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WELCOME TO ASHLEY FALLS

[Crackle]

“(Heavy breathing) My name is Jane Em—“ [Crackle]
“and if you’re hearing this... please... I beg you... help us.
They brought us... here... but I, I... don’t know where
here is. They told us that they were—” [Section missing]
“...but they didn’t tell us why. Something about... I can’t
remember. It didn’t make any sense. They said that we
were chosen or something like that? They didn’t tell us
what that meant or what we were chosen for. They rarely
told us anything at all. We just... had to do what we were
told to. But... but it doesn’t make sense. Ph—“ [Crackle]
“did exactly what he was told to... but they just... they
just let him die. It was so awful! They didn’t even try to
help him. They had to have known what would
happen somehow. Those bastards! They damn sure knew!

They knew all of this was going to happen!!” [Pause] “Mom... for what its worth to you now... I’m so sorry. If I had known that it would have ever come to this, I... I would’ve... I... (Sobbing)... how could you do this to your own child, mother?”

[Section missing]

“We were brought here in blindfolds and handcuffs. They didn’t speak at all until we arrived. I remember being out on an airplane and then a bus of some kind before finally arriving... here. Everyone is so scared. Well, almost everyone. It seems like ages ago when I first met Alyssa. She was so strong and refused to break down and cry. She said it would only give them the satisfaction they wanted, but I couldn’t keep myself from falling apart. We were all terrified, but not her.” [Pause] “Alyssa was part of the second group from our cell that was sent in to this... this place. I don’t even know how to describe it other than it looks like something left over from some type of an—” [Section missing] “—ion. Despite how frightened I am, I can’t help but feel a sense of awe when I look at it. The architecture is like nothing I’ve ever seen. How could something like this exist un—” [Crackle] “I told Alyssa that, but she was always so focused on our escape that she didn’t care much about my theories. The rest of us never felt like we had a chance, but she refused to give up though.” [Pause] ”God, I miss her so much.” [Pause] “When they came for her... I think we all knew what was about to happen... and we lost all hope. Still... there was a part of me that believed she would come back. I refused to believe that anything could stop Alyssa. She

wasn't a soldier, but she was just... I don't know... *different* somehow than any of us. Phillip used to call her 'Bitch on Earth' because he thought that she was scarier than any kind of hell. (Laughs) And yet... she wound up disappearing too... like the rest." [Pause] "The sounds... oh my God... those awful sounds and that blinding blue glow?? What was that?? Please be alright, Alyssa... please be alright..."

[Section missing]

"I don't know how this is legal. I thought there were rights to prevent this type of treatment to human beings?? That's why I took this recorder. They would kill me if they knew I had it... but I don't care. Any day now it will be my turn to go in... and then I'll be dead anyway. Maybe that would be better than this. Whoever finds this... help us... [Crackle] They take new groups every night and then they never return. Wait... night? Maybe its day? I can't even tell anymore..." [Pause] "If they come for me soon, I just hope this tape is found some day. Someone has to know about this and stop it from ever happening again! If we can't be saved... then I hope our story can help to save the others like us. There's just so much that I don't know... or understand. I think that's what is scaring me the most. What is happening to the others when they send us into that... that thing? Listen... Can you hear those screams...? (Crying) ...are they real? I hear them inside my head all the time now. So much pain in those sounds..."

[Section missing]

“Shit! Here they come!! They’re outside the door... I need to—“ [Crackle] “Wait... no way!?! Is that really... you??” [Crackle] “Aly—“ [Crackle] “(Screaming)”

[Crackle]

[End]

I will never forget the day that I first heard that recording, or the events that led up to it. That message was recovered from a government issued tape recorder at the area formally known as Location 2208-C on October 16th, 1948. It’s hard to believe that was nearly two years ago now. I still remember it all like it was yesterday. So much has happened over the past three years and the world has not looked the same to me since. Nor do I suppose that it will ever look the same to me again. The unsuspecting people of this world were carrying on about their every day lives, completely clueless as to the dangers that had been lurking beneath them for centuries. A great battle was waged and many lives were lost. It was one of the most tragic events to ever happen in the history of humanity and the people of the world don’t even know the story... but they’re about to.

