

Worlds Beyond Number

The Wizard, the Witch, and the Wild One: Episode 15 “Hold On Tight”

Draft

[World's Beyond Number intro music rises urgently with orchestral strings and flute]

Erika Ishii

This is the sound of Worlds Beyond Number

[The other instruments fade into a lone flute and violin pluck]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Autumn. Leaves of gold and crimson, deep orange and bright yellow, bob and float on the little stream cascading over waterfalls, piling up amongst the smooth stones. The noise of songbirds bidding the day farewell as the shadows lengthen. Deep golden haze of sunlight, As the day draws to an end, it is quiet. It has been quiet. For a time, both short and yet so, so long. By a tiny little four plank dock, built solely to dip one's feet into the water too shallow for even the most modest boat, other than the boats made by the little leaves scurrying to and fro, sits Ame. The warmth of the sun sinks into the fabric of your clothes, where your skin touches your shirt. You can feel it almost... hot like the top of a stove, and yet it sinks into your skin, as the sun soothes whatever now moves upon your heart. A voice moves across field and garden from a warm wooden doorway.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[faintly]

Ame, I'd love some help setting the table, darling.

Erika Ishii

Ame sighs. I give myself just a moment more to take this all in, to sit eyes closed, feeling the warmth, hearing the crackling of the leaves. They crunch underfoot with little critters running around.

Ame [Erika]

Coming, Grandma Wren!

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Make sure to check the pen is closed on your way in.

Ame [Erika]

Mhmm...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The door closes and you turn and can see at the eastern edge of the sky, the gold has already receded, giving way to lavender and indigo, as the sky darkens.

Erika Ishii

I shake my feet so that the water droplets sprinkle. Dry my feet, slip them back into my little boots. I start walking back towards the cottage.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you walk, you hear not a single unfamiliar noise. The smell of leaves of wet earth. Familiar smell of the feed from the goat pen and scat from the chicken coop and dust on the wind and the oncoming cool of night. And there it is, faintly, a little smell of juk. You've been getting it a lot lately. It's always very tasty, very kind and conscientious of Grandmother Wren to think about your favorite meal, and cook it for breakfast and dinner, sometimes on the same day.

Erika Ishii

It's nice too, that it provides such a good base and that if you gather different seasonal items, it can just completely change the flavor. Like shiso leaves in mostly spring and, um, in autumn there's a certain kind of mushroom that looks like fingers, kind of reaching out of a log, that I like putting in there. And yeah, I'm excited about what we can add tonight. I have a little foraging basket with me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You walk into the house and you hear a voice say,

[Gentle music fades into ominous echo]

Mystery Voice [Brennan]

[Echoing from a distance] Very good, marked improvement.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But that voice isn't here in Grandmother Wren's house.

Mystery Voice [Brennan]

[Echoing from a distance] The first promising sign we've seen.

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren, can you hear - can you hear that?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You go to say that, but you don't say it because you didn't say it. Not here, not in this memory.

Ame [Erika]

[Panting nervously]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It all slips away into darkness and murkiness once more. You feel yourself shivering until a warm weight sinks into your chest and helps to soothe the movement of your extremities. Bring some warmth into your body, but it's still all darkness. Memories. Memories keep coming back.

Erika Ishii

It's cold as I move between them.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

What are the memories Ame is searching for?

Erika Ishii

It's a couple of summers after my friends have left and I come bursting into the kitchen, practically kicking down the bottom door of the farmhouse-style doors.

[Door swinging open, gentle music resumes]

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren, it's the summer festival! Summer festival's coming! AHHHH! Oh my gosh, I gotta win a goldfish!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see Grandmother Wren say,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Ame, I am very, very sorry, but we are not going to be able to attend the summer festival this year.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, come on, it's the best part of the summer. Um, you know - I didn't get to show them, but oh my gosh, I'm gonna get so many fried foods. I'm gonna see if I can bring some foods, and then they'll fry them for me. I'll fry anything there. Ahhh!

[Music becomes urgent]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Grandmother Wren says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Take this lantern, go and stand by the road.

Ame [Erika]

Oh - ah - okay?

Erika Ishii

I can tell in her tone of voice something is wrong. There's no argument. I grab the lantern and I go running down to the lane.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

How old is Ame in this memory?

Erika Ishii

About nine.

[Faint noises of night time critter noises in the background]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Deep cool night. You hear the croaking of spring peepers, frogs out by the waterside. They go silent. Their celebration of the return of spring is calmed. You hear a rustle of some rabbits moving away from their warren. Looking down the road in either direction, you don't see anyone approaching.

Erika Ishii

But it's not always about seeing. I listen for the sounds. Perhaps there's a traveler coming, or should I be listening for hooves? I smell, is there something around? Is it - is there fires?

[Ame sniffs the air]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Smell. You listen. You feel at first the wind blow and then hear until there is a susurrous of rattling, rustling leaves and branches. The trees bending, the wind almost overpowering you, the lantern flying. As the lantern blows in the wind, you see that the light flickers, on the verge of going out.

Erika Ishii

I rummage around through my pockets. I'm pretty sure I have some sort of spare bit of candle or something that can help bolster the flame.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you go to help bolster the flame, you get an extra candle. You move your cloak up around to light this second candle, and as you light it and drop your cloak, a figure is standing, looming over you in the road.

[Ame gasps, music turns to high strings]

Ame [Erika]
[nervously] Hello, I'm Ame...

Erika Ishii
And I put up my other hand that's not holding the lantern, to shake, I put it down, and then I end up just nodding my head instead.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
The figure looming over you is perhaps a woman of some exceptional height. A black gown extends to the dust of the road, shimmering gossamer with lines of pure reflection that fade away into the thick blackness of the gown, like a spider's web spun of mirror glass throughout the jet black cover of night itself. No shoe or slipper can be seen. Indeed, the gown seems to stretch all the way to the woman's shadow cast by the lantern behind her, endlessly into the forest on the other side of the road. Tall, tall, tall. Hard to tell what angle or curve of her movement are knees or waist or back or spine, as two long sleeves of an ancient cloak lie limp at her side with something like fingers extending from in the shadows. Illuminated by the lantern, you see a headdress or crown of many spines, of shadowy black, like the quills of some deep sea monster. And a face that you wonder whether it is regarding you in neutral impassivity, until you recognize that it is a mask. A white porcelain mask with jet black eyes and jet black mouth, only slightly open in the whisper of the beginning of an expression that you cannot countenance.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Kneeling at some strange angles, she brings this unmoving face of inorganic matter close to you.

Mirara [Brennan]
[hoarse whisper] Did you offer me something, little one?

Ame [Erika]
[nervously] I really like your outfit. I think Grandmother Wren must be expecting you. May I ask what you are called?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She cocks her head to one side and says,

Mirara [Brennan]
I asked you a question, little one.

Grandma Wren [Brennan]
[echoing whisper] A compliment. You offered her a compliment, Ame.

Ame [Erika]
Oh! I offered you a compliment.

Mirara [Brennan]
I am called Mirara.

Ame [Erika]
Mirara...

Erika Ishii
I kind of get a little closer to her.

Ame [Erika]
I'm - are - are you, um ... I don't know the protocol for this, but should I - should I call you that, too? And do I invite you in, or can you not step off of the road? And also, where did you get your mask? And also, do you need the lantern? Is this your lantern? And then, do you know Grandmother Wren?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She regards you once again. There is no face for her to move. There is no point of light within the openings of the mask's eyes. She says,

Mirara [Brennan]

You have come to light my way from the road to the door of Wren's abode.

Erika Ishii

I am imagining this grand lady of shadow and darkness, just sitting in the cozy, tiny kitchen drinking tea with Grandma Wren.

Ame [Erika]

[giggling slightly] Oh! Um - yes, please, right this way, Miss Mirara.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you say, Miss Mirara, you hear some spring peepers start to peep again.

Mirara [Brennan]

Just... Mirara.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And she stands, and Ame, you head into the cottage. Grandmother Wren stands at the door.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Very good, Ame, go fetch us some tea. I must talk with my sister.

Ame [Erika]

[barely contained whisper] Your sister? YOUR SISTER?

Erika Ishii

I mouth - I mouth to her.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Grandmother Wren says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

We are sisters of a coven, she and I. Little Ame, go fetch us some tea.

Ame [Erika]

[barely contained whisper] Oh my gosh, are you older, or is she the older one? Do you have a mask?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She leans in and says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Ame, we're not that kind of sister. I don't know how old she is.

Ame [Erika]

[barely contained whisper] Oh my god. Is it rude to ask, or can I ask her?

[Aabria laughing in the background]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[sternly and quietly] Fetch us tea!

Ame [Erika]
Okay.

Erika Ishii

I go back into the cottage and I climb up on my little steppy stool and I start rummaging through the tea cabinet. It is absolutely jam packed. There are jars, glass jars and canisters and bags and different kinds of teapots in there. Nothing is labeled per se in a way that - with writing or anything of the sort, but definitely different shapes and pictures and scratches and colored wires on things. And I'm going to choose one that I think is a nice tea for guests, and not too much caffeine in it because it's kind of late.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You busy yourself making tea. You can hear them talking. You hear Grandmother Wren say,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Mirara, thank you so much for coming all this way to see me. It is very kind of you. I appreciate the effort.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Mirara says,

Mirara [Brennan]

Not a kindness, Wren, simply... obligation.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Certainly the obligation to meet. But I appreciate you acquiescing to my desire to meet here.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that Mirara sits in a chair with a patchwork quilt and carved pig's heads on the armrest and this musty old seat that you would watch Eursulon fall asleep in in the time that he spent here.

