

KASS. Welcome, anyone. And thanks for tuning in. You're listening to Station Arcadia.

[THEME SONG PLAYS]

KASS. Y'know, I've been spending a lot of time wondering if anyone is actually listening and if so, who, (*chuckles*) and it has just now occurred to me that we do have at least one listener -the lovely Marvin Roberts, "stormchaser" and friend of the show. Marvin, if you're listening now, feel free to call in after today's story, okay? We miss you here.

[TWO CLICKS]

KASS. Every summer in the Gannon Islands, there is an art show. People flock to Island Three to see all manners of paintings, sculptures, dances, and any other type of art imaginable. The displays are provided by an ever-changing cast of artists from across the islands. It takes place in and around the Charles Day Convention Center in downtown Oko. With its multi-coloured glass windows and plants cascading down its walls, the building is an iconic part of the Oko skyline that stands out among the trees and grasses that surround the city. In the days leading up to the show, it is even more lively than usual, with people setting up booths inside and in the surrounding park.

This year was the 40th anniversary of this event, and it was Ash Webster's first time as one of the artists. They had attended with their parents since they were a young child and later with their queerplatonic partner Leah, and they had always wanted to contribute to the wonder. This year, they finally could fulfil that dream.

Saturday morning saw Ash bidding Leah farewell in the hotel room the two were staying in and setting out for the Charles Day Convention Center. When they arrived, they got breakfast and cheap coffee from the table of food that had been set out for the artists, then finished setting up their stall. Ash could hear a band warming up a ways away and they were in high spirits. They were one of the first artists to arrive and the sun was only just rising.

Over the next hour, more artists showed up, including the man in the stall next to Ash. He looked to be a few years older than them, and it seemed he made jewellery. This did not appear to be *his* first time at the art show. Ash looked around their stall, suddenly a bit self-conscious. Of course, they knew that their art was good and that they had nothing to worry about, but this did little to calm their nerves. Ash tidied their stall aimlessly and thought about how many people would be arriving soon.

The premise of the show was fairly simple. Artists would display their art, in Ash's case pottery, in hopes of getting commissions. If someone liked an artist's work, they would pick up a business card to show that they were interested in possibly commissioning something. Art could be traded for or even bought, but it was not common. Most of the art on display was just that, displays.

Once people started showing up, the morning passed quickly and uneventfully. Ash got a fair number of people interested in their work. Not a huge amount, but nothing to scoff at. They did their best not to compare themselves to their more charismatic and successful neighbour. He was clearly doing better than them and he seemed to know many of the people he talked to. One of Ash's friends stopped by their stall partway through the morning and they chatted for a bit, but besides that Ash didn't even recognize anyone.

KASS. Oh, Arcadia is letting me know that there's some live audio to share, so um, let's switch to that for a second.

[TRANSITION]

INT. HALLWAY

[BACKSTAGE AT AN EVENT. THERE ARE PEOPLE TALKING AND CARTS/TROLLEYS ROLLING ACROSS PAVEMENT.]

SORREN. --our ratings are down when compared to them, and you're losing traction in this area here, if you just-- Axel!

AXEL. (*considering*) Yeah.

[A PAGE FLIP.]

I see what you mean. *(She doesn't.)*

SORREN. So you see *how much more work we have to do*. This speech isn't going to be your last, but we still need to make it count. I'd suggest starting with the good ideas you have. We have a plan to move forward financially, and I'd dip a little bit into how we want to fund that new education center down the road. That'll give them a more positive outlook going forward, don't you think?

AXEL. Mhmm, yeah... good idea.

SORREN. Of course it is. And I suppose you'll want to tell them about how fishing will be illegal in the surrounding area effective two days after you're elected?

AXEL. Uhh... Right, yeah.

[THEY STOP WALKING.]

SORREN. Axel.

AXEL. Hm? What?

SORREN. You just agreed to make fishing illegal.

AXEL. Oh. *(a silence)* I'm sorry, I'm trying to pay attention I swear. It's just so boring.

SORREN. *(sigh)* You have to take this more seriously. We're in the middle of the election season and yeah, we're still doing okay, but we would be doing better if you'd pay attention when I talk.

AXEL. Yeah, you're right, I'm sorry. Keep going?

SORREN. Okay. Listen this time. So after you talk about the positives, I'd bring up a local issue. I think that education sounded really--

[ASPHODEL BUMPS INTO THEM. PAPERS GO EVERYWHERE.]

AXEL. Oh, sorry--

ASPHODEL. *(at the same time)* Watch where you're--

AXEL. Oh.

