

Supplanted

Chapter 1:

A satisfying click sounds, he takes his indent-nail from the keyhole and the door slides open. Stepping into the apartment, it looks alien to him. Well of course it would, they told him it would seem that way until he was settled once again. He looked around, good taste, light wood flooring, not a huge space. Just big enough to still give room while maintaining a cozy atmosphere. Tasteful furniture, a coffee table, sofa and love seat in the main living space. He takes a step inside, *'Maybe it wont take so long to get used to this.'* Unfamiliar photos appear to line the wall, projected not hung, he drags a finger along the wall as he walks down a hallway to the right.

Click, he opens the door to the master bedroom. A bright light is emanating from a desk across from the door, a notification reads: *"Welcome to your new life! We hope you are adjusting well, we know there is sometimes a difficulty to retain ones acquired name. Progressing can often be a difficult experience, so we encourage those left to socialize and take your new opportunity in stride. Enclosed is all of your information needed to move on with your journey. We wish you a good life! - Sincerely, Tenth Ring Progression Service Team."*

Den *Brahms, Age:31...* The data-slab continued to list his lack luster fabricated history and various bodily quirks he had already heard just hours before at the clinic.

'Den, interesting. I wonder why they choose the names they do? Or maybe I chose it, I'm not sure how that works'

He swiped away the jarring light and the cheery euphemisms attached. He had supplanted, that was the truth of it. Now he was left to live his life with his synthesized half-truth memories, the worst part was that he could not even feel a sense of loss since he had no true recollection of what he was missing. With a sigh Den turned to the large bed covered in pearly white sheets and far too many pillows. He unfastened his belt and undressed revealing his organic tail, he shuddered slightly at the sight of it and the sensation of controlling it. Trying his best to ignore it Den sprawled out onto the bed and slowly fell into an uneasy sleep, he was exhausted.

There were two surprises waiting for Den when he woke. The arm wrapped around him, and the man attached to it. He jolted awake startling the man beside him, flipping his head around he stared at the man wrapped around him. "Who are you!?" The man retreated his arm and jolted back looking confused, "What the hell! What's going on?" Den scrambled out of bed and hurried to put his pants on, but the stem of his tail kept getting in the way, finally he was able to pull them up and secure his belt as he hopped out of the room.

He was half-way out the door already, when the man got up to go after him. "Babe, what the hell is wrong with you?" Den had no idea how to approach this situation, he felt alone and confused. He slowed down before reaching the door leading out to the hallway. The man was behind him, "Hey just tell me whats going on? Are you in trouble? What happened?" Den was tearing up already, he collapsed and looked up at the man dejectedly.

"Who are you to me?" He said holding a hand to his head.

The man knelt down and embraced Den, he felt comforted, 'Why? I don't even know who this is.'

"Hey it's okay, what's going on?"

“I’m sorry, I-I don’t know who you are. I don’t know your name, your relation to me! So whoever you think I am, I-I’m not anymore!”

“What? You’re not making any sense?”

“I supplanted!” Den finally admitted, feeling almost ashamed of the fact

The shock on the man’s face was immediate and filled with a multitude of emotions, his voice went hoarse “You, you what?” He said almost demanding a different answer. But he knew already, knew that his partner before him was no longer who he used to be. His eyes watered.

“Well, *he* supplanted...” said Den shifting in the man’s grip on his shoulders. The man staggered back and turned away in disbelief

“I’m sorry. Please believe me I didn’t know or-”

“I know, I know how it works, you don’t know anything. That’s the problem. Please leave, I need to be alone... Whoever you are.” Den could still hear the quiet sobs of a man he was supposed to love as he quietly opened the door and closed it behind him.

Den walked out of the housing unit, trying to forget what just happened, and turned to look back at the apartment window, but blinds obscured anything he might have caught a glimpse of. Looking forward, Den wasn’t sure how to proceed.

‘I guess that is life for most.’

The area around his specific unit was verdantly green, full of life and activity. Buildings of soft brick and charming verandas covering picturesque seating areas for gentle living, such was the reputation of the tenth ring, ‘the ring of tranquility.’ It was serene. Den thought of his previous life, how could it warrant such a haphazard progression? Was the other so dissatisfied and stagnant in his previous life that he felt his only resort supplantation? How interesting it was to have life. I guess its hard to think about not having it unless you have it, but still the majesty of it all filled Den with a strange feeling.

‘Why did it have to be this way, what did he do in a previous life to deserve this. Literally’ Den shivered slightly. How confusing this all was.

