

THE VILLAGE

Written by

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The sound of broken twigs and leaves ECHOES throughout the darkness.

OFFICER 1# (V.O.)  
Are you sure we are not lost?

OFFICER 2# (V.O.)  
If we were, I would know.

The sounds spread, growing louder.

OFFICER 1# (V.O.)  
...I'm not sure. I swear we passed  
this tree before.

OFFICER 2# (V.O.)  
Because you are now a tree  
connoisseur.

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Two uniformed guards keep walking amidst the trees. A thin mist envelops the woods like a cold, haunting blanket.

OFFICER 1#  
Look, all I'm saying is that we  
should have reached the camp at  
this point.

Officer 2# gives a long sight. They both stop walking.

The woods become deadly quiet.

Officer 1# takes a map from a leather bag with an irritated expression. The annoyance soon becomes confusion as he stares at the map, frowning.

Officer 2# gets closer, trying to get a look at the map himself.

OFFICER 1#  
I'm right, aren't I?

OFFICER 2#  
Be quiet. I'm thinking.

Officer 2# looks around, glances back at the map. His eyes shares a concern his voice will not.

OFFICER 2#  
How long since we crossed the  
river?

OFFICER 1#  
Around fifteen minutes ago.

Some branches and leaves snap as the officers shift in their places.

Officer 1# walks away. The other officer frowns even more. He looks around. Looks at the map.

OFFICER 2#  
(mumbling)

This doesn't make any sense...

OFFICER 1# (O.S.)  
Was there always a village here?

It takes several seconds for the other officer to reply, his voice almost in a daze.

OFFICER 2#  
What did you say?

OFFICER 1# (O.S.)  
Look there.

Officer 2# walks over, with slow steps, toward the other officer. The shot widens, showing what appears to be many houses, from different sizes and shapes, close to one another.

Both officers have their backs to us. The camera focus on the village.

OFFICER 2#  
There is no documentation on that  
place.

OFFICER 1#  
Are you sure?

Camera zooms out, slowly. The woods are still quiet.

Watching.

OFFICER 2#  
How could I not? I have been  
mapping this area for a month now.  
The instructions said nothing about  
a place like that.

OFFICER 1#  
But this would mean—

OFFICER 2#  
It's not under the Regimen.

Focus shift to the two officers.

OFFICER 2#  
(extremely confused)  
This makes no sense. I have never  
seen that place before.

Officer 1# touches his head, lowers his gaze. He freezes on his spot. His voice suddenly becomes distant, as if it's being casted away from his mouth.

OFFICER 1#  
...wait, I think...yes, now that  
I'm seeing it again...yes, I  
remember.

OFFICER 2#  
What?

OFFICER 1#  
(drifting)  
This place...I used to come here  
with my family. We spend a few  
summers there...

There is no sound but the two officers talking.

OFFICER 2#  
Your family?

OFFICER 1#  
...yes. My sister--

OFFICER 2#  
You have a sister?

OFFICER 1#  
--my parents...

A HEARTBEAT.

OFFICER 1#  
...we really like this place.

A twig BREAKS. The sound echoes. The two officers quickly turn around, their hands going for their guns.

The sound of leaves and branches being broken, fast. As if something is rushing toward them.

We see a tight CLOSE-UP on their faces--

CUT TO BLACK

ASH (V.O.)  
Those who covet, hunger.

FADE IN:

INT. ASH'S CHAMBERS - DAY

We are shown walls covered with medals of decoration and certifications. There are sounds of someone getting dressed.

ASH (V.O.)  
With hunger, comes drive.

Cut to the room. It's spot clean, with light pouring from the window.

Cut to a wooden desk. There are open MAPS and NOTEBOOKS, alongside other documentation.

We can see a hand writing in an open notebook. The handwriting is very clean and precise.

ASH (V.O.)  
Through drive, comes victory. Joy.

By the window there is a stunning BONSAI TREE. Upon closer notice, we can see a few droplets of water in its leaves and bark.