My name is Miller Brinkman and I am... well, I *was*... a private detective for the better part of my adult life. I hadn’t always wanted to be a private detective though. In fact, I tried my luck at the Sheriff’s station in hopes of a respectable career in organized law enforcement, but let’s just say that it turned out that I didn’t have the stomach for the job. Murder is a rare occurrence in a place like this,

but it does happen from time to time. No matter how much on the job training you receive, there is no way to prepare for the horrors that you will see. I had nothing but respect for the brave men who fought tirelessly to protect our community, but unfortunately it just wasn't meant to be for me. Never the less, I still had a special place in my heart for helping other people and I knew that I was meant to put it to good use somehow in this crazy world. I suppose you could say it was my calling, if you're the type of person who believes in that sort of thing. To me there was no greater feeling in the world that could compare to the sensation I got from helping others who couldn't otherwise help themselves. That was when I knew that I wanted to become a private investigator. My client base was limited to folks in need of help that was considered too petty or too insignificant for the Sheriff's boys to waste their time, but I didn't mind that at all. To me, there was no case too small or too insignificant to pursue. I investigated things like crooked business partners accused of taking a little extra off the top, or lowlife con men trying to scam honest folks out of a few extra bucks. I was even once called on to put a preacher under surveillance by a jealous wife who thought that her husband had been pursuing interests other than scripture outside of their home. I kept an eye on the preacher for about a week and was happy to report back to her and tell her that her suspicions were unfounded. As it turned out, the good wife did not allow even a drop of alcohol in the house and the preacher couldn't seem to exorcise his internal desire for the occa-

sional glass of wine in the evening from his life. That was about as exciting as things ever got around these parts.

Life in Ashley Falls was pretty quiet most of the time. It may even be considered dull by some standards, but it's a tightly knit community of mostly honest people that are just doing their best to get by. It's a small town where everyone pretty much knows everyone else, which isn't all that hard to do with a population of roughly 4,200 people. It's not the kind of place that people from the outside desire to move into and the people who are already here rarely have any interest in moving out. Most of the families that live here have been here for several generations. There's an inside joke about Ashley Falls that goes "stick around long enough and you're bound to have something named after you." Well, it's probably not all that funny of a joke, but I suppose that depends on your familiarity with Ashley Falls. Most everything here is named after one family or another. Either our town does it in an effort to pay respect to the highly regarded families that have made our community great, or they're just severely lacking in creativity.

Around these parts, most families are either farmers or shop owners. Visitors from the city come here to stock up on fresh produce or to purchase quality hand-made goods from the shops and then they're gone just as quickly as they came. It's the life and survival of a small town and we embrace it. People from here don't dream of growing up and becoming politicians or lawyers. Especially not since the war ended. People dream of preserving Ashley Falls

exactly how it is and living in a community of people that are just as much a family as their own parents.

Like most people who were born and raised in Ashley Falls, my story isn't really all that exciting either. My parents were born here, as were my grandparents, and their parents before them. Growing up as an only child, my parents tried to teach me the family trade out on the mill, but I always knew that life just wasn't meant for me. My parents were disappointed and that was very hard on me, but at the same time they were also very supportive of me finding my own way in life. They wanted me to be happy and to have free will. They recognized that the world was changing and that there was a whole new era of opportunity just on the horizon that did not exist for them when they were younger. I appreciated the sentiment, but the only trouble was that there wasn't much to do in Ashley Falls for employment besides work on the farm. For most, that was enough to be happy in life, but still, I wanted something greater. All of the ambition in the world couldn't help me to escape the limitations of small town life, but my parents continued to encourage me to pursue my dreams and to never give up hope. My mom thought that I was going to move to the city one day and become a famous writer or some nonsense like that. She even once referred to me as a genius while talking about me to some of her friends. She loved it when I would bring home my written stories from school because she thought they were so creative. She'd ask to read them immediately and when she was done, she'd pin them up on the kitchen wall so that she could read them again while preparing

supper. I never did envision myself as a writer, though I did win an award in school once for my report on Ashley Carroll, but I'm not trying to boast. Years later, after my folks had passed, I pretty much gave up on writing all together, but I never forgot what they had taught me about finding my own way in this life. I owed them that. It wasn't long afterwards that I took up an interest in law enforcement, which then eventually led to me opening up shop downtown. The day that I officially had opened my very own practice was the proudest day of my life. That was definitely a good day and to think about it now reminds me of a very happy time of my life. I suppose some might say it was a bit of a hole in the wall, but it was quaint and I liked it just fine. I certainly hadn't gone into business for the bells and whistles.

Working downtown took a lot of getting used to for me. Since I essentially grew up on the mill, I didn't have many occasions to go downtown as a kid. Once in a while, dad would let me go to the bank with him, or mom would take me shopping for new school clothes when I grew out of the old ones, but we mostly kept to our side of town. When I was a child, I remember how much smaller the downtown area was. Our little town has certainly done some growing over the years. Ashley Falls sits on a sprawling piece of land, but much of it goes unused and the actual town itself only consists of three main parts. You've got the farm lands which run along the river, then the residential area where most people live, and finally the sizeable unpaved downtown area which houses the shops, the diner, the church, the bank, the bar and

other things of the like. Outside of these areas is a vast wooded area that encircles the town. It was a strategic location for the American patriots during the Revolutionary War because the woods helped to fortify their hideouts.