[Music changes to Wren's comforting theme]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see here in this place how the visitor looks, and it is made manageable by the comfort of Wren's home. Mirara does look out of place here. Her crown barely sort of avoids scratching the various hanging sages and rosemary bundles. She is not on her home turf here, but she does not appear to be uncomfortable in this space. Wren sits down. You bring them tea.

Erika Ishii

I give her the nice cup. It is the one that has - it looks like a cat's face and it's got little ears on it. And I tell her,

Ame [Erika]

Don't drink with it with the ears facing away from you, you'll poke your eyes out.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You watch as a skeletally thin hand that appears to be clad in a glove that covers claw-like fingers and extends all the way up as the hand and arm emerges from the center of her chest, takes the cup, and the cup and tea vanish into within the center of her being. Grandma Wren looks at you with a look like,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

We might not see that cup again.

[Erika and Aabria laugh]

Ame [Erika]
[quizzically] I'll go get another cup then...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
As you go, you hear them speaking. You hear Mirara say to Wren,

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Time does not appear to be on our side, Wren. The world moves whether we will it or no. Not always can the comings and goings of great happenings dwell pleasantly in your realm. A decision must be made.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see Wren goes,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Well, I think you know my decision, Mirara, and I think you know where I stand.

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] If these tidings cannot sway you, what event possibly could?

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see Wren leans forward. Grandma Wren says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Perhaps none could sway me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
There is a long pause here and Mirara turns to regard you, Ame. The voice emerges from the mask, and again you can't tell if there are lips moving behind fabric under the mask or not, or if instead this is simply who and what she is. But you see her turn to regard you.

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Your little apprentice offered her hand to me on the road, Wren.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Mmm. An offer of friendship.

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Or an offer of a hand?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] I wouldn't get so cross, Mirara.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Mirara turns back to Grandmother Wren, saying,

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] Do I seem cross to you?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] For you, Mirara, this is positively irate.

Mirara [Brennan]
[slightly muffled] I am forced by circumstance to act at the boundaries of what is mine to do and undo, to see my obligations fulfilled. These are desperate times, Wren. And if I am offered something as special as the hand of a great apprentice, if you will deny me other tools to address these problems.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[slightly muffled] Mirara, I've never known you to refrain from a fight you thought you could win.

[Ame giggles]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's a long silence, and Grandma Wren says - you start to laugh, Grandma Wren whips her eyes over you. Grandma Wren stands up and says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Ame, go to your room.

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren, I have - okay. Yes, Grandma Wren.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you turn to leave, Mirara turns to look at you and Grandmother Wren, um, without thinking, just kicks the ground as she turns so that Mirara can't complete her look to you, Ame, and looks back at Wren. Wren says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Just an observation about your character, Mirara, different from my own. I refrain from fights I can win all the time.

Erika Ishii

Ame's fully is, like, tea in mouth, like shaking, shaking with her haircut. The cup is shaking in her hand. I scamper over to my room, and I whip behind the door and crack it a little bit.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Are you trying to get a look at Mirara as she leaves?

Erika Ishii

Just a little bit.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me a wisdom saving throw.

[Erika giggles, Aabria exclaims, 'oh, no!']

Erika Ishii

That's an 18.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Okay. Not bad. Not bad.

Erika Ishii

My mind is *not* blown.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You catch just the barest flash of black as Mirara moves to the doorway. As on the lawn, Mirara turns to say,

Mirara [Brennan]

[slightly muffled] There is much the coven can do without full unanimity. We can act if need be, Wren.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[slightly muffled] Of course. That's your business. If you and the others see fit to act in a certain way, you are welcome to do so. As you've said, it will not be with full unanimity. Best of luck, Mirara. I trust that you will see to yours as I shall see to mine.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There is a strong noise of wind. [Brennan makes wind gust noise] Trees shaking, and you hear Grandmother Wren at the door for a long moment. You hear her go into the kitchen. There's a cabinet open that you don't hear open that much. And you hear a little [Brennan making bottle opening noise] flask opening and a long drag of a pull from a flask and a [long, weary sigh].

Erika Ishii

I wait for the sigh to almost completely be done. And then I come bounding down the stairs.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Hello, Ame.

Ame [Erika]

Grandma Wren!

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Very well done.

Ame [Erika]

Thank you. I'm sorry you had to send me to my room. I just. Was that - uhh... Covenant? Sisters. Dire times. Uhhh... Am I in a coven?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No.

Ame [Erika]

Do I have sisters?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No. But one day you will. Ame, go ahead and take a seat.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And she gestures to a little place by the fire. She says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Throw another log on there, this is going to be a while.

Erika Ishii

I throw a log on there.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Grandma Wren comes over to you and says,

[Erika cuts off Brennan]

Ame [Erika]

Can I have a drink, too?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[incredulous] You heard that??

Ame [Erika]
[sheepish] Oh! Uhh...

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Gosh, you little rascal. No, you cannot have a drink.

Ame [Erika]
These are dire times, Grandma Wren.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
You don't repeat things she said. [increasing in volume and frustration] Times. Listen. Times are always dire. People are always running around saying, times are dire. We have to take drastic measures. Times are dire. Let's do some unconscionable, absolutely ill fated - fool..! I don't - hooo... Ooh. I am vexed!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see Taro sort of peers and flutters off to the side.

[Taro clucks]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
That was my sister, one of four. And, uhh ... She is called Mirara, as I am called Grandmother Wren ... um - Ame, you are not part of a covenant.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And you see here she actually goes, and she makes tea and puts a little cup in front of you and sits down with her own teacup.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Across all of Umora, there are many, many witches in a vast and broad tapestry of those of us called upon to see to the ways and bridges and paths between the world of spirits and the world of Umura. Our earth, our home, is blessed and fortunate to be tied forever to the world of spirits. It is within, amongst, beyond, between all places. And... There are many parts of managing two worlds together that are, in fact, one. It's - it's -

Ame [Erika]
Are you saying that they're all... There's a free flow between spirit world and our world, and we have to help that interaction?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Yes. It's about as complicated as it could be. It is useful to think of a world of spirits and a world of people, for, indeed, that is how they most often regard themselves. But the truth, I feel, after many long years, is that it is one that we are all one. And that these distinctions, we accept these distinctions for their utility and often do not see the price we pay for that usefulness. [sighs] You will have a coven one day, and you are almost ten years old, which is very young, but old enough, perhaps, to know that for fate or fortune, the coven you will inherit from me one day is the Coven of Elders.

Ame [Erika]
Coven of... Is that why you're a grandma? Will I become a grandma when I inherit it?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Umm... You can -

[Ame interrupts]

Ame [Erika]

Is she going to be my sister?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Grandma's sort of a nickname that I like. What you will be, Ame is the Witch of the World's Heart.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that she takes a lovely little wooden, polished, varnished thing of warm, yellow-brown wood up off the mantle and sort of dust it. And there's some old writing on it and this, like, beautiful sort of flourishing script with little roses around it. And you see it says - there's like a little poem on it that you've seen sort of your whole life. It just reads, 'Of open hand and trusting face. A home of homes does all embrace'. She says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Of the Coven of Elders, there have been many witches, and of these witches have there each been many people. I am not the first witch of the world's heart. There were others before me. But for the past 172 years, have I -

Ame [Erika]

Oh, my goodness.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Hey, relax, all right? It's not that old. There's older witches than me, considerably older witches than me. Witches have areas that they steward, that they tend to, and the areas of a witch's care are in some ways her domain. Although that word I have never quite enjoyed, because there is no - whatever responds - a witch does not have authority. She has responsibility. And you are responsible to what you represent, and I will say it is your freedom to refuse this covenant and this position.

Ame [Erika]

No, no, no I want to steward something.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

All right. Well, I'm glad because, you know, I'm getting older and I put off finding an apprentice for a long, long time. And I think, honestly, there are risks with bringing on an apprentice, I think, too early. No one wants to be an apprentice for 100 years. But, um - I also - um, cutting it a little bit close. But the Witch of the World's Heart, of the Elder Coven, there are five.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that she gets sad here. As she says, 'there are five', you almost wonder if there have always been five.

Ame [Erika]

Have there always been five?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

When I was young and first succeeded to the hearth and home of the World's Heart, there were seven. And I believe there have been as many as 13. Many great witches have been lost. The witch that you saw here earlier tonight was one of my sisters. She is the Witch of the Waning Moon: Mirara.

Ame [Erika]

[pensively] The Witch of the Waning Moon...

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

And of my sisters who remain, there is Grimore, the Witch of the Wild Hunt. And there is Haciaea, the Witch of the Woodland Green. And there is Indri, the Witch of the Wind and Stars, and each of us -

Ame [Erika]

Uh, whoa, whoa, whoa, was - was - there's a lot of W's. Did you name it because it alliterates with witches? Y'know, wild hunt, woodland green, wind and stars. Uhh - world's heart, waning moon.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

The naming convention is secondary to the auspices of these various positions. But, yes, an observation well made. There is a strength in names, and those names were selected for those reasons. But truth be told, the categories of our coven do not seem to - Uhh, the names didn't come first, in other words.