ASPHODEL. *(with a huff)* You.

[A LONG MOMENT OF SILENCE BETWEEN THEM WHILE SORREN SORTS HIS PAPERS.]

SORREN. Honestly I can't believe I'm going to have to organize all of this again. I had it in *alphabetical*!

ASPHODEL. *(too politely)* Why don't I help you with that?

[BEAT AS THEY RECOGNIZE WHO IT IS]

SORREN. Thanks, Miss Russel, but I don't need it. *(grunts as he stands up.)*

AXEL. I don't remember you being this polite.

ASPHODEL. Of course not. People change, especially when the environment requires it. The Russel campaign wouldn't look all that reputable if the candidate's daughter didn't reflect her values. *(She pauses to look Axel over.)* You've certainly changed.

AXEL. I noticed you're going by a different name now.

ASPHODEL. Oh, you noticed! I think Asphodel suits me.

AXEL. It's got a ring to it.

ASPHODEL. It's a lovely name. In my humble opinion, of course.

AXEL. Of course.

SORREN. What are you doing here, Miss Russel? I'm sure your mother doesn't need you to show up to intimidate opponents.

ASPHODEL. I'm taking a break from work to help Mother with her campaign. I'm here to pick up the schedule for her next interview.

AXEL. I didn't think you'd be one to settle for being a gopher.

ASPHODEL. What, me? I'm no political genius. I'm merely here to lighten the load. What else would a simple violinist have to offer the team leading in the polls?

SORREN. You're not leading by all that much!

AXEL. Sorren.

SORREN. You're falling behind in rural areas across the board, as well as the general population of Island 8, and god knows about Island Sev-

AXEL. Sorren!

(Deep breath) Let's not give advice to our opponents, shall we?

ASPHODEL. *(smiling)* Hm. Well! This has been a nice little reunion, but alas my duties lie elsewhere. My mother has a campaign to win.

AXEL. *(passive aggressive)* We're very busy as well, I couldn't stay to talk even if I wanted to.

ASPHODEL. I don't expect you to.

AXEL. *(final)* Good to see you Asphodel. Good luck to you and yours.

ASPHODEL. Aw, thanks!

[HEELS CLICK AS SHE WALKS AWAY. THERE IS A MOMENT OF SILENCE AS AXEL WATCHES HER GO.]

SORREN. You... good?

AXEL. Peachy. What were you saying about local problems?

SORREN. Ah! *(launching into another ramble)* Well, there was this incident with a car, running into somebody on the street..

[THEIR VOICES FADE AS THEY WALK AWAY.]

[TRANSITION]

INT. STATION ARCADIA

KASS. Welcome back listeners, let's carry on.

KASS. Around noon, Ash set up a "back soon" sign at their stall and took a break to eat lunch Leah made for them that morning. The day was getting quite warm so they found a nice shaded spot and sat down to eat. As they were unwrapping their sandwich, they realized a person was standing next to them. Ash looked up to see the man from the stall next to theirs. He introduced himself as Miles Cardinal and asked whether they minded if he sat next to them. Ash nodded, he sat down and the two began chatting as they ate. It was primarily small talk about the art show. Miles mentioned that he quite liked Ash's art and Ash returned the compliment genuinely.

After a bit, the conversation turned more towards their personal lives. Ash learned that Miles had grown up on island five and had moved to island two for college. Ash brought up their queerplatonic partner and he mentioned his husbands. Miles also said that he had been participating in various art shows and auctions across the islands for over seven years. When Ash mentioned this was their first one, he smiled and said that they were doing much better than he'd done at his first art show. That made them feel a bit better about how many more commissions Miles had been getting.

Once they were done eating, the two went back to their respective booths. The sun was now almost directly overhead and the tarp ceiling did little to stave off the heat. Fewer people were perusing the stalls now, as many had found somewhere cooler to weather the midday heat. Ash silently cursed themselves for not thinking ahead and wearing cooler clothes. Looking over at Miles's stall, they saw that he had had the forethought to bring a portable fan with him and had dragged it over to his chair. The feeling of being incompetent crept back over them. The heat was starting to give them a headache.

The headache, the heat, the lack of forethought, all these little things that should have been fine on their own started to build up. Things that hadn't bothered that much Ash before, such as their comparatively low number of potential commissions, were now bothering them and just adding on to their mood. They felt tired and agitated and above all, anxious. They had put so many expectations on this art show and now all of them were falling apart.