He was aware of the fact that the memories he had were fabricated, and this was all the more apparent whenever he tried to remember specific people in his life. It was like he hadn’t truly gained consciousness until a few hours ago, and in a way that was true. But those vague memories of parents, friends, enemies all distant and ephemeral, just present enough as to not be alarmed at his lack of experience. It was very unsettling and strange.

Den decided to stop thinking for a moment lest he drive himself to re-supplantation mere hours after waking. Of all the things pressing him in the world right now, one took priority. He was hungry.

A short and stocky barista, with olive skin and loud curly auburn hair half covering her face, was monotonously taking orders from a walk of life populating the small coffee shop. However despite the apparent boredom on her face she was actually having fun, it was an experience to have a job. And although she was truly bored, that was a luxury. Most rings had no need for work, this one didn’t either however it did offer a system to give jobs to those wanting purpose or to just live a day as a drone. So despite there being no reason for her to do this job specifically, the woman stood there taking orders like it was a game.

She was writing a name onto an empty cardboard cup, when Den peeked inside and unassumingly opened the door with a soft ring. The barista looked for the source of the sound and when she did her face lit up instantly, she dropped the cup and pen she was holding and ran towards Den completely forgetting she was supposed to be *working*. Den looking to the menu didn’t see notice the woman barreling towards him until she was mid-air finding her limbs firmly wrapped around Den.

They both fell backwards with a strained groan from Den and a crash around them. The woman, now on top of Den, looked down with an embarrassed expression quickly overtaken by overwhelming enthusiasm.

‘God damn it! Not again what the hell!’ Den thought after finally registering what had just happened.

“Fairy! Where the hell have you been!?” She said trying to put on an angry face, her enthusiasm seemingly replaced by worry and stern disappointment.

“You told me you were going on a trip like 3 revolutions ago? And now you’re-” She let up slightly and examined Den’s pointedly masculine figure “So much different? Since when did you update your organics and go masc?” She gave Den a strange look and hesitated for a moment

“Well either way I’d recognize this guy anywhere.” She dragged a finger along Den’s implant and grinned finally and standing up yet still keeping an arm on Den’s shoulder.

“Ugh, this place is so boring, people barely have any organics or anything!” She said exasperated and seemingly unaware of the attention from all the people in the shop, about to continue rambling before Den finally spoke up while taking a hard step back looking supremely uncomfortable.

“I know this is going to be difficult to hear but-” He looked around at all the eyes trained on the both of them.

“Maybe we should go outside actually.”

Two strangers sat on a bench under a tree, the sun was looping now so the sky had gained a golden hue, illuminating the two softly. Black birds rested on the various branches before a loud noise scared them off the quiet tree.

“Holy shit! So she really supplanted huh? And it’s *Den* now.”

“*Dennn*-” she enunciated again as if trying to get a feel for it.

“Well its not as good as Fairy, but not bad I guess.” She leaned back in her chair stretching like a slender cat. Den looked at her strangely, this was not exactly what he was expecting considering the morning he had. He had thought she would loose her nonchalant energetic attitude realizing someone she loved was gone, but there was only was intrigue and surprise.

“You’re not... mad? Or sad at least?” Den asked unable to read the woman for the life of him. He also noticed her strangely reptilian eyes when she looked up at him, ‘Organics’ he thought and was slightly less embarrassed of his extra appendage. His tail swayed lightly.

She laughed and Den felt slightly annoyed acting so perplexed next to her unwavering confidence.

“Well, I’m not exactly ecstatic y’know. You left... She left, around 3 revolutions ago and all she told me when she did was ‘*I need to go but I’ll be back.*’ Well I guess she was sort of telling the truth.” Her eyes softened for a moment looking at Den.

“Anyway it doesn’t really matter much now, you are who you are and I’m willing to accept that” Den couldn’t hide his dumbfound expression, ‘Just how naive is this girl?’ He slumped a bit, “I don’t even know who I am to be honest, I feel a bit empty.”

“Preachin’ to the choir sister.” She bumped Den’s arm with her strangely sharp elbow. “I’ve been trying to figure out who I am my whole life, and I’d say I’m about-” She starts counting her fingers, “1% there?”

Den let out a laugh, he had to admit this girl was fun to be around.

“Oh shit! Speaking of, you don’t even know my name do you?” Den turned shook his head.

“It’s Fran.” She said giving a big grin and holding out her hand invitingly.

“Den.” He said gripping Fran’s sturdy hand. He silently thanked her in that moment, feeling her hand and the calmness and certainty that came with. He felt like he was something now, he had a friend after all! *Nothing* can’t have friends, connections, he was *Something*.