have to close the museum soon. My wife is coming to pick me up on after she collects our eldest from her violin recital. We're planning on going to the restaurant across the road for some food, would you like to join us?'

Amelie sniffles. 'I haven't any money.'

Halim shrugs. 'No matter. It's a cheap restaurant. The food is delicious, though.' He holds out a hand to help Amelie to her feet.

WHOOSH.

Amelie helps Halim's daughter, Nashwa, pin pleats into her hijab so it perfectly frames her face. 'How is my eyeliner?' she asks in a whisper.

'Gorgeous!' Amelie promises.

Nashwa takes a deep breath and holds her violin across her chest. 'Thank you for coming.'

Amelie smiles. 'Of course!'

She's been in Egypt for three months now. Since that first dinner with Nashwa, Halim, and Nashwa's mother, Inaaya, she's been staying in the spare room in their little house in Cairo. Halim came with her to collect her things from the hotel. She was surprised by how frightening he could make himself seem when he wanted to. He was unfailingly kind to Amelie, so she barely registered he was over six foot tall and almost half as broad, too. She might've, had he not been so sweet with Nashwa.

Nashwa had eyed Amelie suspiciously when they first met, but the floodgates had opened the moment she realised Amelie had been to Paris and in fact had keys to an apartment there. On a weekly basis, now, she begged her father to let them both travel there. She longed to play violin for a french opera.

'You're not ready, yet!' Halim would tell her with an indulgent laugh and a roll of his eyes.

Amelie watched their interactions with wonder. He was firm, supportive, kind with his daughter. A presence in her life. Sometimes, late at night, she thought about Teddy, how he would breeze in and out, buying her things, leaving again. He always seemed interested in what she had to say, but he was rarely there to hear it. He wasn't a father, not like Halim was to Nashwa.

As the months wore on, Halim helped Amelie get a job at the museum. She could speak French, and her English was almost fluent, so she made for an excellent tour guide. The families she showed around often complimented her on the way she told stories about the exhibits. Her most favourite thing was when little children gasped at her stories of the pharaohs whose grand sarcophagi gleamed from within glass cabinets.

Most nights, Halim would drive Amelie to his house and she'd have dinner with his family, almost always sat shoulder to shoulder with Nashwa. She wasn't fluent in Arabic yet, but she was getting there quickly, and she appreciated Nashwa's patience with her in that.

That night is Nashwa's first performance as second violinist with a full orchestra. It's incredible. When she gets home late that night, Amelie folds a programme into the box she keeps under the bed in her little flat.

It was not the life she had expected for herself, but it is a good one, nonetheless.

WHOOSH.

Amelie is smoking on the balcony of her little flat. She hears the door open and the rustle of bags. Nashwa shouts through. 'Only me!' she calls.

'I'm smoking,' Amelie calls back.

'Don't let dad see,' says Nashwa.

Amelie throws the stub of her cigarette down into the city below her. 'He's not here is he?'

'No, I'd have found a way to hold him up,' says Nashwa with a grin. 'I've got your back.' Nashwa was dressed all in black but for her hijab, which was a deep bottle green. The pins she'd used to hold the pleats she liked to use to frame her face were tipped with pearls.

'You look gorgeous,' says Amelie. 'You're not playing tonight?'

Nashwa's shoulders curl in and she smiles coyly. 'No, I'm going out for dinner.'

Amelie squeaks. 'With who?!'

'His name is Ahmer, he's a cellist.'

'That's the big violin, right?'

Nashwa threw one of the throw pillows from Amelie's settee directly at her head.

'Hey! That's not what throw pillow means!' says Amelie.

'Yes, the cello is the big violin,' says Nashwa. 'Mum and dad are coming, they're going to be at the next table. Ahmer asked dad for permission before he asked me out, it's all very sweet, but honestly the look on his face when he came over to me, I thought he was going to deliver an obituary.'

Amelie giggles. 'Goodness, I hope dad wasn't too hard on him.'

'I asked him after and he said as his oldest daughter he has to make sure any boys who want to court me are thoroughly fearing of Allah, and as he cannot see into their hearts to be sure, he'll make sure they're scared of him too for good measure.'

Amelie and Nashwa howl in laughter, crowding next to each other on the settee. 'Dad's going to have a hard time keeping that up if it goes well and they spend more time together,' says Amelie.