Ash was so caught up in their fretting that they barely registered Miles jogging the roughly ten feet from his booth over to theirs until he was almost directly outside of their stall, holding a water bottle and a handheld fan and smiling. He remarked that it was practically sweltering and that Ash looked like they needed to cool off a bit, before offering them the fan and the water. They accepted, and thanked him for helping out. After a brief chat and several more thank-yous from Ash, Miles returned to his booth, leaving Ash feeling much better. The headache had eased and although the fan wasn't particularly strong, it was significantly better than having nothing at all. With a cooler head, they reflected some more and realized that business had been slow for Miles too this afternoon, not just Ash, so they really weren't doing as badly as they'd deceived themselves into thinking.

Miles checked on Ash several times over the course of the afternoon and they even visited his booth once. The two had become good friends and Ash was quite thoroughly enjoying themselves by the time the art show began to wrap up. By around five it had cooled off significantly and clouds were starting to roll in. Around half an hour before closing, Leah called Ash and informed them that, once the show was done for the day, she was going to pick them up and take them out for dinner to celebrate their accomplishment. They accepted excitedly and the last hour passed in a pleasant blur.

As the last few patrons trickled out and the artists began to pack up for the day, it started to rain. At first it was just a drizzle, but as Ash packed up their last piece it began to pour. They saw that Miles hadn't left yet and went over to go chat with him until Leah arrived.

Ash stood when they saw Leah approaching, and was grateful that she had brought them an umbrella. As Ash hurried over to her, doing their best

not to get completely soaked, they waved goodbye to Miles and promised to talk to him tomorrow. Maybe the art show hadn't quite been what Ash had expected, but they'd had a nice time and made a new friend, and Ash figured that was good enough.

KASS. Well, that was a nice one. I'm starting to see why Lyssel wants to live on those islands.

[A phone rings]

KASS. *(Excited, a bit surprised)* Oh! Marvin is calling!

[They pick up the phone]

KASS. Hello Marvin!

MARVIN. *(Warmly)* Hello Kass. How are you doing?

KASS. I'm--I'm doing well, it's great to hear from you. How are you?

MARVIN. Oh, I'm alright. Been weathering a few storms but nothin' too dire. If ya like, I could do a bit of a weather report for the broadcast.

KASS. That'd be wonderful! I mean, only if you've got the time.

MARVIN. Course, Kass, I've always got time for you.

KASS. Start whenever you're ready.

MARVIN. Thank you. *(clears throat)* I am currently out in northern Clercourt in the town of Moran and I am stood exactly where a storm was taking place just a few short hours ago. Moran had a large regiment of troops holed up there, but strong winds blew in from the east in Westerfield, carrying a dry thunderstorm with them. The Clercourt soldiers were not prepared to stand up to the elements.

There were significant casualties, as well as many civilian deaths. A small fire created by lightning was fanned hotter by the winds, and smoke billowed across the plains like gas. That's what really gets ya, y'know. You couldn't hear much over the roaring gales, but among the

shouts of troops calling for gas masks there were reports of the term "Phlegethon."

The storm itself was brief, all things considered. With burning lungs, the soldiers fought back against the tempest. Eventually, the winds died down, and the Moran soldiers with them. Westerfield generals must be very happy that the smoke was so effective against their enemies.

The civilians who are left have banded together to clean up the town and repair any damage. It's been a while since Moran saw a storm, but they seem to be doing a remarkably good job of recovering. Things in The Empire may be turbulent, but remember that every cloud has a silver lining.

KASS. Thank you, Marvin.

MARVIN. Anytime, kid. I'll let you finish your broadcast now.

KASS. I'm almost done here, I've just got to do my sign off. Why don't you stay on the line and we can chat afterwards?

MARVIN. Sounds good.

KASS. Alright then. Remember listeners, stay safe, stay moving, and stick close. You've been listening to Station Arcadia.

[THEME MUSIC PLAYS]

C.V.V.M. Station Arcadia is a podcast by Metal Steve Productions, and licensed under a creative commons attribution noncommercial share-alike 4.0 international license. It is produced by Eliana Esdi and C.V.V.M., and directed by Tovah Brantner. It is edited by Eliana Esdi and J. R. Steele, with soundscaping by Becker Hoang and music by Theo Goodwin. Today's episode was written by Logan-Alexis H, with scenes by Tovah Brantner and J.R. Steele. It featured Jade Virginia as Kass, Dylan Ramdin as Marvin, Rachel Cameron as Axel, Aakash S as Sorren, and Tovah Brantner as Asphodel.

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Unfortunately. Day backwards is week the of day the.