On the outskirts of town is a place called Sunset Hill, which is a popular spot for the younger people. I recall spending a lot of time there in my youth as well. It's located near a sheer cliff where the river that runs through town drops off into a waterfall and connects to a sister river at the bottom many feet below. Because of its elevation, it does provide a beautiful view of the sky and the world below it. It faces the setting sun at dusk, which is as gorgeous as anything you could ever put on a postcard, and obviously is how it gets its name. I had once asked the Mayor if the name Sunset Hill had been chosen because they'd finally run out of family names, but all that seemed to do was illicit a dirty look. I've never been able to prove it, but I feel confident that my votes haven't been counted during an election ever since. It is a great name though and at least it was awarded its name because of something pleasant that makes people feel good, unlike our town.

As the story goes, back during the time of the Revolutionary War, there was a family settled out here amidst the beauty and marvel of the lands. They were the first family to ever call this place home as best anyone can tell. Because of the secluded nature of the area, it was a popular piece of land for those opposing the British to seek shelter and plan their next move. One night, British soldiers were in the area chasing after an escaped Amer-

ican patriot who had caused quite a raucous. The soldiers found the home of the Carroll family and were convinced that the patriot must be seeking refuge inside. They stormed the front door and questioned the frightened family, but no answer they could give was deemed acceptable to the soldiers. The Carroll's were accused of harboring a fugitive and told that they would face certain death if they continued to defy the crown. Just then, a pale child with curly red hair made her way down the staircase with her favorite doll clutched by its arm in her right hand. Seeing an opportunity, one of the soldiers grabbed the child violently and demanded that they give up the fugitive or the child would suffer as punishment. The Carroll's pleaded with the soldiers and maintained that they knew nothing of a fugitive and that they were just ordinary farmers.

Angered and frustrated, the soldiers finally lost their patience and bound the family at the wrists then marched them through the woods and to a clearing where they spotted the cliffs. They forced the man and his wife to their knees and told them they had just one last chance to surrender the fugitive. Sobbing uncontrollably and still without an answer, they could only plead for the mercy of the British soldiers. In a fit of rage, one of the soldiers grabbed the little girl and lifted her up on to his shoulder. He then walked over to the edge, and dropped the petrified girl over the waterfall to her death. Stricken with immense sadness and rage, the man got to his feet and charged at the soldier in front of him. With two shots from his pistol, the other soldier downed the man before

he could reach his target. The two men then cut the woman loose and instructed her that she was to live and tell the story of what happens to those who oppose Britain. The woman wrote down her horrific story in a journal and left it out on a table in the front room of her home before taking her own life with a blade from the kitchen. In the journal, she mentioned wanting to find the afterlife so that she might seek the forgiveness of her darling Ashley. When discovered by colonists looking to establish a township years later after the war the ended, the settlers decided to name their new home Ashley Falls to honor the memory of the poor child spoken of in the sad tale left behind. The Carroll's home, now treated as a historical monument by the town's leaders, still stands to this day. People are allowed to visit it and pay their respects, but are not permitted inside. It has sat there uninhabited for over a hundred and fifty years and has become fodder for many generations of local ghost stories. I still remember my grandfather spinning yarns when I was a child that scared me half to death!

The legend of the haunted Carroll home became a staple of our little community. Parents used those stories to scare their misbehaving children and the school kids would use those stories at sleepovers and play tricks on the first person to fall asleep. The story has changed many times over the years, but I remember the version from when I was a child. My grandfather said that Lady Carroll would walk through town at the stroke of midnight every night looking for her darling Ashley. She would peek into the windows of every child's bedroom and take the ones

that were awake instead of sleeping like they were supposed to. There was a two year period in my life where I was starting to go to bed at around eight o'clock to insure that I would be fast asleep long before midnight came around. My parents always loved to tell that story whenever I started hanging around with new friends or God forbid a girl friend. It was all in good fun, but everyone understood the seriousness of the source material.

Ashley Falls certainly isn't the type of life for everyone, but I'd say that most of its people here are very happy. From time to time, you hear rumblings from people that don't quite see things that way and convince themselves that there is a better life waiting for them in the city. One such person comes to mind as a matter of fact. Coincidentally enough, it's the very person whose story was the beginning of all of this.