Ame [Erika]

So then why did the other witches that are no longer on the council - the ones that you lost, didn't they have heirs or apprentices?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

They did not. One of them never took an apprentice, though she was made aware many times of the danger in not doing so. And the other's apprentice betrayed her and foreswore witchcraft.

Ame [Erika]

Can you do that?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Of course. In my life, I have watched the coven diminish. Oruna, the Witch of the Wide Blue Sea, and Scalvi, the Witch of the Watching Fire, both departed their seats unsucceeded and unfilled.

Ame [Erika]

Is that what this is about? Is Mirara worried that there's going to be another loss of an Elder?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No, no, that's not what Mirara's worried about. Mirara, I will point out, does not have an apprentice.

Ame [Erika]

And who drank the tea inside her stomach?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I don't know what she does with the tea.

Ame [Erika]

Oh...

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

The point is this, Ame. You don't need to worry about - Mirara is going to - there's always some problem. But as far as I'm concerned, when Mirara's got a problem, we're all doing better. The important thing to know about the Coven of elders, Eme, is that witches are those who practice witchcraft. And witchcraft is about understanding. Witchcraft and magic itself flourishes when we understand. And there is much in the world to understand. There is value in the truths that we are all able to speak to. And though I don't like Mirara's truths, and she definitely does not like mine, they are there.

Ame [Erika]

How can they be both truths if you guys disagree that they're truths?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Because our world cares about what is true and people care about what they want. And unfortunately, in some ways, witches, for the moment, have to be people, too. So each of us is responsible for observing and understanding the nature of our world, pretending to it, for speaking to something that could unfold in a catastrophic way. But also,

each of us, probably, on some level, wants to see more of what we care about in the world. That second part is a... I don't know, call it a personal ambition. I think the world would be nice if it were nice.

[Ame giggles]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Some people feel differently. And witchcraft, in its beneficent wisdom...! [volume increasing to a yell near the end of the sentence]

Ame [Erika]

She can't hear you...

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[yelling] In its beneficent...!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see she stands up and waves her broom at the shutters.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

[yelling] In its beneficent wisdom!!!

Erika Ishii

I also stand up, and I get on my chair.

Ame [Erika]

Beneficent wisdom!!! [yelling]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Yes, Ame. Remember always that some portion of magic is yours to wield, and that the world contains many, many truths. And the hope, I suppose, of a good witch, is that there are enough things that are good that are also true, that your magic might flourish at its utmost.

Ame [Erika]

How? How do I know that the truths that I stand for are the right or the beneficent ones?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

How do you know if you're doing the right thing?

Ame [Erika]

Oh... yeah.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Great question. Let's spend the rest of our lives figuring it out.

[Ame groans]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Don't give me that sigh, young Ame. It's a very worthwhile endeavor.

Ame [Erika]

Can't I just get to be like what you are and just know?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

A little tear comes to Grandmother Wren's eye.

[music starts to swell]

Ame [Erika]

Well, I know nobody's perfect, but you do a really good job of it. I mean, you always seem to know.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She leans down. Puts her nose at, like, the edge of your hair, and just closes her eyes and puts her head against your head and goes,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

You're coming in at the end of my story. And whatever wisdom you think I have, I can only assure you that my ledger is filled with the mistakes that bought that wisdom.

Erika Ishii

I can feel her breath, my little bowl cut, ruffling the hairs. I can smell her warm smell. It's already warm on this hot summer night, but her kind of warm smell is different. It's cozier.

Ame [Erika]

I don't - I mean, you said 170 isn't that old, and that there are many witches that are much older than you, and that seems like there's a lot of time for a lot more mistakes, and we can make them together.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

There is more time, Ame. We will be together.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Over the coming days and weeks, as memories flood through your mind, Grandmother Wren trains you in all the ways of the Witch of the World's Heart. And you begin to understand how strange and fluid these domains of witchcraft are. For the World's Heart seems to be... Not a physical thing, but rather the magical tapestry of all of the ways in which parts of the world move together. There is a magic to compassion, understanding, insightfulness. Moments where a choice to grind and dissolve and dismember instead becomes a choice to come together, to grow, to have two things join and become more than the sum of their parts. It is an idea almost impossible to articulate, but you begin to feel it working in the world. The idea that within the domain of this Witch of the World's Heart are all of those moments where a creature, a category, a concept, things large and small and things that might not even be said by most folk to have the ability to make a choice, make the choice, instead of being afraid and moving away and dissolving and disintegrating, to make the braver choice, to instead connect and move as one. You see all of the ways in which Grandmother Wren, in communicating, begins to talk to you about the adventures of her life, what she does. You remember the first night that she puts you on the front of her broom in her lap -

[Erika squeals excitedly and loudly, music begins to pick up pace]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Once again, it's pre dawn light, early sunrise. She's got a huge bag of food and snacks. Taro's in your lap. You're in her lap.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

All right. This is our first little outing. Hold on tight!!

[Erika squeals, music swells triumphantly and is accompanied by whooshing sound effects]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

[speaking quickly and excitedly] Wind in the trees. The fog clears as she takes off into the sky. And at first, it's treetops, it's moving, it's wind, and it's everything. And then it's even higher, and then - oh, my God. Since you're seeing farmland, you can't even see buildings anymore. Oh, you're way too high. You're in the clouds. This is too high!

[Ame yelling as music continues to swell]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Put your scarf on! You'll catch pneumonia!

[Ame yelling]

Erika Ishii

Just fully, fully, like shouting at the joy and the pure freedom of movement and sky and air and stars and... ahhh! I just - Ahhh. It's wonderful. I close my eyes, and it really... I feel... I can't explain... Just the joy. I feel like my heart is soaring.

[music continues to sweep and swell]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She takes you on some very simple, minor adventures, mostly things where she has to go somewhere to retrieve something, find something that was stored away a long time ago. Many of her adventures at this time have to do with old friends and allies dying, passing away, that there is a moment of ages changing. She communicates to you how vulnerable the transition will be on her passing, which as painful as it is, she talks about with some regularity, especially as you get later into your teenage years. She just has to be honest. And specifically, that you will come into a great power that you will not have her experience or wisdom in wielding. And there will be a very fragile time for, essentially, the office, the station of the Witch of the World's Heart will have moved to new and inexperienced hands.

[music quiets, transitions from joyous to more subdued and serious]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And with no judgment or castigation, she just has to warn you how dangerous a time that will be for the world. And over these years, you realize, essentially, that in this Coven of Elders and of those elders, you don't even meet the other witches. She doesn't bring you on those meetings. But unless you would, like, desperately ask to go on one of them. But the other domains, the Wild Hunt, is a monstrous witch, one of, like - the other - there are other rhymes that she gives you in, like a children's nursery rhyme almost, for each of those stations. For the Witch of the Wild Hunt, there's a little rhyme that a little fairy in the attic of Grandmother Wren's house repeats for you,

Attic Fairy [Brennan]

Where beasts have tread and monsters fed, the bloody fang and maw hath led.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And it's like, very cutesy, but you're like, oh, meeting that person in person would be very intense. The Witch of the Wind and Stars, who apparently lives at the far northernmost point of the world in that same little sing-song rhyme about these great witches of old, 'Of frost and stone, of ice and throne, the ruler of the self alone'. And, uh - you, uh - The only one that sounds, like, close to being, like, a person you could hang out with is the Witch of the Woodland Green, which is the holly branch in towering oak, the limb and leaf and thorn her folk, who seems like, pretty, like, okay, nature.

Erika Ishii

Yeah.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Okay.

Erika Ishii

This is doable. I commit all of these to memory, and I imagine what the witches will be like, and maybe some of them have apprentices, and maybe there are other witches my age that are also learning these rhymes and that I

can meet. And maybe the one that's from the Wild Hunt is, like, cool. I imagine, like, a female looking Eursulon, like an Eursulon with eyelashes.

[Brennan laughs]

Erika Ishii

I really apply myself, because I want so badly to be part of this and to do right by Grandma Wren and to spend as much time with her as I can, learning. I bet that when I meet the other witches of the coven, we can also have witty exchanges with each other.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you think about having witty exchanges with the one witch of the elder covenant you met, you come across the last little stanza of that poem, 'Underneath the sign of the waning moon, the death of light, the end of might, the all consuming dread of night'.

[music turns somber, almost ominous]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you realize that of these stations, only one of them concerns itself with people. And that all of personhood in the world, all of the world of humans, exists in the purview of a single seat on that coven. There is much in the world that is spoken for outside of people.

[gentle music]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Over those years, I will ask, as these memories come flooding back, what your most sorrowful, and your most angry memory would be.

Erika Ishii

[voice echoing slightly, as if in a dark, enclosed place] My most sorrowful memory is that I just - I couldn't stay away. And I had to find out more about my parents and my family that left me with Grandma Wren. I don't think it was much more than finding out who they were, where they were. I can't imagine that they live in a village too far from Toma. If they knew about the Witch of Toma and to bring their daughter there. But I just want to see what they look like. You know? And I know - I vaguely remember there were a lot of brothers and sisters. I used to have a lot of playmates.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

How do you try to find them?

