

EIGHT BILLION AND ONE:

LOCATION: THE GALAXY
SPACECRAFT: THE GENERATIONS 065
YEAR: 2767

“Law violated, Sector 5,” the speakers echoed through each corridor, bouncing off the walls. Georgia Wahlsbury, Chancellor, pushed through the crowd gathered around the scene. Her hooked nose, pursed lips, and hunched back imitated that of a vulture. Thin and crooked, she had worked her way to the top with deception, bribery and blackmail.

“Please, no, she’s only a child! Don’t take her!” a Charleige woman screamed. Georgia Wahlsbury surveyed the incident. She gave a small cough, letting the Charleige know she was there.

Suddenly, the woman looked up, “Miss Wahlsbury, please, I’m asking. Let her go, I have lived my life; she hasn’t started one yet. I beg you, don’t.”

But her pleas were not enough. Instead the Chancellor looked down at the Charleige with penetrating eyes, hatred coursing through her veins.

“You know the population rules, Charleige. You know the ship can only hold eight billion people. Not eight billion and one. So, give me your baby and be done with it,” she said, icy cold injected into every syllable.

With shaking hands, the woman handed Wahlsbury her child, tears trickling down her face.

“Good,” Wahlsbury said. A thin smile appeared on her face; she had a fondness for cruelty.

And with that, she pushed her way back out of the crowd that had come to witness the scene, soldiers trailing behind her like puppies following their master’s beck and call.

“Goodness, what a mess those filthy Charleiges are,” the Chancellor said, bored, examining her nails.

She looked over at the baby she had placed on the table: it was crying.

“God, these repulsive creatures,” she muttered to herself.

She walked over to the table, unsure how to comfort it. She picked the baby up, holding it as far away as possible from her.

“Shut up,” she said.

The baby stopped crying, and instead giggled.

“I might keep you,” Wahlsbury said, “How about we get rid of one of the criminals rotting in jail to make room for you? I think I’ll name you Trinity.”

The Chancellor smiled at her with warmth that had never been seen before; “My Trinity.”

Thirteen years later...

I look at myself in the mirror, holding up a picture of Mama next to my face, trying to find some similarity. We’re not the same. She has a hooked nose, mine is small and slightly upturned. Her lips are thin and constantly pursed together. I don’t know what my lips are, but they aren’t Mama’s.

I rush to school, hugging Mama on the way out. Running, I finally reach Sector Three – school.

I fall over, catching a glance at the beaten-up sneakers that tripped me up.

“Sorry, didn’t see you there,” says Levi, a Charleige.

He grins, pulling his leg back.

“Levi Hemphs, you know that wasn’t an accident. Detention,” says Mr Quiermorre.

Levi mutters sorry and traipses into the hall.

“If you ask me, it was a mistake to allow Adrumytes and Charleiges to mix; sorry Trinity,” Mr Quiermorre says.

“It’s okay,” I reply.

As I walk away, I hear him mutter to himself: “Those low-life Charleiges.”

The bell rings and we all rush out of school, running back to our sectors. Out of the corner of my eye, I spot Levi sitting on the edge of one of the spacecraft beams. His brown hair flops over his eyes and he is wearing an old, stained white and blue bomber jacket. His clothes are all second hand – the smell of a charity shop follows him everywhere. He is two years older than me: the bane of all teachers.

He journeys towards the Split – the area that leads to the separation of Adrumyte and Charleige sectors. I follow him through the crowd. As he walks into Charleigion, I stop, hesitant to be spotted amongst what Mama calls ‘filthy delinquents.’

But then I spot watchmen walking past, patrolling the corridors, and I run into Charleigion, lost and unsure where to go. With bags that seem like weights on my back, I stop at what appears to be a public bathroom. I walk inside, wondering why my natural instinct was to

follow Levi. To enter Charleige. To break Mama's rules. Rules were made for a reason, and should never, ever be broken.

I hear a cough from one of the cubicles, turning sharply to look behind me. A woman staggers out. Barely the age of 40, hacking and forcing herself to the basins. But they are covered in mould and rust, coated with neglect.

"I'm sure the cleaners will come soon," I say to myself hopefully.

The woman looks up at me.

"There are no cleaners. There is nothing here, not in Charleigion, but you knew that already. Stop acting naïve, child. You have lived here for what?" she looks me up and down, "thirteen years? You know how the Chancellor treats us."

I keep my mouth shut.

"She took away my child thirteen years ago, almost fourteen. If she was still here, she'd be fourteen next week. But that Wahlsbury stole my child; she wasn't registered. Poor Levi. Esme Hemphs, she was called. A slightly upturned nose and wide eyes that were always glittering."

A wistful look appears on her face, and I look into the grime-coated mirror. I look at us. Oval faces, slightly upturned noses and an identical shade of brown in our hair. Both wide-eyed, but hers had lost the hope and happiness that I could see in mine.

I look at her, and notice she's doing the same.

Was my whole life a 3D storybook the Chancellor had built for herself?

I look at her once again.

"Mum?"

With a satisfied smile, she closes the laptop. She enjoys dreaming about the future and expressing her thoughts. And she did just that.

Her brother comes running through, "Lunch. Mum's calling."

She runs down the stairs, greeting her mother with a kiss.

"Mum, read the story I wrote."

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