

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Generations: Part 6

Blake Jackson · Friday, August 27th, 2021

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The catwalks above the engines were well hidden in the darkness. Scientists and engineers scurried about far below around the heart of the dimensional rifts, not a security guard to be seen in their inner sanctum. The shimmering purple light emanating from engines washed over Jed and Hexlia, broken every few moments by a flash of blue.

“They don’t normally look like that,” Jed said softly.

“And how would you know what they look like normally?” Hexlia’s indifferent mask was back up, protecting her from the unknown.

“Because I worked on them. Every day for six years. And even a little before that when we were still on Earth.”

“Earth?” Hexlia’s voice was a whispered prayer of hope.

Jedrian turned, meeting her eyes. He felt calm, sure. He didn’t have to hide who he was anymore. He was still so young, but he knew this: fathers should be honest with their daughters. After all, isn’t it a parent’s job to keep their children safe?

“I grew up on Earth. But I chose to leave with the fleet. I met Kino on the shores of Riada Lake. I’d never seen anyone so handsome. A few months later we moved in together. And yesterday...” He took a deep breath, voice catching. “Yesterday I asked him to marry me.”

Hexlia shook her head slightly, tears running down her face.

“And this morning, the engines turned purple with blue flashes and I...got pulled through. I ended up here. And I met you, Hexlia. My *daughter*.”

“No, that can’t be true. You’re not even as old as I am, you—“

“You know it’s true. You felt it the moment you saw me, didn’t you?” He reached for her, pulling her close to him. “I needed to get back here...because I need to get back to you and Kino.”

“You’re going to go *inside* that thing?!” Her watery eyes widened in shock.

“I have to. Hexlia, you grew up without me. Knowing that I missed out on that has made me feel so goddamn guilty. I want nothing more than to see you become the amazing woman you are today.” Jed absentmindedly stroked her hair. “I know Kino’s proud as hell. And so am I. So thank you. For keeping him safe. For staying strong even when you didn’t have to. You’re the best of both of us.”

Hexlia clutched at him, openly sobbing, her mask shattered. “*Dad...*”

In that moment, broken and ridden with the impossible guilt over something he could not control, Jedrian whispered, “Forgive me.”

“What?” Hexlia pulled back, hair wild, eyes bleary with tears. “What for? Jed—dad—it’s not your fault. You couldn’t have known.”

“I touched the engine. It was my choice to...to...” Now he was the one who was crying. Hexlia held him close.

“Stay.” She whispered. “Stay with us.”

He grabbed her tightly, both their chests breathing in and out, fully in sync. Another part of his soul he didn’t know he’d left behind. But he gently pushed her away. “I’m sorry, Hexlia. I can’t.”

Hexlia’s face contorted in rage. “What do you mean you *can’t*? Did you come back just to leave again?”

“No. I...” He couldn’t meet her gaze. “I’m trying to get back to you. To the moment I left. So you can grow up with two loving fathers. So I can *be* there for you so you don’t have to worry about money or danger when you’re still so young. So I won’t lose the man I love. Hexlia, I have to believe there’s a way I can fix all of this. I have to try.”

She turned away, putting on her helmet, her face hidden in the darkness. “Leave then. It’s what you do best.” The darkness swallowed her as she walked away without a second glance, and after a moment Jed heard the *hiss* of the airlock closing.

I’ll fix everything Hexlia, he thought as he swiped through his Glass, transferring his entire account over to her. *It will all work out. I know it will.*

The dimensional engine was directly below him, one of the membranous windows curved upwards. The perfect spot to enter.

Jedrian climbed up onto the railing, staring down at the purple-and-blue swirls roiling underneath. *Please let me get back to my family.*

He let go of the catwalk’s bars and he felt through the cavernous space. There was a slight resistance when he hit the membrane, but his body weight pushed through and he entered the engine itself.

It didn’t hurt as he saw himself drifting apart. Pieces flaked off bit by bit as he hurtled towards the heart of the dimensional rift. It folded backwards like a multicolored flower, the petals wrapping

around him even as his limbs faded away. *Please take me home.*

The rift swallowed Jed whole.

The next years of Jedrian's life felt like a sick joke. Every time he passed through the dimensional engines, he found himself another twenty-five years in the future. The second time he had raced home, he found that Kino was dead and Hexlia was no longer living at that address. He spent weeks trying to find her, but on a ship full of millions, he could only find her if she wanted to be found. The third time, he found his daughter. Her grave was in a field full of flowers that her daughter visited every week.

After that, Jedrian kept flinging himself forward in the hope that something would yield. His happiness could be found, if only just out of reach. But time moved unceasingly, unerringly forward. He watched generations of his descendants live and die and change and grow. Sometimes the rifts stayed their normal rainbow hue and he would have to wait weeks, months, even years before the 'Purple Hue Phenomenon' occurred again. Jed grew tired of his life unmoored, but kept on in the hope that someday his luck would change.

Finally after dozens of 'jumps' he found himself on Eden. Their new world was a bright one. Larger than Earth with wonders just as unique and perfect as their blue-green marble had been. He wanted to explore humanity's new home, but the dimensional engines were being taken offline. And at sixty-seven, Jed didn't have much left in him for false hope.

So he made one, final jump.

And found himself staring up at Kyl.

They frowned down at him. "Who are you?"

Jed pushed himself up on his sore knees and ran.

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