Erika Ishii

Maybe I just ask people in the village. Everybody knows everybody.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's when you realize that nobody knows where you came from.

Erika Ishii

[in shock] Are you sure?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

That's when you realize that nobody knows where you came from.

[faded background festival noises, like fireworks and excited crowd chatter]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

We see that you're at like a spring festival. How old do you think you are?

Erika Ishii
I'm 14.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's a spring festival. You see that there are some other girls that are, like, out by this apple cart. There's hay. There's some beautiful dancing, there's long ribbons strung around a big string like Maypole. And you see the girls go - like, one of the little girls who has like, these long brown pigtails goes,

Village Girl with Pigtails [Brennan]

No, my mama talked about it. You're not from here.

Ame [Erika]

Your mama *talked* about it? [scoffs]

Village Girl with Pigtails [Brennan]

Well, it is interesting.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, I am interesting. Where did I - where did your mama say that I came from?

Village Girl with Pigtails [Brennan]

Well, when you were really little, like, I don't know, like five years old or four or five years old or something like that, you just showed up in town one day. Grandma Wren goes on long trips out of town.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, I know, but, I mean, didn't - like, how far away? And - and - and... What does the local gossip say?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see a little ten year old girl goes,

Ten Year Old Village Girl [Brennan]

I heard you came out of an egg!

Ame [Erika]

I don't think witches come out of eggs... At least not, um - well, not in the way that chickens do. We all come from eggs, of course.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

But you see that one of the other girls, who's like a fellow 14 year old, just looks at you and says,

14 Year Old Village Girl [Brennan]

Look, your family's not from around here. You don't think they would have come to find you if they wanted to see you?

Ame [Erika]

Well, they *don't* want to see me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The other sort of girls sort of whisper, and you see two or three of them behind the main one you're talking to kind of turn and laugh to each other, and you see that one of them turns around and says, like -

Mean Village Girl [Brennan]

Why do you want to know anyway?

Ame [Erika]

[scoffs] Look, if your mom wasn't the town gossip and your dad wasn't the town fool, I mean, you'd want to know anyway, even if it sucked to know, right?

[music tenses up]

Mean Village Girl [Brennan]

My mom's not the town gossip. And I don't know why you want to come talk to us anyway. It's not like you're another village girl. You don't go to the school.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see another one who says,

Other Village Girl [Brennan]

Calm down, she's clearly a girl.

Suvi [Aabria]

Because it was like, this is a solvable situation. You go out in the bad grass and you grab a friend and you bring them back. And it was going to be an hour, and then it wasn't. But! No one's dead, and

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And she's like,

Mean Village Girl [Brennan]

No, she's a witch.

Erika Ishii

I go [smack noise] and I, like, punch her right in the face.

[Brennan laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Bam. You see them scream -

[crowd starts yelling, Ame yells]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You feel Grandma Wren's hand on your back,

Erika Ishii

I leap on her, and I start doing the windmilling my arms.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Enough! *Enough!*

[Ame yelling in anger, music is heightened and tense]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see she pulls you off. The girl is like, bleeding out of her nose as you've socked her.

Mean Village Girl [Brennan]

[screaming] You're out of your mind!! What's wrong with you!?!?

Ame [Erika]

I'm a *witch!!!*

[thunderous noise that instantly deadens]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see Wren goes,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
We don't need that!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And then pulls you out of there. Later at home, you are being excoriated.

[door opens and slams]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Are you thick? What's wrong with you? You can't attack - look -

Ame [Erika]
Why can't I? Why does she get to say mean things about me and I can't do anything back?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[raising voice] Because she's not trying to be good!

Ame [Erika]
Maybe she should have and she wouldn't have gotten hit.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[yelling, exasperated] Oh, is there something someone in the world should have done? Oh my goodness! Someone in the world should have done something!

Ame [Erika]
Yeah!

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[yelling, exasperated] Let's every time someone doesn't do something they should, let's absolutely lose control.
Great! Good!

Ame [Erika]
Okay. I would like to say that I did not lose control.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[yelling, exasperated] You leapt on her and socked her in the face!

Ame [Erika]
[defiantly] Yeah! And I could have done magic about it and I didn't. I'd say that's very in control of me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
It gets dark in the cottage.

[silence, except for the creaking of the cottage]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
[extremely seriously] Whatever you're glibly referring to has the power to rot your heart from within and turn you into something that you would never recognize. Do not glibly invoke casting magic to settle a score because of your hurt pride. That you have even turned your feet in the direction of a road that dangerous gives me pause.

Ame [Erika]

[sniffing, full of hurt] Well, what if I wanted to have that? What if, once in a while, I wanted to have a little bit of something and feel good about things and not always be working? Every summer, you go to the festivals. Every spring, you go to the festivals, and you give so much to all of them, and they don't even invite you in for tea like a normal person. What if I wanted to be a normal person sometimes?

[music swells to an ominous theme]

Ame [Erika]

I could *make* them think I was normal.

[dark whispers swirling in the background, full of anger and threat, building to a crescendo]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Grandma Wren looks at you, sees this incredibly dangerous statement you have made. She walks over to you, picks you up, which is harder for her to do now that you're 14, and hugs you close to her chest.

[the sound of cloth rustling, and Ame crying quietly]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

You miss them.

[music turns sorrowful]

Ame [Erika]

[crying] To them I was Ame. To everybody else, I'm just a witch. You know, I can't be like them. And I don't belong with the spirits. But I only have you and them, and they're gone. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I want to be good. I want to be kind. I'm sorry.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

That's all right, sweet Ame. You're - these are the very, very hard years. And you're not wrong to feel this way.

Ame [Erika]

[crying] I don't understand what's happening to me. I just feel things all the time.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

The pain... The pain will never be able to overtake the cause of its appearance. Here.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, she takes a little sort of - she roots around in the thing and pulls out a little ball. It's like a little, sort of soft blue ball. It looks like something that might even be, like from the Citadel. And, you see, she holds it up. In her hand, and she drops it. She doesn't throw it. She just drops it on the ground, and it bounces, and it gets, like, a couple inches away from her hand that she has to lower her hand to get it.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

It's a very wonderful little thing. Soft and Stone gave this to me because they believed that they would be able to come and visit once a year. And they wanted some toys for little Suvi here in the cottage. It's bouncy. It's fabricated from some wizardly materials, and it's quite a lovely little object. And when you drop it, it can never go higher than the point from which it was dropped. And there's something in that that I sort of feel about dealing with the pain and loss. Great pains, great feelings of unfairness, of loss, of hurt, mirror the wonder of the thing that we lost. Your sadness is, in its own way, a reflection of how wonderful the friendship you discovered was. And I don't think you would feel it if it were not for how special those moments were.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah. I guess. And I'm just glad I had them for a summer. But, you know, I think it's like this ball. It always just gets lesser over time. The comfort that the memory brings. Boy, if I live to 170, and that's kind of the only high point for me, then I don't know.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I can't promise that it won't be lonely. I can only...

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And, you see here she sits, and goes,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Before you, I was very alone. Oh, Ame, I'm afraid I don't have the answers, my darling. The world will always be ready to see you as a witch. Sometimes it will be in celebration, sometimes in fear, sometimes in wonder, sometimes in dismay.

Ame [Erika]

I'm ready to accept that responsibility.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see, she holds you close, says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I will reach out to - I know not where Eursulon is, his path he has concealed, but a day, I think, might come where Suvi could come into your life again.

Ame [Erika]

[excitedly] Really???

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

And Eursulon, yes. If Eursulon were to return one day, and... It's not beyond imagining, but Suvi is in a hard position, and I will reach out to Steel to... I have often reached out to Steel to inquire after Suvi to make sure that she is all right. I think it's time I told you. Suvi needs to be at the Citadel for some time because there's a great danger that surrounds her.

Ame [Erika]

Can we help? Is she just safe there? Wasn't she there when her parents, you know... They got attacked there before. What if they're attacked there again? She should come here.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No, not here. There would be a safety here. But Suvi would - Suvi needs a place to flourish. And though there are comforts here, she has a gift, and she is gifted in those ways. And the Citadel has for her -

Ame [Erika]

More books. Yeah. Yeah.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I hate to be that crass, but it's got way more books.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She looks at you and says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Do you want me to tell you?

Ame [Erika]

Yes.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

All right. [sighs] Suvi's stay here that summer was about more than just being safe. There was a business at the Citadel that Soft and Stone and Steel were all involved in. The night that Suvi first came here, the night that Rhuv attacked the citadel, was anticipated by a faction within the Citadel that had been discovered by Soft and Stone and Steel.

Ame [Erika]

[shocked] They knew about it?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I don't know that they knew about the attack before it happened, but they knew that there were people within the Citadel working to bring about the downfall of the Citadel. This information, I'm telling you, I'm telling you because you will one day be the Witch of the World's Heart. This information could absolutely see people killed. And I have to start telling you at some point, and you're 14, and that feels early, but any later, it starts to feel irresponsible.

Ame [Erika]

Does Suvi know?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No. When Soft and Stone passed away, it was after many months of hardship and violence.

Ame [Erika]

Wait a second.