Though the camera is focused on the bonsai, we can see the outside area. A trail surrounded by naked trees. A woman passes by the bonsai.

ASH (V.O.)  
Yet those who only knows how to  
dream--

The focus shifts to outside, closing in on one of the trees. There is a bird nest in one of the top branches.

EXT. OUTSIDE - DAY

A BIRD with a broken wing lies beside the tree. It's being eaten by maggots.

ASH (V.O.)  
 --They starve.

Laughters begins to echo. They start distant, muffled. They get louder and louder. There's the sound of a locker being closed--

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A man and a woman are putting away their belongings, getting ready for training. They are dressed with simple shirts and pants, their military tags hanging from their necks.

BO COLLINS (mid 20s) is wrapping his knuckles with bandages. His untidy hair and charming smile makes him look younger.

BO  
 You will spar with Davon today,  
 right?

NARI KANG (mid 20s) ties up her hair with a delighted glow in her eyes. She has strong legs and lean features, barely reaching Bo's chest.

NARI  
 What you meant to say is: Today,  
 Davon will cry for mercy.

BO  
 If you pay me a meal, I will help  
 you with him.

She laughs, not even sparing him a glance.

NARI  
 I politely decline.

BO  
 I can hold him in place so you can  
 kick him to your heart's content.

NARI  
 You are losing me, Bo. Try again.

FRAN ANGELINI (early 20s) passes by them without glancing their way. He has the sunken eyes of someone who craves sleep more than any human interaction.

FRAN  
 Just say you are penniless and want  
 a free meal.

Bo smiles brightly.

BO  
(to Fran)  
Where's the fun in that?

Nari begins to stretch her legs and arms.

NARI  
If you take Rose for her morning  
walks for the rest of the week,  
I'll buy you today's soup.

Bo's smile disappears, yet his eyes are content. Filled with respect and joy. He extends his hands. Nari shakes it back.

BO  
(serious)  
Always a pleasure to do business  
with you, dear Kang.

NARI  
Always a pleasure to feed you,  
Collins.

FRAN (O.S.)  
Is Colonel already here?

Fran starts taking off his uniform coat.

NARI (O.S.)  
Heard her leaving her room before  
the sun was even up.

A WHISTLE echoes as Fran shakes his head, his eyes cold as he removes his gloves.

BO (O.S.)  
Our Colonel will make us look bad,  
at this rate.

FRAN  
If she doesn't collapse first, that  
is.

Bo wraps his arm around Fran's shoulder, the friendly mockery present in his voice, eyes, and smile.

BO  
Just say you hate morning trainings  
and wish Colonel would give you an  
exemption. Like she did with Iryna.

Fran removes the arm with a bored gaze, his voice tired.

FRAN

I wish our leader would take a proper care of herself--

From a distance, the sound of a bag being punched. The sound gets louder, and louder.

FRAN

-- so that we don't have to.

INT. TRAINING ROOM - DAY

The room is mostly empty. The windows, floor and walls are spotless. On the left side, there are bars, suspension trainers, barbells and other equipment. On the right, heavy bags, leaving the back of the room empty.

A woman keeps punching a heavy bag, both knuckles are wrapped tightly with bandages. The sound keeps echoing in the space.

COLONEL AISLIN "ASH" DOHERTY (mid 20s) has sweat running down her face. She has a fierce gaze and strong features, a small scar crossing her left eye. Every punch is controlled. Every breath taken, calculated.

BO (O.S.)

(singing)

*Through daggers and spades, our hearts have been wounded--We pay our dues tonight!*

Nari chuckles. The woman never stops hitting the bag.

BO (CONT'D)

(singing)

*Our deaths have been guessed, delayed, and alluded--We pay our dues tonight!*

Fran rolls his eyes, walking ahead. The woman glances toward the group briefly, continuing with her training.

ASH

Someone is merry this morning.

FRAN

When he isn't?

Bo salutes Ash with a smile, walking with Nari toward the barbells. Nari acknowledging Ash with a short bow.



