

Uprooted

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OLSM STREETS - DAY - TOP RING

In the fictional world of Asagea, it is graduation day at the Olsm Regime, the nation's world renowned military. Species of all kinds - humans, elves, gnomes, dragonborn, and more roam the streets of the Upper Ring, where well-off residents reside. White silk coincides with blue and purple belts.

YOUNGER ABEL, a frail elven man dressed in silk robes and a purple belt, stands up straight and beckons passersby near his tent. Dirt is kicked up along the gravel streets as he speaks.

YOUNGER ABEL

Come on up! Portraits of this
year's graduates! Only 30 gold
today!

YOUNG ASH, half-elven and dressed in similar attire with a blue belt, goes and recruits more people from a distance. She is wearing several necklaces, one of which she holds up as she makes her speech.

YOUNG ASH

C'mon! You know you want a portrait
as a keepsake! You can get a
necklace any ol' year, but
portraits of the graduating class
only come along once! First come,
first served!

MONTAGE

As Ash gets older, she starts going with her friends rather than her parents. They mess with other children by means of food fights, Ash's friends make flirtatious advances that do not work, and other shenanigans. All are of either the Upper or Middle Rings, with the Middle Ring residents wearing cotton robes as opposed to silk.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

It's finally ASH's graduation day! She's difficult to find in a large pool of other hopefuls.

Row by row, each group of students is called up to receive their diploma. Ash's nervous excitement has dipped down to dozing off by the time they get to her row.

GRADUATING STUDENT #1

Hey, get up! It's almost our turn.

Ash goes on to shake hands with MERRICK, a big Goliath of a man with a stern handshake and cold demeanor. As she receives her purple belt, Merrick clenches her hand longer than is necessary, not letting go even as Ash tries to pull away.

MERRICK

Congratulations.

Merrick finally lets go of Ash's hand. The rest of the students get their turn before Merrick makes his speech.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

You have achieved somethin' that
lots of children can only dream of.
You're the backbone of this nation.

The new graduates look around at one another in pride. Some are trying to find their parents. In the stands, some cut outs of students faces can be seen. Gnomes need to stand on chairs, but are still too short to make anything out.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

So act like it!

Everyone stops what they are doing and looks at Merrick. Dead air hangs. Merrick takes a breath and composes himself.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

You've done plenty of mock
missions, but this is no game.

Ash and the other students acknowledge bruises and cuts from their final fights as students here.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Outside, you'll see a list of
missions. You've been divvied up
into groups based on the scores you
got on your final tests. Now go.

Both students and parents alike stampede out of the auditorium.

EXT. FRONT YARD OUTSIDE AUDITORIUM

There are already students fighting for a spot to see where they have been placed. Various students can be heard complaining and wanting to trade, but Merrick will not allow it.

Finally, Ash gets to see her mission: "Peaceful Parade."

ASH
(reading to herself)
"Keep peace at the parade which
honors the Battle of Olsm." Sounds
easy enough.

A gnomish girl walks up next to Ash, hopping up to try to
read the board

GRADUATING STUDENT #2
Oh, careful! I heard that since
this year's the 20th anniversary,
they have something special
planned.

ASH
Like what?

Graduating Student #2 leaps onto the nearby table, getting
herself to higher ground.

GRADUATING STUDENT #2
Dunno. Heard rumors that Merrick's
the one planning it though.

ASH
Gods, I wouldn't be surprised if
something went wrong on purpose
then!

The pair laugh and go on their separate ways.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT - UPPER RING

AMBER, human, tries to give Ash a piggyback ride since her
feet are swollen. The cobblestone pathway makes it a bit
difficult to traverse, and Amber almost loses her balance. A
light giggle takes them both.

ASH
Mom, c'mon. I'm not a kid anymore!
I can make it on my own, y'know.

AMBER
I know, Little One. That's why I
want to cherish every moment like
this I can get with you. There
won't be many more, now that you're
officially a graduate!

Ash accepts the piggyback ride without further complaint. The paintbrush clattering among the cup full of water catches Ash's ears.

ASH
What's that?

AMBER
You'll see in a minute. For now,
let's get you in a bath.

INT. MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Their mansion is spacious. The place would echo, if most of the walls didn't have cushions, picture frames, etc. To reduce reverb. Everything keeps with the color scheme of war heroes of Olsm - purple ribbons decorate the pillars that uphold the second and third floors.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The bathroom is large enough to be a sauna. She sets Ash down on a chair and starts the water, her hand underneath the stream.

ASH
Mom?

AMBER
Yes?

ASH
What made you want to go to the
Regime? It wasn't money, right?

AMBER
No, nothing like that. I grew up in
the Middle Ring. Your grandpa was
an assistant to your dad's dad, if
you can believe it! Ha, I never
even knew about him until much
later. I joined the Regime because
I saw what my dad was doing and
wanted to be just like him.