Erika Ishii

I run to my room and I come back and have, like a little sort of accordioneing, almost map-like a piece of parchment that I kind of roll out. And you can see that it's got drawings and sketches and different connecting bits and marginalia and chicken scratch about Suvi and her parents and Jasper and Steel and Citadel and uhh - 'beast?' question mark. And just absolutely as much information as I have been able to gather over the years.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that she says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

The Acadator was a small group of self-deputized individuals within the leadership of the Citadel that included Suvi's parents, as well as several other important wizards, Steel, and several figures outside of the Citadel that alerted them to the presence of these agencies. One of them was a man named Eoighorain, who was a shapeshifter from Gaothmai. The entity they were chasing, which I believe they jokingly referred to as the League of Whispers, was dedicated to the downfall of the Citadel from within. They discovered that, but unfortunately, their own secret society was operating outside of the bounds of review because they believed there was a corruption within the Citadel and they had to move extrajudicially in order to cut the rot out. And it resulted in a prolonged series of secret violences across Umora.

Erika Ishii

I have scribbled on an extra piece of parchment 'equadator' and I have slapped it onto the middle of the board and I'm making notes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see she says,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Suvi was brought here because her parents, they thought they had more time. And the summer that she was protected here, they were intending on coming back. However, I believe that those individuals responsible were pushed underground. Although, Steele has often asked me if I had any idea where Eoighorain was, so his involvement... I have my suspicions about him and how loyal he ended up being. Regardless, Suvi... I do not believe that Suvi is in danger. That matter is now many years resolved.

Ame [Erika]

But are you sure?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

When Steele came to collect Suvi at the end of that summer, the primary targets of their investigation were dead or missing.

Ame [Erika]

But if there was no... Okay, well, if they were missing, that's just not here. That's not gone.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

It was all -

Ame [Erika]

Dead...

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Well, it was all tangled up in... The issue with getting involved in that level of conspiracy is that if you have an enemy in Rhuv and an enemy in Gaothmai and an enemy in Kehmsarazan, and you come across one of them in a dark alley and they end your life there, they're not necessarily going to post a bulletin for your other enemies.

[Ame groans]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

This is going to be very complicated, Ame, and a great deal is going to rest on your shoulders. There is a - there is much to do, and unfortunately, your position as Witch of the World's Heart is to fix problems that affect people. You'll do great.

Ame [Erika]

Yeah, yeah... You're sure there's none of the other witches that have apprentices that could lend a hand or something?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Well, I believe that the only two of my coven that have an apprentice at the moment are Grimore and Indri. So I think Gramore's apprentice is busy catching and eating things, and then Indri's apprentice is occupied with tending to empty hallways and corridors of icy crystal.

Ame [Erika]

Okay, well, that first one, we are all trying to catch and eat something. Second of all, that second one sounds irrelevant.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I'm going to tell you something. What you've said is absolutely true, and you are magically prohibited, as am I, from saying that in coven meetings.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, my - wait.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

When you're in a coven meeting, one day -

Ame [Erika]

You can't insult somebody, like, magically, you can't - ?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Oh, there will be tremendous repercussions if you insinuate that any of the other stations are not incredibly significant to the nature of magic itself.

[Ame laughs and groans]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

We are bound by laws of mutual respect. We are bound, Ame!

[music swells to triumphant theme]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You move from this memory in the final, uh - Grandmother Wren tells you a lot that, honestly, as these memories come flooding back to you, and of them, you remember, there's, like, wild memories or whatever, or memories come flooding back to you. She tells you about friends of your station all over the world. It's more than I can even impart to you in a single episode. But from this point forward, if you're in a new city or a new place or a new whatever, and you want to roll a check to see who's there. In other words, Grandmother Wren does like the anti-heroes quest mentor thing. She's not like, the power will be within you when you most need it. She's like, here's a list of 100 helpful people, right?

Erika Ishii

Like, this is exactly what's going on. This is the villain.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She spends a lifetime training you. But of note, it's, like, to give you an idea of the flavor. It's like years of her not only training, like, here's how you make a potion. Here's how you put a stitch in a magical garment. Here's how you do this, here's how you do that. Here's how you cast a spell like this. All of this stuff that she's training you to be able to do, she's also flying you around the world, showing you places of significance. And she's, like, introducing you to some people. She even tells you if you ever go to the Citadel, she talks about the friendly people there where she's like,

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

Of course, Suvi, your dear, beloved friend, is there. The Citadel hosts many people, many wizards, many spirits. Steel is someone that you can trust to do what she considers honorable and just. But if you try to talk to her about something that does not benefit the Citadel, you are going to meet a very, forgive the pun, steely presence. Um -a good friend there is my old friend Sly of the Brooch, a very powerful wizard who's very underestimated in a good way. Gult, the Artificer, is also an old friend. And there is a spirit that they have bound to their service in one of their libraries who is called Pomeroy, but his true name is [magical echoing] Quinfael Rathre.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that, uh -

Ame [Erika]

Is that with two n's or one?

[Brennan laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She spells the name out for you.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
He is the Spider of the Wind. You may find him -

[Ame shudders]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Yes, gross.

Ame [Erika]
Gross!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
And she goes through an immortal man - All over the world, too, she talks about, like, in the port of Kudroy, on the inner sea of Rhuv there is a man named Thraum who sold his soul to the moon for the chance to live forever.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
He made this promise a long time ago. So he's immortal. But he made a promise a long time ago to always look after his descendants, if asked. He's a powerful, powerful warlock. However, he didn't really understand how generations worked when he made the promise. So he has, like, thousands of descendants. You are one of his descendants.

[Ame gasps]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
He doesn't -

Ame [Erika]
[excitedly] Oooh! Oh!!! Wait, I have a greatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreatgreat grandfather?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
You and, like, 50,000 other people, so he didn't -

Ame [Erika]
[excitedly] Wait so I'm related to - I have family all over!

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
That's sort of how our species works, yes.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She goes over all this different stuff. The last memory that comes back to you is, as she gets - the last day she's on her feet before she has to go into the bed.

[music slows, quiets]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]
Ame, it's time for me to start handing over tasks to you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see the big bed around her, she's breathing heavily.

Ame [Erika]
[sadly] I understand.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I have done my best to put as many tasks to rest as I can so that this transition might be as smooth as possible. We respect all honored friends. The Wild Ones are as much a part of this world as its people, as the rocks and trees and rivers and lakes.

[music quietly turns foreboding]

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

There is a spirit that is moving upon the world in a way that I have never seen before. He has held his breath since the dawn of time. He is known by some as the Pilgrim Under Stars and by others as the Man in Black. He is the King of Night. He is called The Stranger. For some time now, since you were a very little girl, in fact, he has been moving upon our world in a way that I cannot quite see.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you see that she begins to show you writings on her desk, other elements.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I have never found even a shred or scrap of what his name might be. And I believe that he has never been bound by any wizard or sorcerer of antiquity. He is a spirit of the night, of dread things. And earlier this month, while I was away, I was in a sacred place of the Covenant of Elders known as the Grove of the Well, he appeared and attacked me there, and I fear he is coming to the cottage.

Ame [Erika]

[worried] How do I prepare for him? How do I -

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

If he comes, do not grant him entry. This station still has power left in this sanctum. It is important that you not lose this home. There will come a moment after I am gone, where for a very brief moment, there will be no Witch of the World's Heart. And in that moment, he may strike. But you must act carefully, quickly, during that time. But once you have inherited the home, all will be well.

Ame [Erika]

[worried] When you say he moves upon the world in a way that you haven't seen before and he dared to attack you? What hope do I have against such power?

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

You have a hope that you have the strength to provide. No more, no less.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see she puts a hand to your face.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

It is not fair to be tasked with this. The door is open. I remember that little girl that I held weeping in my arms, who wished for a life where you could feel that you were of the tapestry rather than speaking for it. It is not fair to be asked to be a speaker for the world. And if you wish to put that task aside.

Ame [Erika]

[firmly] No.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

No, Ame, of course not. I mean to say, if you wished to put that task aside, there are none that could blame you. And I need you to know that I would love you all the same. My love for you is not built upon what you can do for this world. You have earned it every moment of the day by being just and only yourself.

Ame [Erika]

[voice breaking and sniffing] I love you so much, Grandma Wren. Thank you for always seeing me.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She smiles.

Grandmother Wren [Brennan]

I will tell you everything of The Stranger that I know.

Ame [Erika]

And I'll be ready.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She goes to sleep. And you wake up.

[Deep, bell-like noise, Ame gasps]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Ame. You awaken in a bed. Clean, smooth linens. Your belongings are on a small dresser to the side. A window is open, and a scent of jasmine comes in through the window on an evening breeze that you look out and see yourself and the stars moving in a strange way. You are in a town or a city, and you realize that the city is rising slowly. You are in a hovering platform the size of a small town within the Erien of the Citadel.

[music cuts abruptly]

Ame [Erika]

Oh, *fuck*.

[Aabria laughs]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

On your chest you feel a weighted warmth, and the fox looks right into your eyes and goes,

Fox [Brennan]

[tiredly] You awake?

Ame [Erika]

...Fox?

Fox [Brennan]

[tiredly] You okay?

Erika Ishii

I hug him real close.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He goes and licks your face. [quick lapping noises] He's just, like, licking at your chin and cheeks.

Ame [Erika]

[voice full of joy and relief] Oh, fox!

