

Welcome anyone! This is one of our unfinished episodes. The script is mostly unrevised, so any grammar check/sensitivity reading will have come after. You may see some highlighted parts, which are usually notes to check accuracy or pronunciation notes for our cast. Here, you get to see our writer's stream of thought, so please be kind and remember that what you see in the final product is never a first draft! With that, please enjoy!

EPISODE 26 - POLLYANNA

KASS. Welcome, anyone. You're listening to Station Arcadia.

[THEME PLAYS]

It's been a while but we've got another guest here on Arcadia. How about you introduce yourself?

RYAN. Ryan McCarthy. Surri soldier.

KASS. You gave us a little bit of a fright when you showed up. It's been awhile since we've had someone wash up without even a boat. You must have been swept away in the tide.

RYAN. Yea, I guess you could say that. You've all been very... accommodating, letting me recuperate here for the past few days.

KASS. Of course. Now, you showed a little hesitation about coming on the show, if you're really that concerned about being here you can leave if you want.

RYAN. I don't know. I'm not exactly anyone important, you know?

KASS. Arcadia still knows that you've got a story to tell though. Think about it. It might not be immediately obvious.

RYAN. What kind of stories does she want?

KASS. Hm. Can you answer that, Arcadia?

[STATION COMMUNICATION NOISES]

Something that you think someone needs to hear.

RYAN. Someone?

KASS. Yea. Maybe a group of people, maybe just one.

RYAN. Okay. I think I might have something. It happened a few months ago, but I guess it goes back a bit further than that. I had this friend in Perrimon where I grew up. Safiyah [LAST NAME]. We had a birthday in the same month, which meant that we would be going to service during the same drafting date which was kind of nice. Some people don't mind making friends with people a few years younger or older than them, but others are a bit more leery of it because there's all this free time you have to just think about what might've happened to them. Me and Safiyah didn't have that problem.

When we were conscripted I was put into the domestic infantry around the areas that hadn't seen a whole lot of action for a few years. It was mostly guard duty type stuff, security and all that. Safiyah also went into the ground forces, but she was sent to an enemy country. I don't specify, because I think she went to a few different ones. We reconvened in Perrimon after our time was up. But Safiyah came back different.

I mean, most people come back *some* kind of different. But Safiyah hadn't stopped smiling since she came back to the city. I had another friend, Brana, whose grandmother had been in this constant dream world since her conscription. Kept forgetting that the rest of her platoon had been killed and tried to invite them over for cards every week. But Safiyah was fully lucid. She'd talk me up about recent developments in the war or goings-on around town. I just... couldn't figure out what was up with her.

She kept a little garden of herbs in the windowsill of her apartment. Rosemary, thyme, maybe some basil? She had to use some of the water from her rations just to keep them alive. They were withered and kind of pathetic, but better than some of the other botany projects I'd seen in the city. Anything is better than nothing, she said. Anything to make our rations taste a little better. I didn't really get it, it was too much effort for not enough of a reward. I wouldn't have sacrificed that much water just to make some bland food a little more flavorful.

KASS. Did it work?

RYAN. Huh?

KASS. Did the food taste better?

RYAN. I mean, I guess. It made it taste like something. I thought she'd really lost it when she started giving some of her rations to this soup kitchen that popped up in town. She didn't even know those people, but she had to take care of herself. All of this was just piling up. I was getting really worried. I'm sure you've heard about this, being at this weird liminal radio station and all, but everyone in the Empire carries a weapon and it isn't just to look flashy. You have to be ready for when someone else pulls out theirs.

So I asked Safiyah what was going on. Why she was giving up so much for people that she didn't even know and could just as easily be taking advantage of her when she was already struggling. And she just... smiled and told me that if she can believe that something good exists anywhere, she can believe that it's in these people.

I didn't know what to say to that. I mean, what are you supposed to? I just left it alone for the time being. Tried to keep an eye on her as she gave away half of her food and emptied her wallet of spare Stelos to any beggar she saw on the street.

KASS. She sounds very kind.

RYAN. Yea, well...

Yea. She was.

It all came to a head when I was over for dinner one night, because of *course* she invited me to dinner at least three times a week. I don't even remember most of the beginning. At some point Safiyah excused herself, and after she'd left I realized we'd run out of whiskey. I thought she wouldn't mind if I got some more, especially to share.

So I went down to her cellar. Safiyah had one of those houses on the outskirts, next to the wall. They're bigger, but cheaper because of the risk.

KASS. Risk?

RYAN. (*Duh:*) Well, yea, they're next to the wall.

KASS. I'm sorry, I'm not sure that I follow.

RYAN. (*Realizing Kass hasn't grown up in a war zone:*) Oh. Um, well, that's where the enemy would first breach, and they're the furthest away from the bomb shelters in the middle of town. I mean, most folks have a bomb shelter on the street but they aren't well stocked. Or protected.

KASS. Ah.