Amber takes her hand out of the water and darts a playful glance toward Ash.

AMBER (CONT'D)
Sound familiar?

Ash smiles to herself, allowing a small giggle to escape.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Anyway, be sure to let me know when you're done. We have a surprise for you!

Ash and Amber high five as Amber exits.

Ash takes off her first robe, revealing her shoulders. She flexes them, trying to make them more broad. She examines the rest of her body in a similar way.

INT. MANSION HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT

Ash comes out of the bathroom to a portrait of herself in her graduation attire. The bottom of the portrait acts as a paperweight for a note.

ABEL VO

Great work today, kiddo! So proud of you!

Ash smiles to herself before heading to bed.

INT. MANSION - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Today is the day of the Parade of the Battle of Olsm. The sky is still dark as Ash finishes getting ready. She sees a note from Amber:

AMBER

We'll meet you there later. Good luck, and stay safe!

EXT. OLSM STREETS - MORNING - UPPER RING

Ash and the rest of her platoon march along the cobblestone streets, keeping a safe parameter along the floats and pushing back the occasional overexcited child or particularly drunk pedestrian.

A human man, late 20's, silently holds up a sign that says, "My father died for this?" A wave of civilians, young and old, break through the line of Olsm Regime graduates. They begin tearing down numerous floats.

Ash pulls the man with the sign away from the floats.

MAN WITH SIGN

No, get away from me! Haven't you done enough?!

RIOTING WOMAN

You've taken everything from us,
you monsters!

The rioters throw sticks, stones, and other debris at the O.
R. members.

AMBER

Enough of this! Please, stop!

Amber tries to pull one of the rioters away from Ash.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Abel, help!

ABEL

Right!

Abel takes out a few of the rioters before being trampled on.

POV OF AMBER

One of the rioters takes a stone and bashes it against Amber. Everything is spinning and blurry. Her hand comes away from her head soaked in red. We are vaguely able to hear both Abel and Ash scream and cry. Amber looks up just in time to see the man with the sign pummel her one final time - her vision goes black.

END OF POV

Abel goes into a blind rage at the sight of his wife's body. He swings his fists indiscriminately. Merrick comes along and takes him away. No matter how far off the pair go, Abel's wailing can still be heard, the cobblestone streets becoming soaked with blood.

INT. INFIRMARY - NIGHT - UPPER RING

Ash clutches her ribs, limping over to a nearby hospital bed. GENEVA, Tiefling, positions Ash's pillows so that she may sit upright. Each bed is full, both graduates and pedestrians take over the beds. People from all three Rings are represented.

Geneva hands Ash a letter with a wax seal - that of the Olsm Regime. Geneva's voice remains soothing.

GENEVA

Easy, now. It's nothing to
celebrate. This is something that
your mother wanted you to have, but
only when you're ready.

ASH

Geneva... You know about my mother already?

GENEVA

Of course. You know we both went through the Regime together, right? I know losing your mom isn't easy. If you need anything at all, just ask.

ASH

It doesn't feel real.

Geneva finishes testing Ash's vitals and gets ready to leave.

ASH (CONT'D)

It's not fair. None of this is fair! This is all wrong! I was supposed to go on to be a great fighter like Mom and Dad.

Other occupants of the infirmary shuffle around - Ash's angry yelling goes back to a whisper.

GENEVA

Do you want to stay with the Regime?

ASH

It's not like I have any kind of backup plan.

GENEVA

Neither did I, until I needed to make one.

Geneva shows a scar on her ankle.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Messed me up pretty bad. Could never fight again, the doctors said. So, I needed to find another way to make myself useful.

Ash tries to sit up, hurting herself. Geneva settles Ash back down.

GENEVA (CONT'D)

Trust me, you're not out of options. The world is full of infinite possibilities.

ASH

I can't make a plan right now.

GENEVA

You don't need to, Ash. All you can do is take it one breath at a time.

ASH

Geneva... Do you know when I'll start feeling better?

GENEVA

Physically, you should be back to normal in about a week. Emotionally and mentally... That's up to you, and the people you surround yourself with.

ASH

What does anyone else have to do with this?

Geneva takes a syringe out of her bag.

GENEVA

People are a lot like syringes. Some are like water. We need them on a day to day basis in order to be okay. Others are like poison. They sap you of everything you have, with no consideration of how you feel. What I'm trying to say is... be careful.

Ash nods, trying to reposition the pillows to go to sleep. Sleep finds her quickly, still clutching the letter.

EXT. COTTAGE - EARLY MORNING - BOTTOM RING

Boxes of both Ash and Abel's possessions fill up a small, unfamiliar cottage from top to bottom. Abel helps her up the gravel pathway, taking small, sheepish steps. His speech is slurred, and his Upper Ring clothes look torn and stained with ale.