Fox [Brennan]

[tiredly] I gotta go to bed.

[Fox snores immediately]

Ame [Erika]

I'm gonna let you - Oh... okay.

Erika Ishii

It takes me a minute because I just don't want to move, you know? Once he's on top of you and he's all comfy and asleep, it's like, that's kind of it, but okay, I got to get up. I put him to the side. I scooch him to the side. I look around.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

A woman steps in, dressed in white robes with white gloves. She has dark hair up in a large, sort of wide, almost like Victorian bun. She has a gold piercing in her nose that goes along a gold chain to pierce in her ear. And you see, she goes,

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

Oh! Are you awake, Ame of Toma?

Ame [Erika]

[cautiously] Yes...?

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

I am Dr. Nadine Tamry. Oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness.

Ame [Erika]

Yes, uh - I suppose I have you to thank for being in good health here.

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

Uh, yes. Oh, my goodness! Your fox is asleep!

Ame [Erika]

Yeah. Yeah, he does that.

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

Oh, no, he doesn't, actually.

Ame [Erika]

...What?

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

Well, he has refused to sleep while you have been unconscious.

Ame [Erika]

[gasps, full of emotion] Oh...

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

Yes, you've been in a coma for a little over a month.

Ame [Erika]

A *month*?!?!?!?

[WBN outro theme plays: A waltz of strings, bowed and plucked]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

We cut to -

[Erika and Aabria laugh loudly]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

We cut to the smell of rich incense and wondrous potpourris of flower petals. Nectars diffused from glass decanters. In a rich palatial suite in tangled sheets, we find Suvi next to the sleeping body of the wizard Silver.

Lou Wilson

Damn. Everybody in bed?

[Brennan and Aabria laugh]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Everybody's in bed.

Aabria Iyengar

It's been a month!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Um, Aabria. Could you please describe Suvi and her abode?

Aabria Iyengar

Yes. Suvi has a - she would call it a comfortable set of rooms that she calls her own. They are very... She's tried, and I think now, having spent that one sort of precious afternoon at Grandmother Wren's cottage, she has tried to approximate the level of coziness, using the sort of sumptuous, very elaborate styles of the citadel. So there are cushions everywhere and fabric swooping down from the ceiling, and all of that looks like, very languorous and decorous, because that's the outer sort of what she shows off to the world. She wants to look comfortable and poised and cozy and, fuck it, a little sexy. And then she's got, obviously, her secret study that no one is allowed entrance to, that has a completely different vibe. That's just a monomania dream of books and thoughts and things. But for now, she's here just sort of laying in bed and looking over at this very handsome man that seems to match this room quite well, and she's feeling very pleased with herself.

[Erika hoots and hollers]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

It's like early evening right now. So Silver is very much not asleep. He's just, like, resting his eyes. He turns over. You see that he has a bunch of scars on his body from combat that all of which have been, as most wizards of the Citadel do, have been modified. So they are genuine scars that would have actually sort of impacted his good looks. And so he had them healed just enough to keep them, but keep them in a way that did not alter what he felt were his best features.

Aabria Iyengar

I love wizardry. This is great!

[Silver yawns, music turns to gentle, calming piano melody]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He turns over, goes -

Suvi [Aabria]

How you doing?

Silver [Brennan]

I'm doing better than before. I wanted to ask, by the way. Are you planning on seeing any of the, sort of grand examinations for people that are trying to be graduated up into the upper class? Because I think some people are going to go do that this weekend. I don't know if there's any that struck you as being interesting or not, but...

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, do I know anyone that's coming up through these classes? More specifically, do I know any of Steel's kids coming through?

Brennan Lee Mulligan

One of Steel's eldest is close to this, but this is actually not even about -this is not about acceptance into the Citadel. This is about graduation and promotion up through the ranks of the Citadel. So these are graduated wizards.

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, got it.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Silver looks up, and says,

Silver [Brennan]

Correct me if I'm wrong, you're getting your name cloak, right?

Suvi [Aabria]

Uh, God, yeah. I guess that's time for that. Yes, yes, I am.

Silver [Brennan]

Do you have a - you know, some people are superstitious about it, but do you have one picked out that you would want to tell me?

Aabria Iyengar

Oh, do I want to leave that a surprise...? I think Suvi gets really quiet and, like, still for a while.

Suvi [Aabria]

Sky.

Silver [Brennan]

Sky?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah. I'm going to be the wizard Sky.

Silver [Brennan]

Third of the name. All right. That's a - I would have put money down on it.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah...

Silver [Brennan]

For sure. For sure. For sure.

Suvi [Aabria]

Look, it's a - I understand it's kind of a cold shot, but I ... Yeah.

Silver [Brennan]

But you're sort of in that you kind of have to. I mean, you grew up -

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah!

Silver [Brennan]

You know, it's like, if you didn't say Sky, people would be like, I wonder why she didn't do...

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, right? They're going to be like, oh, she picked Salamander. What the fuck? No.

Silver [Brennan]

No.

Suvi [Aabria]

Hey, I have lived - you've known me forever. Big shoes to fill. So I guess we're kind of just going to lean into it now.

Silver [Brennan]

It does feel like part of the order of things, right? Like Sky. Yeah. Well, for what it's worth, I think. You'll do an amazing job. Everything I hear is that you're one of the only Arc Magi apprentices that's actually doing anything or sort of helping the Citadel at all.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, it's crazy. I got back and I was like, oh, I really want to buckle down. And it's been very easy to keep up with that workload. Look, this feels weird to brag because you're kind of covered in battle scars and I'm talking about paperwork. [panicking] Is this weird? What is this?

Aabria Iyengar

Can I insight check him? I just need to know if I'm losing it in this moment.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Give me an insight check.

[dice roll]

Aabria Iyengar

How is this - a natural one.

Erika Ishii

Ayyyyy!!!

Aabria Iyengar

Arc Two, we're back, baybeee!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You think of the past month. You look at Silver. How can he not be judging you? I mean, he's seen actual war. You see he looks at you and just sort of smiles and says,

Silver [Brennan]

I feel like you have things you're worrying about. Lord knows whatever this is.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And he points to your study area and he's like,

Silver [Brennan]

Kind of doing some memorabilia collecting, or?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, just a big project. Uhh, you know, uhhh, Gaothmai. And there - it's fine. I want to help with the war effort. We need to know who we're fighting.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You hear a bang on the door.

[Suvi yelps]

Citadel Attendant [Brennan]
[muffled] Wizard Apprentice, Arc Mage Suvi, your friend has awakened.

Suvi [Aabria]
Ame??

Citadel Attendant [Brennan]
[muffled] Ame is awake.

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh, *shit!*

Aabria Iyengar
And Suvi's, like, whole - she was diving out of bed. And then does the freeze kind of at the edge, like a weird, sexy gargoyle.

[Erika guffaws]

Aabria Iyengar
She turns back and looks at Silver.

Suvi [Aabria]
Hey... Um, I have to - I have to -

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see he creates a dimension door back to his own quarters. You see that - Silver goes,

Silver [Brennan]
No worries.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He traces a finger in the air, opens a doorway that suddenly reflects his own quarter and chambers. And you see, he goes,

Silver [Brennan]
Clothes, hop to it!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Claps his hands, and as he steps through, socks, shirt, pants, he hops up in the air, the pants jump up on his legs and they all sort of animate and fly onto his body.

Aabria Iyengar
Before he leaves, I want to grab him sort of at the threshold of the dimension door and kiss him.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
He kisses you back passionately.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah, let's go to the thing later when I'm - I - okay.

Silver [Brennan]

There's going to be a little get together tonight, I think. Oh, I heard some people were going to try to challenge your guardian to a drinking contest.

Suvi [Aabria]

[laughs] I will be there.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

He peels out and you begin to...?

Aabria Iyengar

Suvi makes for the door, opens the door, slams the door shut, remembers she is butt ass naked.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

The attendant goes,

Citadel Attendant [Brennan]

AHHH!

[Erika laughs]

Suvi [Aabria]

OH GOD! Oh, modify memory. You will not come quickly enough. One second!

[music turns whimsical, lighthearted]

Aabria Iyengar

And I will analog put on clothing.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

And you analog put on clothing, charge at the door and you make it down to the bottom of your suite in Alabast Hall, looking at the rest of the court around you. Malacanth's court, one of two dozen massive floating platforms that rotate softly and gently, helixing up and down through the massive glass tower of the Erien. These perfect courtyards, neighborhoods, small cities unto themselves in this massive stretching to the sky, almost seven or eight mile tall glass structure boggling the imagination, rising into the sky of the white sand desert. Stars overhead, it is so bright here at night as the white desert reflects the moon and starlight back up into the Citadel. Racing out underneath a hedgerow of peonies, you see the supine form of Eursulon, or as he is known here, Bear of Silbury.

Lou Wilson

I'm just asleep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Uh, well, -

Lou Wilson

Yeah, I'm asleep.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Eursulon, please describe for me, if you would, what objects of consumption and comfort which the Citadel so richly provides, surround you here at this flower bed and the soft, supple grass that creates almost like beds of comfort beyond what you could imagine kept privately all throughout the Citadel.