RYAN. I went down to the cellar and started to rifle around. It seems like business as usual but then... I heard something.

Now, I need you to know I'm not like those other soldiers. Lots of people hear sounds that aren't there when they come back, especially when they're not around a lot of people. But I'm not *like that*, I'm not all skittery. So when I heard that tiny scraping sound I *knew* it was there.

I defaulted to training. I pulled out my pistol and started scanning the room. It was all these shelves filled with boxes, but I didn't find anything between them. I was going to give up until I saw the plates of food on this table pushed into the

corner. Bread. Fresh. Or, at least as close to fresh as you could get here. And it was right next to this big chest.

... I don't need to dramatize this next part. I found two women in there, barely able to fit inside with the two of them. It was already suspicious they were hiding like that, but one of them had tied her hair back with this... colorful bandana. Bremish design, we'd been trained to recognize certain patterns like that on the field to identify opposing soldiers. Either way, these were not citizens of Surragen.

I almost pulled the trigger. I was going to, I'd just found enemy spies hiding in my friend's home and then I heard Safiyah calling me from the top of the stairs. She had her rifle at her hip, but it wasn't pointed at me. And she was smiling.

"Why don't we have a conversation upstairs, where there's better lighting," she said.

Next thing I knew I was sitting at the dinner table with a mug of tea. It was weirdly savory. She told me that they were refugees. A Westerfieldian deserter with her partner that she'd smuggled down from down south. There was a smuggling ring of sorts being run out the docks to the Gannon Islands, and she said she was just giving them shelter until arrangements for their transport could be made.

I asked her why she didn't shoot me in the cellar. I could easily go to the town marshals and turn all of them in. It was my duty as a loyal citizen of the country.

She smiled at me, in the way that accentuated the lines at the corners of her eyes. She said "You're a good person, Ryan. I don't think you'd do that if I asked you not to."

KASS. That sounds... like a difficult situation. She put a lot of trust in you.

RYAN. I don't know why. I didn't tell anyone, but honestly... It was kind of because I was afraid it might be traced back to me somehow. I mean, I spent all that time with Safiyah, and all

those dinners, I wouldn't be surprised if someone got suspicious of how I didn't notice. She didn't say it, but from the way she talked it sounded like these weren't the first refugees Safiyah had hidden.

And that got me thinking about how I *hadn't* noticed it. Should I have caught on earlier? Maybe then I could have talked her out of it, gotten her to see reason or at least the insane amount of risk she was taking onto herself.

Weeks passed and I won't lie, there were a few times I really, *really* thought about turning her in. But each time I thought about her standing at the top of the stairs and I couldn't do it.

[SHAKY BREATH]

I remember the day I saw a bunch of soldiers dragging Safiyah out of her apartment building better than any of my days in service. I was heading over to drop off her rations because I'd already picked up mine. She was struggling against them, but when she saw me she started fighting and screaming at me. Calling me a coward. When they got close enough, she spit in my face before the soldiers could yank her away.

I... I remember one of the other soldiers, one not handling Safiyah, walked up to me and told me not to worry about what she said. I had no idea what they were talking about and they must have picked up at least a little bit of my confusion because they said...

I can still hear what they said to me. "Anyone a traitor like that calls a coward is nothing short of a [WORD] to the country."

And it hit me when they said that. I've been hit by a bullet a few times and I think it felt a lot like that. I realized that Safiyah did all of that to keep suspicion off of me because I had been just staring at the scene like an *idiot*.

She was protecting me. In the last moment that she was going to see me she pretended to hate me just so that I wouldn't be lumped in with her.

[BEAT]

I don't know what happened to her. I mean, I *know* but I don't... I don't know what they did. I don't know what happened to the women she was hiding. They were probably taken away too.

Life went on after that. There was frustratingly little change aside from the holes in my days that I would deliver Safiyah's rations or spend the evening. It felt like a robbery. The world should have collapsed in on itself, there should have been people in the streets screaming about the injustice. But there weren't. Because Safiyah was the one who had done something wrong but the only *crime* she had committed was showing kindness to people, and the world hated her for that.

[HEAVY SILENCE]

KASS. The world didn't hate her, Ryan.

RYAN. It sure seems like it.

KASS. Safiyah is part of the world too, isn't she? She's here just as much as anyone else.

RYAN. At the beginning of all this, you told me to tell a story I thought people needed to hear. That's it. I only wish that Safiyah could have been here to say it in her own words instead of people having to hear it from me.

KASS. I think that she'd be proud of you.

RYAN. I hope so. I should get back home. There's a few things that I want to do in her memory.

KASS. Of course. To everyone listening from wherever you are; stay safe, stay moving, and stick close. You've been listening to Station Arcadia.

Notes:

- From the perspective of a humanitarian's friend
 - Safiya and Ryan
- He doesn't understand why she's helping refugees and donating food n stuff
- At the end she's arrested by the military and he realizes that the only crime she committed was being nice to people