BO

The greatest of mornings to you, my  
dear Colonel! You look splendid  
today.

Though she tries to hide it, a faint smile touches her lips  
briefly.

ASH

Did you have a pleasant night,  
Collins?

Fran positions himself behind the heavy bag, holding it as  
Ash punches it in a constant rhythm. Cross, hook, uppercut.  
Jab, hook, uppercut.

BO (O.S.)

You know I always do.

Fran watches Bo walking away, his eyes shifting to Ash.

FRAN

Did you hear any news?

ASH

Nothing, so far.

FRAN

It's been awhile since we heard any  
reports from them.

She pauses momentarily, shifting her position before  
continuing to throw her punches.

ASH

Not surprising. Delays are not  
uncommon this time of the year,  
with the rains.

FRAN

But it didn't rain the past days.

ASH

Then we might hear from them quite  
soon.

FRAN

Or perhaps the news were not so  
merry after all.

Ash stops. She stares at Fran, trying to decipher the man's  
gaze.

ASH  
You have heard something.

FRAN  
Not me. I was told to deliver a  
message to you.

Ash steps away from the bag.

FRAN  
The Prime Commander. He wishes to  
see you.

INT. HALL - DAY

Ash walks down the hallway in her uniform. Every person who  
lays their eyes on her gives a salute, stopping in their  
tracks. She acknowledges each one.

She stops before a decorated wooden door. Raises her hand to  
knock.

PRIME COMMANDER (O.S.)  
Come on in, Colonel Doherty.

She hesitates for a fraction of time.

INT. PRIME COMMANDER'S OFFICE - DAY

The room is filled with shelves and decorations. Shelves are  
filled with books, organized alphabetically. Every object set  
apart by the same few inches, not even one painting askew.

A room that clings to an obsessive idea of perfection.

Ash stop in front of the desk, hands on her back.

ASH  
You wished to see me.

PRIME COMMANDER (late 40s) smiles with his eyes and mouth.  
Hair perfectly combed to one side, hands clasped together.  
His voice is cultured, soft like velvet.

PRIME COMMANDER  
Indeed, I do.

As the silence stretches, Ash avoids direct eye contact.

PRIME COMMANDER

You have heard about our plans with the new train line.

She nods.

ASH

Constructions already started. It will cover the entire Sector.

PRIME COMMANDER

Not only our Sector, but it will connect with others as well. To provide not only a faster transportation to all of our residents, but also resources.

Ash shifts in her spot.

PRIME COMMANDER

Which is why it is of utmost importance that this line is built.

The man unclasp his hands, revealing a map underneath his arms.

PRIME COMMANDER

Alas, we received some news that can delay our plans.

The Prime Commander gives a written report to Ash, and as she readers her expression changes, furrowing her brows.

ASH

This doesn't make any sense. The Regiment conquered the entire region--we made sure of it.

PRIME COMMANDER

Yet it appears that one did escape our gazes. And now we must address this issue with care.

Ash reads the report again. She pounds for a second.

ASH

If we follow our code, our approach should be--

The man stands up.

PRIME COMMANDER

Our approach will be peaceful. We will teach them our ways, and they will come under our protection-- like all the others before them.

Ash opens her mouth, hesitates. The Prime Commander smiles.

PRIME COMMANDER

You resemble your mother in many ways, Doherty. Never looking down, always aiming high.

The man looks at the map below him.

PRIME COMMANDER

You wish to become a Prime Commander like her, don't you? To lead your own Sector; watch the view from the very top.

ASH

Yes, sir.

PRIME COMMANDER

It takes drive. *Desire*. Yet desire can only take you so far without the right opportunities.

Ash raises her eyebrows briefly.

ASH

You want me to lead this operation.

He nods.

PRIME COMMANDER

Not only there are a few mines close to this village, there is also a river. Crops. This place could later become a base, or a station to restock our resources. It is in the Regiment best interest to absorb this place without complications. Which is why I want you to make it an outstanding success.

