

RIDERBOY

RUMMAN R KALAM

It had been nearly an hour. I have no idea how I ended up with this man alone at an ice cream shop. The five of us came here during our class break and somehow or some way, three of them left me with quite possibly the strangest boy I have ever talked to. He was staring at me with narrowed eyes like I was a fugitive from the law.

"So, uh. What's your name? I am Sadia," I tried starting an even more awkward conversation.

"Turjo. Riderboy Turjo," he replied, his eyes even narrower now.

"That's... uh... That's a nice name but why?" I had to ask.

"What why?" replied a stony voice.

"I am sure Riderboy isn't your first name," I asked with a forced laugh.

Turjo leaned back on his seat and looked into the distance or the chandelier, anyway.

"Correct, it is not, my friend. It is a title of honour given to me by my brothers in their time of need whence I rode into their lives," said Turjo, still looking at what I

hope is the chandelier.

"Hahaha, that is the first time I heard someone use 'whence' in a conversation." I tried to make the air a bit lighter.

Turjo's head quickly snapped back into our impromptu date. He looked at me with smoldering eyes and replied.

"It is no joke, sister. Brothers bound by the wheel are forever. Oil burns brighter than blood, runs deeper than veins, into our souls."

"Wow, you do seem passionate about your motorcycles." I nodded grimly.

"Brother, passion is for the weak and unsure who are scared by their own desires. It is not my passion. It is the true calling of my being," he continued, "Tell me, brother. Have you ever been waiting patiently for the path you must take only to be rammed in the back and thrown off into the waiting hands of death?"

"Uh... no. I am sorry you had to go through—"

Suddenly, Turjo stood up and was pointing a finger at me.

"YOU! DID YOU RAM ME IN THE BACK TOWARDS DEATH?!" his accusation echoing inside the small ice cream shop that sold fried chicken and had no customers.

I looked around for help and all I saw was the cashier lustily rubbing a bank card machine on his cheek.

"Turjo, please. No. I did not ram you in the back. I was just sorry that you had to go through the accident," I replied, nearly tearing up in front of this crazy man.

Seeing me hold back my tears, Turjo sat down again, accepting my words.

"Please, brother. Do not cry. Do not feel sorry for what made me a man today," he quickly shifted his seat next to mine as the



floodgates of my eyes opened.

"You are a person of honour and truth, my brother. We must become friends. Please add me on Facebook now."

Great. Now this weirdo wants to be my friend on Facebook.

"I... don't have any, um, charge on my phone," I said through sniffs, trying to get past this confusing experience.

He brought his phone out and just as he turned on the internet, a barrage of different alerts started screaming through the speakers. All 17 ride-sharing apps were hailing him.

"We must put faith upon destiny and hope to meet again, brother. For now, I must go. My brethren need me."

"But we're in the same cla—"

By that time, he already got up and ran towards the door. Out of simple curiosity, I wanted to see his bike.

Riderboy Turjo just ran and ran. There was no bike.

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"Take it or leave it. You won't get a better deal anywhere in the Sector-C," grumbled the man behind the counter. His voice made even more indecipherable through his respiratory device. R-no knew the man was right. Not because the man was demanding a reasonable price compared to the others, but because he knew for certain no one else had the little ornament he had, tucked safely in his palm as he glared impatiently at R-no.

R-no never had trouble making his ends meet. He always considered himself more fortunate than the others in the Mars Colony, or TerraDome as it was decreed to be called now. Unlike the others who burned through their excess on gambling and stimuli, R-no had his sights set elsewhere. A seemingly harmless hobby that took him to shady back alleys and novelty shops that never sold what they claimed to. A passion that was pushing R-no to buy the trinket dangling in front of him that very moment, despite the outrageous price tag.

There was a sandstorm outside of the dome. It wasn't evident of course. While the inner walls of the dome projected the image of a serene afternoon, real enough to fool the third generation of Mars dwellers, it didn't fool R-no. "The trick is to look at the ventilation pods," he would enthusiastically tell his students in the academy, to no one's interest. "Whenever there is a storm, the screen around the pods would go hazy. That's how you know the storm is at your door". Not that it mattered anyways. R-no knew very well how pointless it all was. No one was going out of the dome except for scavengers. This new haven was their self sustaining escape from everything - the extremities of the planet lying outside, the memories of the lives they all left behind 54.6 million kilometers away, and the wind.

R-no never associated himself with the fanatic 'Originists', the ones protesting the rehabilitation program in Mars demanding to get back to the ruins we all left behind because he enjoyed nostalgia for what it is, a warm thought on a lazy evening over a cup of hot

beverage, a fleeting smile over a past that may or may not have happened—an escape. He knew there was nothing to go back to. No fields of electric green to tread mindlessly on, no mountain to conquer to see the world below, no autumn wind to greet him that would scuffle his hair amidst a downpour of yellowing leaves. This makeshift life in the comfort of the domes is all they have now and all they will.

R-no's thoughts snapped back to the trinket in his hand, light as a paper plane (another meaningless accessory he kept on his table). He made his way to his room, pushing past the cluster of low hanging wind chimes brushing against his burly figure. Each resonated with the other like strings on a lute, a perfect harmony in a windless world that makes their existence redundant. He hung his prized possession, in the middle of his room among the other expensive novelties where it stayed motionless, waiting for the wind that would never come just like the wind chimes around it, just like him.