Lou Wilson

I think you see Eursulon splayed out. I think there are a number of, kind of very intricate, essentially to-go boxes from the different restaurants and eateries that he's been just picking at. A bunch of half-eaten things and then bottles upon bottles of the nicest wine they'll give to a guardian.

Suvi [Aabria]

B-Bear?

[Eursulon awakes and spits]

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, God!

Lou Wilson

Full bonbon comes out of my mouth.

Aabria Iyengar

I catch it.

Eursulon [Lou]

Oh, put that down. Are you done? Are we allowed to - can I come upstairs? Are you done?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, yes, yes. But, uh, Ame's awake!

Eursulon [Lou]

What????

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes!

Eursulon [Lou]

What????

Suvi [Aabria]

Come on, come on!

Aabria Iyengar

And I just crush the wet bonbon in my hand.

[patting noises]

Lou Wilson

Eursulon desperately trying to brush all of the crumbs off of himself.

Aabria Iyengar

A series of prestidigitations.

[spell noises]

Eursulon [Lou]

Oh, thank you. Yeah, that's right. Thank you.

Suvi [Aabria]

I got you, bud, I got you.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Crumbs, everything goes away. As it goes away, you see, whatever, like litter or garbage, you leave, as you exit more than 30 paces, you see there is a momentary eclipse of a rune of magic hanging in silver light. And a small dust devil whirls the refuse up and begins to move it in the direction of a receptacle.

Suvi [Aabria]

This is the best place in the whole world.

Eursulon [Lou]

It's amazing. So there was a moment where I was about to feel bad about just leaving a bunch of trash. And then it's always fine. It's always fine!

Suvi [Aabria]

No, don't worry about it. It's always fine. Thank you. Again, I'm sorry. I'm not sorry.

Eursulon [Lou]

Yes. How long have you known? Is it just now?

Suvi [Aabria]

Just now!

Eursulon [Lou]

Okay. All right! All right!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You begin to tear across Malacanth Court. This is the home of the Pyrian Dome, which is the meeting place of the Arc Magi of the Citadel. Even for a place of riches in all corners, Malacanth is the place of highest clearance and business. This is the cream of the crop. Like the Arc Magi of the Citadel have their quarters here in this place. The Tower of the Sword, Steel's home is here in this place. As you run through, once again, it is not austere. The Citadel is far from austere. Beautiful marble and bright red bricks covered in flowering vines. Huge fountains of golden statues where the water erupts in movement to ethereal music that plays from seemingly nowhere. You hear proud horns playing. This is not one of these sort of, like, carousing platforms. So it's not bawdy here. Instead, it has a kind of peaceful, serene music that plays at certain fountains. And you see that as night sort of descends, people are very much heading to their homes. You see that a few little carts and places stay for those who have forgotten or skipped dinner. There's like a small sort of umbrella where you see over a cart of someone serving shaved ice, who looks out as you rush past in this plaza with like, well lit, kind of wizardly torches that flicker in flame that is cool to the touch.

Lou Wilson

Eursulon slows down for one second and then realizes that he should just keep running.

Suvi [Aabria]

We can get some later.

Eursulon [Lou]

Yes, we can get. But we'll come back?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, we'll come back.

Eursulon [Lou]

You know he only comes out like, twice a week.

Suvi [Aabria]

I know, but now we can show Ame!

Eursulon [Lou]

Yeah, that's right. Ame. Ame. Ame.

[fast paced footstep noises, music is twinkling and light]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

There are many intersections, so Malacanth is very much not on a grid. So small alleys raise into steps that go up into a cobblestone, across a wide avenue where troops can march up through another sort of curving street that moves away, a sort of hodgepodge panoply of various streets and buildings. Many of the buildings here fit a central civic, imperial architectural style, but several of the buildings and towers here are of strange architectural styles that the buildings were moved here whole cloth from other places.

Suvi [Aabria]

Suvi's doing the romcom run of, uh - in narrow alleys, she's in a full sprint and then anywhere where someone important might see her, she's going to do the slow and - we're good, and we're power walking. And then into a dead sprint.

Eursulon [Lou]

Oh, God. [laughing]

Suvi [Aabria]

I'm really not telegraphing this in a way that's out - It's fine.

Eursulon [Lou]

No - it's -

Suvi [Aabria]

You be in front, you be in front.

Eursulon [Lou]

Okay, well, then I'm just going to run the whole time.

Suvi [Aabria]

Shit.

[low overlapping chatter]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You arrive and see a crowd outside of Ame's place. This is in the Alchemist's Hall, where you see that there are a number of alchemists, all talking excitedly to each other. You, of course, are shepherded right in. You see that there's another Citadel wizard. Who says,

Citadel Wizard [Brennan]

I believe that the Sword of the Citadel is on her way right now.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You are both ushered in, and see the lights on inside. Dr. Nadine is there, who has cleared the room.

Erika Ishii

I am up and storming around like hobbling a little bit.

Ame [Erika]

I need to see her *now!!!*

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see a shaky on her feet after a month in bed, Ame holding a sleeping fox. And when he's sleeping, he can make himself into a little ball when he wants. Legs full, splayed out, like legs hanging from her arm, head lolling, tail drooping. He is just a bag of bones. You rush into the room. Ame, you see Suvi and Eursulon.

Eursulon [Lou]

Ame, you're awake.

Lou Wilson

I'm going to come and pick you up, probably too aggressively.

[Erika and Aabria laugh, Ame makes a struggling noise]

Eursulon [Lou]

Oh, sorry.

Ame [Erika]

[quietly but rapidly] We need to talk. We need to talk. We need to talk right now.

Suvi [Aabria]

You just woke up, are you okay?

Ame [Erika]

Yes, I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.

Suvi [Aabria]

This is a lot of energy. Do you want something to drink? Are you - ?

Ame [Erika]

[with urgency] No!!!

Brennan Lee Mulligan

As you rejoin in this moment, you see, Ame has this intense look in her eyes. Fox just going [loud snores]

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, he's asleep. He's so mean. Okay. Dr. Tamry. Hi. Thank you so much. Go. Please let us know when Steel gets here. We need a minute to catch up. Tearful reunion. Thank you so much. I don't know how to expedite this without -

Ame [Erika]

Thank you for your services!

Erika Ishii

We push her right out.

[Dr. Tamry yelps, Suvi exclaims]

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]

There are some other tests we need to run -

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, we can run them in five minutes.

Ame [Erika]

We can do that!

Dr. Nadine Tamry [Brennan]
All right.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
She says. She steps out. I'm going to roll a die to see how close people are. You want, I guess, a lower number?

[dice roll]

Aabria Iyengar
Okay...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
That's a 19.

Aabria Iyengar
That's the opposite of a lower number!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You guys can start talking.

Suvi [Aabria]
Okay, okay, okay... I'm going to close the doors. Hi. Are you good? Do you need any - ?

Eursulon [Lou]
I mean, you seem well. The last time we saw you -

Erika Ishii
I open up the door.

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh!

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Steel is standing right there.

Erika Ishii
I close the door.

[door slamming]

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh!

Ame [Erika]
[rushed whispers] Okay, okay, I know - I know everything. I know everything that was forgotten. I know things about your parents, I know things about spirits -

Steel [Brennan]
[light knock on the door, voice muffled] Uh, this is Steel. The Sword of the Citadel. May I come in?

Suvi [Aabria]
One minute!

Ame [Erika]

[hushed and rushed] I have so much to tell you. I remember everything. And I know who we can trust. And I know who we can't trust. And I know some things. And we got to compare notes. A month!!! Also, thanks for visiting me, both of you. I know you were there.

Suvi [Aabria]

What? What do you mean?

Ame [Erika]

Hiiii!!!!

Steel [Brennan]

Ame! You are...

Ame [Erika]

I'm awake.

Steel [Brennan]

Awake. How are you feeling?

Ame [Erika]

Good.

Steel [Brennan]

Okay, great. Uh, well..

Suvi [Aabria]

Do you want to come in?

Steel [Brennan]

Yeah, can I come in the room?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah, I'm gonna -

Aabria Iyengar

And then I close the door behind Steel.

Ame [Erika]

Mmm. Mmhmm. Mmhmm. Please come in.

Steel [Brennan]

Wonderful. Uh, hello.

Ame [Erika]

Hi.

Eursulon [Bear]

Good to see you, Steel.

Steel [Brennan]

Bear, very good to see you. Well, I'm sure Dr. Tamry has mentioned, but you've been unconscious for about a month...

Ame [Erika]
Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Steel [Brennan]
Your friends - Suvi is very close to getting her name cloak, which will be a big milestone.

Suvi [Aabria]
Oh, yeah.

Steel [Brennan]
We're having that ceremony very shortly. Bear has been training for some time.

Eursulon [Lou]
Yes.

Lou Wilson
And you'd see now, I'm wearing - I don't think I'm wearing my normal, my plain clothes. I think I'm wearing essentially whatever would be a training - someone in training's outfit.

Erika Ishii
I am also wearing fully a hospital gown. This is all hospital gown.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You see that she says,

Steel [Brennan]
Yes. So Bear has been staying with us. And for you to know because you've been asleep for a month, Bear is the guardian and protector of the Archmage Apprentice Suvi.

Ame [Erika]
Ooooh!

Eursulon [Lou]
We made it official.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah...