'Too right,' says Nashwa. She turns to Amelie's shoulder. 'What about you? Are you seeing anyone?'

Amelie sighs. She'd had a couple of people over, spent a couple of nights at some hotels. All tourists, stopping in Cairo for a week or two, never anyone who stays, nor anyone local. 'I don't think I'm ready for anything serious,' says Amelie.

Nashwa sighs. 'What if I am?'

'You're almost twenty, I think that's allowed,' says Amelie.

Nashwa smiles, looking up at the ceiling. 'Promise it won't change anything?' she says.

Amelie laces their fingers together. 'Course it won't.'

WHOOSH.

It does change things. Not at first, and not for the worse, but it changes them. Ahmer is sweet and kind. Amelie would never tell Nashwa but he reminds her of their dad, Halim. He slots into the family as though he has always belonged there, adding his parents, siblings

and cousins to the crowd that gathers for special events at Halim and Inaaya's. Sometimes Amelie forgets they have unofficially adopted her into their family, that she ever had a life before she met them.

Nashwa and Ahmer get married in the spring, and by the autumn, Nashwa is expecting a baby. It's exciting, Amelie weeps with delight about it and helps Ahmer and Nashwa paint their nursery. When the babies – twin boys – arrive, relatives from both Nashwa and Ahmer's family swoop in to help, Nashwa barely has to do anything alone. It's all so different to what Amelie expected, to what she remembers of her own childhood.

For the first time in a long time, she finds herself pouring over the photograph of her mother in her memory box, wondering who she really was, and what happened to her.

With the photograph propped against the lamp in her bedroom, Amelie scribbles a few words into a notebook. A poem.

It's Nashwa that tells Amelie to send the poems to a publisher. She finds Amelie's stash of now dozens of notebooks crammed with poems when she stops by with the boys for lunch on Amelie's day off. Amelie is resistant at first. 'What would they want to see that old rubbish for?'

Nashwa laughs. 'Amelie, I nearly cried just peering through them.'

'I told you they were bad.'

'Not because they're bad, because they're beautiful!' says Nashwa. A look crosses her face. 'The one about the street light. It's so pretty, but it's so sad.'

Amelie's stomach twists. 'Oh, why did you have to look at that one?'

'It's how the pages opened in my hand! It was fate,' Nashwa insists. 'If you won't send them off, that's fine. There's this bar a few streets from Ahmer's brother's offices. They do this thing on Tuesdays where people go and read their poetry aloud. You should do it.'

'You've been to a bar?' says Amelie. '*Without* me?!'

Nashwa laughs. 'Don't get too carried away! They also do jam sessions. We took my violins, played with some local musicians. It was great.'

'I can't believe I wasn't invited.'

Nashwa rolls her eyes. 'This is me officially inviting you.'

'You're a married woman; aren't you supposed to be setting a good example?'

'Just don't tell dad,' Nashwa says with a wink.

WHOOSH.

Amelie packs away the few copies of her book that are left after the reading. It's been a late night at the little bookshop, much busier than she'd expected. Most readings, she expects only three or four people to come. This one back in Cairo had more than thirty. She's grateful for it. Coming back to Cairo after her book tour felt like coming home and this reading has made it feel like being welcomed back by distant relatives.

She's thinking longingly of her quiet little flat, of an afternoon at the museum, seeing Halim on his coffee break, treating him to a cake from the bakery down the street. Tomorrow she'll see Nashwa and the new baby and no doubt marvel at how tall her boys will have managed to get in the short months she has been away.

She is about to leave when a slender man in an expensive hat walks up to her table.

'Sorry, did you want me to sign something?' says Amelie.

'You already did,' says the man. He waves a copy of her book.

Amelie smiles. 'I'm sorry, it's been a busy one tonight. I don't mean to be rude. You sign that many books.'

The man laughs. 'Don't worry, it's alright. My flight came in a little late. I thought you'd have left by the time I got here. You signed this for me in New York three weeks ago.'

Amelie smiles more cautiously now. The man chuckles again.

'Don't worry,' he says. 'I'm a Cairo native. I was in New York for business, but I'm back now. I saw the poster for this event on my way out of the airport. I thought I'd stop by. I wondered if I might buy you a drink?'

Amelie is blushing now. 'Coffee, perhaps? I only drink alcohol for celebrations, and even then only on occasion. My family is muslim.'