ABEL

Welcome home.

ASH

Wait, what?!

ABEL
I couldn't stay there, in that mansion.

ASH
And you never thought, 'huh, maybe I should tell Ash about this?!'

ABEL
It's not that I didn't want to tell you, but I knew you'd be upset.

ASH
Soooo, your solution was to keep it a secret or something?

ABEL
Look, just get inside, okay?

ASH
And do what?! Our stuff can't even fit in there.

Abel darts a death glare at Ash.

ABEL
This is hard on me, too. Get inside. Now.

FLASHBACK

Amber carries Ash up the cobblestone pathway to their mansion.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. COTTAGE - LOWER RING - MORNING - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

Ash is in much less pain compared to the last time we saw her. Still, she wears a semi-permanent look of disgust. Pieces of papyrus are strewn about the place, as are bottles of ale.

Ash finds Abel passed out on the floor, amidst his paintings of Amber. She moves closer when she hears him drunkenly mumbling. The speech is slurred.

ABEL
She wasn't always like this. She was always driven by her strict values of "right" and "wrong".
(MORE)

ABEL (CONT'D)

Anyone who wasn't, wasn't someone she cared about. She spent a lot of time with Geneva and Merrick.

FLASHBACK

INT. OLSM REGIME HALLS - DAY

A young Amber and Geneva are seen walking the halls of the O. R. They eventually meet up with a young Merrick, looking eager. As soon as he sees Amber, Merrick's eyes soften and smile.

INT. OLSM REGIME AUDITORIUM - LATER

Abel, a guest speaker, is quite articulate and animated when talking about close calls in battle. Amber becomes increasingly enthralled - Merrick rolls his eyes and tries to find solace in Geneva, but she too is tuning in.

Amber walks up to Abel who hangs out once his speech is done. Geneva trails behind.

AMBER

You're such a good speaker! I never hear anything like that in this tiny little town.

Abel relaxes - he has done a similar routine to many different women.

ABEL

Well, maybe one day you and I can get out and see the world together. Why don't we start with this little town here?

AMBER

Sounds great! I'll take you to my favorite place to eat.

ABEL

Why don't you and I have a picnic, instead? Away from a bunch of people, where I can get to know you better?

GENEVA

(mutters to Amber)

Hang on. You barely know this guy!

AMBER
So? When's the last time you came
across a war hero?

GENEVA
Alright, don't say I didn't warn
you.

AMBER
Ever-cautious as usual, Geneva. I
can take care of myself, y'know!

Geneva darts a death glare at Abel.

GENEVA
You hurt her, you'll never hear the
end of it.

Abel sarcastically sits up straighter and salutes Geneva.

ABEL
Aye aye, ma'am.

Amber giggles, completely beside herself and absolutely
smitten.

END OF FLASHBACK

ASH
I'm not sure I can do this anymore,
either.

Abel lays there, unmoving for a moment.

ABEL
Why did you join the Olsm Regime?

ASH
I admired how the people there
always did so many good things.
Bring food to poor villages, stuff
like that.

ABEL
Do you still want that?

ASH
I do want to help people...

ABEL
Good.

Abel pushes away one of his sketches as he tries to sit up.

ABEL (CONT'D)

Oh...

Abel gives Ash the envelope with the wax seal on it.

ABEL (CONT'D)

Open that, will ya?

ASH

How do you know about that?

Abel rolls over to face Ash.

ABEL

Word gets around quickly here.

As Ash prepares for bed, Abel lays on the floor just a while longer. When it sounds as if Ash had settled down, Abel goes through and clears the cottage of any remaining ale.

Abel proceeds to take out his own Olsm Regime uniform from an old chest of personal belongings - frayed around the edges now, the blacks have faded to grays, some small splotches of blood still visible, and too wrinkled to be worn as it is.

Also within the chest is a sketch that Abel did as Amber was pregnant - he folds the sketch and holds it close to his heart.

EXT. FRONT YARD OUTSIDE AUDITORIUM - EARLY MORNING

Ash is skimming the mission board.

GENEVA O. S.

Looking for this?

Geneva is holding a papyrus scroll alongside a letter detailing a mission. Ash gives it a closer look.

ASH

Requester: Abel? My dad?

GENEVA

Keep reading.

ASH

"Take this letter across town and ensure both its safety and the contents within it."

Ash looks front and back of the request sheet.

ASH (CONT'D)
No address?

GENEVA
There's only one place your father
wouldn't dare set foot near.

Both Ash and Geneva subconsciously look toward Merrick,
standing near the entrance of the auditorium. He glares back
with a chilling intensity.

ASH
Great. I also have to manage to not
be frozen in place the minute he
looks at me.

GENEVA
Good luck, seems like you'll need
it.

