Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Generations: Part 3

Blake Jackson · Tuesday, August 3rd, 2021

Read Generations Parts 1 and 2

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Jedrian hit the metal floor of the chamber hard, pain shooting up his spine. He groaned, teeth clenched, a trickle of blood pooled in his mouth. He must've cut his tongue. The dimensional engine in front of him purred, returned to its normal shimmery rainbow hue.

"Who are you?"

Jed looked up to see a mousy woman, curly hair spilling from a tight bun. Her oversized glasses made her dark eyes seem larger than the rest of her face. The eyes narrowed, peering at him closely. "Do you have clearance to be here?"

"I…I work here. Where's Kyl?"

"Kyl?" The woman laughed. "They retired eight years ago, pup. And you don't look like an old-timer. How do you know Kyl?"

Jed pushed himself off the floor, standing at attention in front of the woman. Even though she was at least a good foot shorter than him, Jed had the distinct impression he was still being looked down upon. "They're my boss," he gulped.

"I don't know what kind of work they've got going on now, but it sure as hell has nothing to do with my engines. So I'm going to kindly ask you to leave."

Jed nodded, confused but walked away from the woman briskly, not wanting to endure her questions any longer. *Retired eight years? What is she talking about?*

Feeling a creeping sense of wrongness, Jed took the long way home. The rolling hills of the Center were now covered with more urban sprawl from Delhian, the glow of the cities filling the manufactured darkness of night. Even looking down the Center massive cylindrical space, the small dots of cities now felt like bulging tumors, encroaching on the green and fertile land that had been so verdant only yesterday.

Jed hurried along his usual path, now paved instead of dirt. A dam cut its way through the center of Riada Lake, the once gentle currents now stagnant. The open air of the Center somehow felt more canned, like the recycled air he was used to in the Web.

Something is very *wrong*.

Kino.
Kino.
Kino.

The name pounds in his skull with every jarring footstep down the labyrinthine corridors of the Web. Subtle changes to the environment he had come to know so well flash through his mind, but none stay more than a second because with every change, the pit in his stomach grows.

The exit lights are now green.
Kino.
The lights are dimmer and I've seen more vermin in the past six turns than ever before on the ship.
Kino.
The apartment numbers are different.
Kino. You must be okay, Kino. You must.

Jedrian reached his apartment in only a matter of minutes, but it felt like hours. He was just down the corridor when the burly arms of an old man grabbed at him roughly. The old man had emerged from the shadows of the apartment next to his, his face set in a wry grimace. Jed's skin tingled where they touched.

"I don't have anything to steal, I swear!" Jed sputtered.

The old man cracked a grin, his voice a raspy growl. "I'm not trying to steal from you, young man. Just an old geezer asking you to slow down. Whatever it is, it's not the end of the world. Just breathe, son. Just breathe."

Jed swallowed, thankful he wasn't getting robbed, but weirded out by this old man who definitely hadn't lived next door to them yesterday. *Where was Ms. Ziadra?* Once he had his breath back, he felt strangely calmer.

"Thank you, sir."

The old man's wrinkled face curved into a smile. "No worries at all. Just remember to breathe, son. Just breathe." He turned away back to the shadows of his apartment, the door closing softly behind him.

Jed took a deep breath and approached his home. *Their* home. His stomach began to crawl up into his throat again, and no amount of deep breathing was going to stop it this time.

One of the numbers on the door had fallen off and the numbers that were left were faded and grey. He pulled on the handle, but it was locked. Shaking, he pulled out his key card and waved it over the door. It flashed red. Locked. His breaths became shallow and quick, the anxiety rising in his throat, threatening to choke him.

Raising his hand, he knocked twice.

After a moment, he pounded on the door again. And again.

Suddenly the door yanked open, and a young woman in her mid-twenties stood in front of him. She wore a jumpsuit covered in spray-painted swirls and graffiti, her multi-colored nails were short and sharp, and multiple piercings poked their way out of her ears. Her eyes were reddish as if she had been crying, but her stony expression didn't let on that it was anything she cared to share.

"Who are you, kid?" She seemed familiar in an odd way, and Jed was hit with a wave of deja vu.

"Uh, hi. There seems to have been a mistake, you see I—"

"What do you want?" Her foot tapped impatiently against the dingy metal of the corridor. "Look I already told Byaz that I'm not joining the Roughs so you can scuttle back to him with your tail between your legs, because I do not have time for this shi-"

"I don't know who Byaz is," Jed interjected quickly. His mind raced, searching for answers. "And I, uh, know someone who used to live here. Do you know where they moved to?"

He must've said the wrong thing, because she folded her arms and backed away slightly. "No one's lived here before us. You must have the wrong house." She moved to close the door, but Jed pushed his way inside.

It was different, but it was still his home. The same plates on the table, the same potted plant he has brought with him from Montana, the same framed painting—the first one Kino had ever been proud of.

"This is my hom—"

He doubled over as the woman's leg hit him in the stomach, then she grabbed him and shoved him against the wall. She had him by the throat, her nails digging into his skin. Her face was still expressionless, but her brown eyes were terrified.

"K-Kino." Jed gasped. Her brows knit together in confusion, her fingers loosening. "W-won't hu-rt, y-ou," he managed to get out.

She dropped him, stepping back and pulling a long retractable blade from her jumpsuit. There was a thin *whisk* as it extended, glinting in the harsh light pouring in from the corridor. "Talk. How do you know my dad?" She leveled the blade towards him.

Dad?

Jed's vision blurred from the headrush of almost blacking out, and as it readjusted, he could've sworn he saw his sister in front of him. He recognized the way she hid her whirlwind of emotions behind a face that no one else could read. Nobody but him. Blood recognized blood.

It couldn't be…

"I'm Jedrian. I'm sorry for everything. It's a misunderstanding I swear. But first…" he coughed, his throat still slightly bruised from where she'd grabbed him. "What's your name?"

She rolled her eyes. "Hexlia. Nice to meet you, asshole."

Hexlia. His vision snapped into focus, and he saw it all so clearly now. His dark hair and the same rust-brown eyes, but also…there was a bit of Kino in her nose, and her smile. Two halves perfectly melded together into a whole. *Hexlia. My daughter.*

(Featured image by Tekon69 at DeviantArt)

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