The man raises an eyebrow. 'You surprise me. I thought you were french?'

Amelie laughs. 'Are there not muslims in France?! But you're right. I've been sort of adopted by a new family here. They're better than my old one.'

The man smiles warmly. 'You only get more fascinating.'

Amelie blushes even more deeply. They leave the bookshop and cross the street to a late night cafe. The man introduces himself more properly as Tarik. He's a writer and a director. He makes indie films. So many of Amelie's poems are about films, about catching people in lenses, about looking, watching, seeing.

'Poems are all about trying to get out something you can't just say,' he tells her.

Amelie shrugs. 'For me they are all about working out my feelings. Some of them are more literal than others.'

'That's what I love about them. You never quite know whether you're grasping at truth, or beyond it. There's a beauty in that, to me. I think when I'm making a film, what I'm trying to do a lot of the time is to find these hidden moments. I love theatre, you know, all this big, incredible emotion, right? But on film we can get closer, we can notice these small details in a performance. And its those little things that make people who they are, really, isn't it? How they comb their hair on their own in the mornings, the way they fold their socks.'

Amelie laughs.

'What is it?' says Tarik.

'I do fold my socks, so I don't wear out the elastic.'

Tarik grins. 'A wise woman.'

They finish their coffees and talk on the walk to Amelie's house about film, about poetry, about people. They talk as their strip off their clothes, and when they sleep together, it barely adds punctuation to their conversation. They fall asleep naked and sticky on the couch. When they wake in the pale blue light of Cairo just before dawn, they speak again as though their sleep had just been a pause in the conversation, and they live this way for weeks.

WHOOSH.

Amelie is not wholly sure she is in love with Tarik until the summer after their daughter Raida is born. They are walking through a market together. Tarik has Raida in a sling over his chest. The moment she is sure she loves him is when he pauses to peer more closely at a large, wooden bowl. As he moves, he raises a hand to cradle Raida's velvet-soft scalp. He looks up at Amelie as he leans, and he smiles, and it sends shivers through her whole body. She walks over to him and kisses him deeply, but briefly.

'What was that for?' he asks.

'I love you,' Amelie tells him. 'That's all.'

Tarik smiles. Amelie brushes a thumb across his soft brown cheek.

'That's good,' he says. 'I love you too.'

He rocks Raida gently in her sling as he moves on to the next stall.

It's a beautiful day. It feels like it might stretch on forever.

WHOOSH

No. It's. Forever.

Forever.

SIR
Apprentice?

WHOOSH.

APPRENTICE
I-- I'm sorry. I-- I don't think I--

SIR
You don't have to see the end.

APPRENTICE

They're-- she's happy. She's so happy.

SIR

There is more joy, beyond what you saw.

APPRENTICE

I know. I know. I don't, I-- I just can't bear it. Not her. I know that's--- but. I don't want it to end.

SIR

You've had enough? Very well.

A BEAT OF QUIET.

SIR

How is your head?

APPRENTICE

My... my head? Oh. It's fine. It's. Fine.

SIR

Good. Why do you not wish to follow her to her end?

APPRENTICE

I-- I don't know. I just. I can't.

SIR

Alright.

APPRENTICE

Thank you. I hope this doesn't mean I can't take the job?

SIR

I'm afraid the job is yours regardless. That's why you're here.

APPRENTICE

Oh. That's... good?

SIR

It is neither good nor bad. It simply is.

APPRENTICE

If you say so.

PAUSE

APPRENTICE

I don't want to put her back.

SIR

I see. Back where?

APPRENTICE

Anywhere, I--- I want to keep her safe.

SIR

Will here be safe enough? Or would you like to find a specific place?

APPRENTICE

I uh. I'd like a proper place for her, if that's okay.

SIR

Of course.

APPRENTICE

Right. So, where will I be staying?

SIR

Staying?

APPRENTICE

Yeah, like. I'm working here, aren't I? Or do I need to... how did. The... bus?

SIR

Do not dwell on that. I am sure there will be rooms for you, should you desire them.

APPRENTICE

Oh, grand, that does make things a lot more straightforward.

SIR

This time will be interesting.

APPRENTICE

Uh, I hope that's a good thing?

SIR

It is neither good nor bad. It simply is.

APPRENTICE

Ah. Right. Will you show me where my rooms are?

SIR

I'm sure they're here if you think they ought to be.

REVERBERANT HUM

END