[Ame laughs]

Steel [Brennan]
And there's a very foolish rumor going around based on the fact of - there's a familial resemblance between Bear and - Bear the human,

Ame [Erika]
Yes.

Steel [Brennan]
Who looks like a very familial resemblance to, uh -

Suvi [Aabria]
This is like, the most unsubtle you've ever been.

Ame [Erika]
[in realization] Oooohh!

Steel [Brennan]

Well, I - She's maybe groggy and seemed very perturbed and slammed a door in my face. So I'm just trying to communicate to you.

Suvi [Aabria]

This is like, the most unsubtle you've ever been.

Ame [Erika]

Oh, fair. Well.

Suvi [Aabria]

[amused] Yeah, he's my half brother.

Steel [Brennan]

The great thing about a rumor, Ame, is it gives people something to talk about, which is the thing you always need them to be doing.

Ame [Erika]

Right. Something else interesting. An interesting story. Great. So here I am in the Citadel, and, uh... Sorry, I'm, yes. A little overwhelmed.

Suvi [Aabria]

You're good.

Ame [Erika]

Right. Now, what's a name cloak?

Suvi [Aabria]

Oh, we don't have - um - so, you know, so Steel,

Aabria Iyengar

And I just gesture at the massive armor clad, like,

Suvi [Aabria]

Kind of not really her born name. Wizards. You have a name and then you - we kind of -

Ame [Erika]

And then you get an S name.

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes. And it kind of eats the real name out of the world because names are powerful. Remember I got mad at you once when I was like, stop saying my name all the time. It's a whole thing. I'm sorry about that. God, so much to catch up. Anyway, I'm taking the name Sky. We - I mentioned it.

Ame [Erika]

Right, that was just a pseudonym. You're saying that it will eat the name Suvi?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yes.

Ame [Erika]

So if I call you Suvi, does that mean that it doesn't exist anymore?

Suvi [Aabria]
No, no no no.

Ame [Erika]
[hint of annoyance to her voice] Will everybody else hear Sky?

Suvi [Aabria]
[flustered] Yes, yes. Um, Steel?

Steel [Brennan]
Yes?

Suvi [Aabria]
I just have to give them a bit of my name. And that's how they can still remember?

Ame [Erika]
[hint of annoyance to her voice] So if I say Suvi, then everyone will hear Sky.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yes.

Ame [Erika]
[hint of annoyance to her voice] And I will hear Sky. I will hear myself say Sky?

Steel [Brennan]
You'll hear Suvi.

Suvi [Aabria]
Suvi. But you'll know that you're not really - like everyone else is hearing -

Steel [Brennan]
Also, as a point of order, not everybody gets an S name.

Suvi [Aabria]
Okay, yeah. It's complicated. There's things. So it's special.

Ame [Erika]
Sky, Soft, Stone...

Suvi [Aabria]
Silence, Silver.

Ame [Erika]
Silver?

Suvi [Aabria]
Yes. So that's a thing. And it's very cool. We don't have to - there's a lot of -

Ame [Erika]
[slight aggression] Do you know Steel's true name or real name? Because she knows yours.

Suvi [Aabria]
Yeah, because she was kind of around when I was born.

Ame [Erika]

[slight aggression, pressing] Sure. But do you know hers? Is that something - do you share each other's names?

Suvi [Aabria]

Wow. Came out spicy. From a coma.

Steel [Brennan]

Typically speaking, Ame, children don't know their parents' - younger generations do not know the given names of their older generation.

Suvi [Aabria]

[quietly] My parents died before they could tell me their name.

Ame [Erika]

[softening] I'm sorry.

Suvi [Aabria]

It's okay.

Ame [Erika]

Okay, uh - Great. Sorry. A little bit of a diversion there.

Suvi [Aabria]

No, you're good.

Ame [Erika]

You're training!

Suvi [Aabria]

Why *don't* I know your name?

Steel [Brennan]

You want to know it?

Suvi [Aabria]

Yeah.

Steel [Brennan]

It's classified.

Eursulon [Lou]

Well, what if I want to know it?

Steel [Brennan]

Maybe for Bear, if you stop dropping your guard after a successful counterstruck.

[Bear laughs and protests, Suvi laughs]

Eursulon [Lou]

[flustered] Well, you're being mean, all right? You make me do all the push ups before, and I'm not as strong as I need to be toward the end.

Steel [Brennan]

Oh, you're only gonna fight people when you're not tired?

Eursulon [Lou]
Maybe... If I can time it out well.

Steel [Brennan]
Well, you might not always be able to time it out well. Regardless, Ame, are you okay? You seem very agitated.

Ame [Erika]
Yeah.

Erika Ishii
I whip open the door again to look out.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
A bunch of doctors go, ah!

Suvi [Aabria]
Why?

Doctors [Brennan]
Rude!

Suvi [Aabria]
That will happen every time. Why are you -

Ame [Erika]
Steel? I remembered the things that Grandmother Wren taught me that she told me that I had been cursed to forget.

Steel [Brennan]
Great. That's really good. And if you ever want to talk about some of the things you remember, let's be really... Thoughtful about good places to have those conversations.

Ame [Erika]
Mmhmm. Mmhmm. Yeah.

Steel [Brennan]
Wonderful. You are a welcome guest of the Citadel for as long as you should desire to be so. And also, the traveling door to Silbury is functional again, so if you would wish to return home, you may do so as well.

Aabria Iyengar
Suvi, just little bit shaking her head, like, no no no no no.

Ame [Erika]
I - thank you. That is very kind of you. I very much appreciate the hospitality and will, I suppose, eventually have to return to Toma and my duties as a witch. But for now, I would love a chance to catch up with my companions.

Steel [Brennan]
Lovely. Then by all means. And if you wish to catch up in earnest, Suvi's dwelling place is an extraordinarily comfortable and safe place to do so.

Ame [Erika]
Ah, wonderful.

Suvi [Aabria]
And there's pants there.

Ame [Erika]

What?

Suvi [Aabria]

You got your cheeks in the wind. You're wearing a - you've been asleep, so you kind of got a backless thing happening right now. So I'm just saying. Gesticulate less.

Ame [Erika]

Pants are like prisons.

[Light, jaunty music begins]

Brennan Lee Mulligan

She looks out and says,

Steel [Brennan]

All right.

Brennan Lee Mulligan

You see that the alchemists outside, the various doctors, come in, administer a few other tests. They provide a sleek, small, lightweight wheelchair for Ame to be escorted back to Suvi's dwelling place. Fox sort of rolls over.

[Fox snoring loudly]

Ame [Erika]

[with adoration] Oh, he's so tuckered out.

Suvi [Aabria]

I never saw him sleep.

Eursulon [Lou]

He slept while I was there.

Suvi [Aabria]

Wait, really?

Eursulon [Lou]

Sometimes.

Suvi [Aabria]

Seriously?

Eursulon [Lou]

Yes.

Suvi [Aabria]

He bit me *twice*.

Eursulon [Lou]

He was - honestly, it's the nicest he's ever been to me.

Suvi [Aabria]

[mumbling] All right, I'm not going to take that personally.

Brennan Lee Mulligan
Steel looks over and says,

Steel [Brennan]
That fox badly bit a number of wizards.

Ame [Erika]
[snickers, stifles laughter] I'm so sorry for his behavior.

Steel [Brennan]
He also, I believe, almost drove one wizard to renounce the Citadel.

[Suvi laughs]

Ame [Erika]
Ooooh...

Steel [Brennan]
He can tell you the story when he's awake, but essentially it was -

Ame [Erika]
[with love] You little shit...

Erika Ishii
I squeeze him tighter.

The Fox [Brennan]
[snoring then gasps awake, speaking weakly] Boss...

Brennan Lee Mulligan
You guys move out, taking Ame back to your dwelling place. And Ame, for the first time you are walking under the skies of a distant land within the realm of the Kehmsarazan Empire, here at the heart of the Citadel.

[Music swelling louder and louder, becoming grander as Brennan speaks]

Brennan Lee Mulligan
At the edge of Malacanth Court, which is at the edge of the platform, you look down and see a several mile drop to Haverward, which is at the base of the area, a massive sprawling city that is the terrestrial landing pad for the various campuses, colleges and universities of the Citadel. This enormous marble balustrade flecked with mica, fool's gold. Coloring this place, twinkles under the light of desert stars, reflecting the glow of endless white sand rolling in dunes. Ame, you can see the dance of these windswept dunes and trails of gossamer snow-like sand being carried by the wind from the cresting ridges of each sandy hill in the vast wide sea of desert expanse. Looking out at the edge of the platform that rises slowly, slowly to the Erian where it will crest at the very top, a line with the points of geometric line at the apex of the Erian's Tower. It will receive that magic there and then slowly twirl down to land before rising again in an endless dance of swirling platforms. Here at the heart of wizards' magic in the world of Umora.

[A waltz of strings, bowed and plucked, underscore the credits]

Taylor Moore
That was Lou Wilson as Eursulon, Erika Ishii as Ame, Aabria Iyengar as Suvi, and Brennan Lee Mulligan as Everyone and Everything Else. Worlds Beyond Number is edited, designed, and scored, by Taylor Moore at Fortunate Horse, with additional sound design by Michael Ghelfi Studios. For even more like this, join us on our Patreon. We'll see you there.

[Waltz fades out]