The man taps on the map a few times.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)  
 Gather your team. The recent graduates will go with you, provide military support if needed. I believe there are around forty; we had a large class this year. You can depart tomorrow before sunrise.

He glances at her, the corner of his mouth curling in a smile.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)  
 Do you have any reservations, Colonel?

Ash seems a bit uncomfortable. She continues to avoid his gaze.

ASH  
 I'm simply wondering if perhaps we are not involving too many of our forces for this. This village is small, I doubt it has more than a hundred people.

His opens his mouth in an 'Ah', starting to pace around the room.

PRIME COMMANDER  
 There's a difference between being overzealous and being attentive. Between patience and laziness. Our Regiment did not come to be within a fortnight. It took us years, almost two decades, to find the right people who shared our vision. To share this vision with the world. We now have three continents under our care, and we want to have them all--a unified, strong community.

He stops by the bookshelf. Takes a volume.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)  
 Do we believe in perfection?

ASH  
 No--

PRIME COMMANDER  
 Of course we don't, perfection is but an illusion created by the weak-minded.

The man closes the book with a loud snap, placing it back in its place.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Yet we thrive to achieve the closest thing to it. And for something to be the very next thing close to perfection, it must be free from corruption and weakness. A mechanism with all cogs in working order.

He stands beside the map, pointing to where the village is located.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)

A community that is not under our care is prone to weakness. So, we must do our best to bring them under our wings, to nourish them with love. Like any good parent would do.

Then, he crumples the map under his hands, his voice serene and steady.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)

But if they cannot see their own weakness, and the risks a divided nation poses...then we must get rid of them, so the rot will not spread.

The map soon becomes a crumpled ball, one he throws in the trash like it holds no importance.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Does this answer your doubts regarding our efforts, Colonel?

The woman nods, her gaze unwavering.

ASH

Yes, sir. We will do what we must.

PRIME COMMANDER

Then share the news with your companions. Tell them the Regiment expects great results from all of you.

She salutes her Prime Commander, ready to leave.

PRIME COMMANDER  
Oh, and Colonel Doherty.

She looks backs, meeting his gaze for the first time. The Prime Commander smiles warmly.

PRIME COMMANDER (CONT'D)  
Make your mother proud.

Her eyes fills with determination as she nods and closes the door behind her.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAWN - NEXT DAY

Uniform officers are walking up and down the platform, loading the train with provisions and shouting orders.

Ash keeps staring at her pocket watch, her cap under her arm.

NARI  
Colonel!

FRAN (CONT'D)  
--I told you she would be here,  
already.

Nari rushes toward Ash, Fran following in a slower pace.

NARI  
You could have called us sooner, if  
you were planning on arriving so  
early.

Ash shakes her head, putting her watch away.

ASH  
Nonsense. If I had called you  
earlier, you would barely get any  
sleep.

Fran frowns.

FRAN  
What about yo--

DAVON (O.S.)  
You two beat me for half a minute.

As they turn toward the deep voice, a man approaches.

DAVON HARRIS (late 20s) walks in quick, small steps, his glasses briefly reflecting the lights. He is carrying a personal suitcase.

Davon looks around, frowning.

DAVON  
Where is my queen?

NARI  
Bo took her for a walk. They must  
be on their way.

FRAN  
If that idiot doesn't get lost.

DAVON  
(to Nari)  
Why did you never ask me to take  
her for a walk?

NARI  
Because I know Bo will give her  
back.

Davon frowns, hurt.

FRAN  
(to Ash)  
At what time the train will depart?

ASH  
5:15.

She turns around, checking the officers and the cargo.

ASH  
You can board the train if you  
want.

NARI  
(concerned)  
Don't you need help with the--

Barks echoes through the platform. Davon's eyes pop open with glee as he sees Bo and the Dutch Shepherd, ROSE.

Behind then, DARYA BOYKO (mid 20s) walks in a steady pace. Her bright red hair is tied in a messy way, her clothes wrinkled, dark circles under her eyes.