EXT. OLSM STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Ash roams the Olsm streets, address in one hand, piece of
papyrus in the other. Ash is trying to imitate Geneva's
voice, her armor clanking and clattering the whole way.

ASH
Oh yeah, "good luck! You'll need
it!" Even finding this place is a
mission by itself, much less
tolerating the guy.

EXT. MERRICK'S SHED - AFTERNOON - UPPER RING

ASH
The guy's giant... There's no way
this can be his place.

INT. MERRICK'S SHED - MOMENTS LATER

ASH
Hello? Merrick?

She tiptoes, holding her breath. Suddenly, she hears a loud
crash. It's Merrick, who has hit his head in his shamefully
small hut.

MERRICK
What?

ASH

My father wanted me to give this to you.

Ash hands the scroll over to Merrick, his ever-present scowl deepening. Ash turns her back to leave as quickly as possible.

MERRICK

Wait.

Ash stops in her tracks, still not facing him. When she opens her eyes, she sees a crudely drawn picture of Merrick and Amber together, and another man's face with an X drawn across it.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

You're s'posed to be here when I read it, she said.

Ash turns back toward Merrick.

ASH

Oh... Great.

Merrick looks sheepishly away, mumbling.

MERRICK

Uh... Reading's not my best.

An awkward silence hangs before Ash finally speaks up.

ASH

Wait. You can't read?! How did you even graduate from the Regime?

MERRICK

Oh, like you're so much better! You can't beat me in a brawling match to save your life! Anyway... Amber read the questions to me. It's how we met. But enough about that.

Merrick tosses the scroll to Ash.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Read it.

Ash takes a breath to calm herself before undoing the scroll.

ASH

"If you're reading this, it seems I have met my end. Please, don't cry.

MONTAGE

AMBER VO

I have lived a happy and healthy life. I just hope I have raised my family well enough to give them enough tools to keep on moving. To my Abel...

INT. COTTAGE - LOWER RING - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

Abel is taking his belongings out of a box, alone in the dark, save the daylight peaking through the broken windows and leaking ceiling.

AMBER VO

...You know that I love you with all my heart, just as I always have, and I always will. To Geneva...

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Geneva is reapplying a bandage around the arm of someone who has been hurt.

AMBER VO

...I really couldn't have asked for a better friend. You were there for me through thick and thin, and no words could express how much you mean to me. To Marrick...

END OF MONTAGE

INT. MERRICK'S SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Merrick flinches before Ash continues to read.

ASH AND AMBER VO

I love you, too. Even if it wasn't in the way you wanted, I have always hoped that I could see a smile across your face.

(MORE)

ASH AND AMBER VO (CONT'D)

Please, promise to show my Little
One your smile a few times for me -
I know you're still in there, even
after all this time. To Ash...

Ash takes a deep breath and gulps.

ASH AND AMBER VO (CONT'D)

I need you to know how proud I am
of you. From here on out, I may not
be with you, but I know you'll be
fine, Little One. You've got the
smarts, the skill, and the
determination to see anything
through to the end. My final wish
is perhaps the most terrifying
mission of all: take care of each
other."

Ash rolls the scroll back up with a deep sigh. Merrick just
stares intently at nothing in particular.

ASH (CONT'D)

You're, y'know, massive and
terrifying, so I'm not sure there's
much I ca-

MERRICK

Get out.

ASH

What?

POV OF MERRICK

His vision is blurry, as if he'd been trying to hold back
tears. Once he blinks them away, he sees a bloody Amber where
Ash is standing.

END OF POV

MERRICK

I couldn't do anything for her, and
I don't intend on doing anything
for her, either.

FLASHBACK

GRADUATING STUDENT #2

I heard Merrick's the one planning
it this year!

END OF FLASHBACK

The pair tense, sizing each other up.

ASH
Answer me this, at least. Did you
plan the Parade this year?

MERRICK
What if I did?

ASH
There's no way that was on purpose.
Right?

MERRICK
(smirks)
The riot? It was s'posed to take
that worthless old man out. There's
no way I could follow through with
Amber's request.

Merrick makes it to where Ash is standing in only a couple of paces, and puts his massive hand right next to Ash's face.

MERRICK (CONT'D)
You wanna be next?

Ash takes Merrick by the neck and knees him in the stomach, then elbows him in the back of the head. She takes the opportunity to run without looking back.

EXT. MANSION - LATE SFTERNOON - UPPER RING

Ash takes a moment to catch her breath.

ASH
Here again. Old habits die hard, I
guess.

Familiar footsteps are heard. Ash faces toward the source.

MERRICK
If she can't be here, you shouldn't
be, either.

Merrick prepares himself for a fight, and Ash follows suit.

ASH
(to herself)
So much for "taking care of each
other." Sorry, Mom.
(MORE)

ASH (CONT'D)
(to Merrick)
Let's go.

FADE TO BLACK.