

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Generations: Part 4

Blake Jackson · Tuesday, August 10th, 2021

“Are you going to sit there with that dumb look on your face all day, or are you gonna talk?” She absent-mindedly twirled the blade around. “May I remind you this is Byaz’s territory and intruders frequently go missing. And you look like you’re from the Center, prettyboy. So what’re you doing down in the Web?”

“What year is it?”

The blade stopped. “Excuse me?”

“I got knocked on the head pretty badly back there. I’m sure it’ll come back to me in a moment, but...just humor me please.”

“2175. February 6. Not that months matter down here,” she rolls her eyes. “We don’t get seasons like you Center folk.”

Twenty-five years. Somehow...I’m twenty-five years in the future. Talking to my daughter. He shook his head, trying to wrap his mind around the enormity of what had happened. *How can I get back?*

“Hello? Anyone in there?”

“I’m not from the Center.” Jed allowed himself a small smile at her shock, in seeing a look other than the indifferent front she’d been maintaining successfully thus far. But the shock disappeared just as quickly beneath her mask.

“Interesting. And what are you doing knocking on my door, muttering my dad’s name?”

“He...is an old friend.” Jed tried to choose his words carefully.

She frowned. “You’re a little young to be an old friend.”

“Where is Kino?” He hoped that he didn’t look too desperate, but he couldn’t help it.

Hexlia’s mask cracked slightly, a brief glimpse of pain. “He’s been in the hospital for three months.”

Jed’s throat went dry. “What for? Is he okay?”

She dropped the blade, and collapsed onto the very couch where Jed had proposed to Kino only yesterday. His heart ached, yearning to see his fiancée again. “It started a few months ago. He had trouble painting and it wasn’t until it was too late that we realized it was a stroke. Doctors said if we had caught it earlier…well he has his mind, but his body isn’t doing too hot. Some kind of heart disease.”

“Can I see him?”

Hexlia laughed darkly. “They barely let me see him. Only on weekends during approved visiting hours. Doesn’t help that they think I’m one of Byaz’s girls so they’re afraid to let me mingle with the rest of the Center folk,” she gritted her teeth. “They’re still billing me like I’m from up there, though. Because the famous Kino must just have wads of cash lying about.”

“Kino? Famous? And…who is Byaz?” Jed’s mind raced. He glanced around the apartment, taking in the leak in the ceiling, the ratty sheets, the clothes hanging to dry on one of the ceiling rafters. It reminded him of how he had grown up. Dirt poor with too many mouths to feed.

“Jedrian, you must’ve really hit your head hard,” she cocks her head, eyeing his engineer coveralls. “Are you sure you’re from the Web?”

“I’m sorry this is just a lot of information all at once and I—” his voice cracked. The enormity of his loss hitting him square in the chest. His whole family dead for almost two decades. His friends scattered and years older…would they even remember him? His daughter grew up without him, and Kino…Kino was lying alone in a hospital room all alone. Kino…

“Hey buddy, it’s okay,” Hexlia’s arms curled around him and held him tightly. He hadn’t realized he was crying until he felt his tears soaking into her jumpsuit. This strong, beautiful woman was his child. His girl. And he had missed all of it. This was too much to fix. Too huge to reverse.

Unless…

Jed sat up, embarrassed, wiping at his eyes. “I need your help.”

“What’s your angle? You come barging in here, talking crazy, then you start crying everywhere. What’s with you?” She didn’t look angry, just concerned. He hoped that a part of her recognized herself in him. That strange sense of *deja vu* he’d had when first seeing her. *Does she suspect?*

“How much do you know about the *Wayfarer*?”

“We live on it, and we’ll live on it for another 650 years more or less. What about it?” Her earrings dangled, clinking against each other as she leaned forward. As much as she tried to hide it, she was intrigued.

“What do you know about the engines?” Jed asked carefully.

“They’re powered by dark matter colliding and creating dimensional rifts.”

Guess they weren’t able to keep it a secret much longer, Jed thought.

“How heavily guarded are they?”

Hexlia laughed. “You want to break into the engines? Possibly the most secure place on this entire ship? You’re fucking kidding me, right?”

Jed pulled out his Glass, surprised it still worked. “How old is that thing? Damn,” Hexlia muttered as he swiped and clicked his way to his banking profile. Miraculously, his account still existed. \$34,000 just waiting to be claimed. Everything he had saved up since leaving on his own at fourteen. That \$34,000 was six years of hard, back-breaking work. And he would spend it all for even the smallest chance that he could fix things.

He met his daughter’s inquisitive eyes. “I can pay you.”

“You want a job done, go to the Roughs. Byaz has better connections and more access, an—“

“I’ll pay you \$34,000.” The air between them went still as Hexlia processed what Jedrian had just said. “All yours. I’ll transfer the second the job’s done.”

“Why?”

“You could use it more than I can. And Kino...”

Her defenses had gone back up. “Who the fuck are you?”

“I really am an old friend of your dad’s, alright? I promise I’ll tell you more once we get to the engines. I swear it.” Jed had never begged before, but he couldn’t tell her the truth. Why would he break her heart, when he could go back and make sure that she was never broken in the first place? “Please, just trust me.”

Jed felt that strange electric tingle of recognition flash between them. Hexlia sighed heavily before meeting his gaze. “Strangely enough, I do.”

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