

WARNING:

The following story was written in lieu of the “real” chapter 6 for STORMS OF FATE. It just happened to be running up on April 1st (in real life) and in the novel as well. A match made in...well...my office. So, I spent an afternoon writing this “chapter.” I even dated it April 1st. And then I mailed it. To my editor. To Jordan Weisman. To many of the BattleTech writers and friends (Chris Hartford, Chris Trossen, Warner Doles, Herb Beas, Mike Stackpole, etc.). Asking them all to take a look and give me some feedback if they would. That something seemed a bit...off.

To date, it was one of my most successful jokes ever. No one believed I would spend several hours writing a -joke-. And I’ll go over some of the responses in a later Commentary.

In the meantime, enjoy. People have asked about this over and over, and I don’t mind putting this back out. But please, make a note. This was NEVER intended to be cannon or anything other than a spoof/humor piece designed to shock my editor and a few friends. ***If you are offended easily, by profanity or even by an irreverent treatment of some classic BattleTech characters, set this one aside and enjoy a different piece of ficton today.*** Otherwise, please, read on!

Loren Coleman

-6-

Apartments of the First Princess

***Avalon City, New Avalon
Crucis March, Federated Suns
1 April 3064***

“What do you think you know about it?” Katrina asked, rounding on her guest. She was beginning to regret ever arranging for his visit. The planning and problems. The risk! Bringing him to the Davion Palace on New Avalon was not without danger. And for one of the few times in her very careful life, Katrina Steiner-Davion had stepped into harm’s way.

“I can tell you are getting desperate. We had an understanding. What makes you believe that you can trade on that with me like some low-caste merchant?”

She glared daggers at him, furious with this smug conceit. A call. The trip of a hundred alarms secreted about her private apartments. And his death would follow only seconds after Richard Dehaver’s loyal agents stormed in. Did he know how close to that line he was?

Vladimer Ward, true khan of Clan Wolf, smiled pityingly.

The two had begun their private meeting with far more interest. He’d pulled her braids out to let the cascade of golden hair fall

loose over her shoulders. His jacket was draped over one end of a large, ivory sofa. She knew he was posturing now, a release for him as much as Katrina's imaging him bound and helpless was for her. The danger of their meeting flushed the skin on his neck. It permeated the room, like a warm smell, both intoxicating and nervous.

"I am not trading with you at all," she said, being careful to avoid contractions as was Clan custom. Vlad would take it as a sign of a lazy mind, and she would prove that her mind was sharper than his. "I simply asked if you had designs on Jade Falcon worlds. You were halfway here before they attacked across the border, but since you are here why not discuss it. Does it matter if helping yourself would also help me?" She guided him to the sofa, settling him down on it and then seating herself beside him, legs pulled up beneath her.

It wasn't the first time they had worked together, and Katrina knew that Vlad would be reviewing their first encounter. She had been traveling to meet with the Khans of Clan Ghost Bear, thinking to arrange a deal. Clan Wolf's assault on the Bears had netted JumpShip, crew, and herself. She had seen it then, his infatuation with her. The excitement, and the hint of fear for feelings he didn't quite understand. Clan society, at the upper levels, divorced emotion from relationships. Their breeding program, using genetic material taken after death even, promised them an immortality that casual relationships lacked.

No wonder we was scared. Vlad had never felt attraction to a woman. Not in this way.

Katrina could use that.

"I have an able general in the Melissia Theater," she lied, knowing that Sharon Byron would do nothing but get herself killed if she insisted on meeting the Falcons with a static defense. Although her cousin, Adam Steiner, might pull something out of the mess. Katrina relaxed against the soft back cushions, leaned in close so that her breath warmed his neck. "And the ARDC is well protected, if out of my hands at the moment. The Falcons will find stiff resistance. If you were to challenge their rear lines, we could divide their occupation corridor between us. What do you say to that?"

"I say you are underestimating Clan Jade Falcon." He turned his head to look at her, his eyes sharp and penetrating. "But your idea does have some merit."

Of course it did. It dealt from a position of strength, and Vlad Ward would appreciate that. The Clans consumed the weak to strengthen the next generation. Katrina discarded the weak and strong, as it suited her personal goals.

Their faces were a hand's breadth apart. The scar twisting down the left side of his face gave him a rugged, roguish look. Not the kind of face she'd want posing next to her in holograms, but then if she wanted a showcase husband, she could have had that long ago. Katrina could smell the Clan leathers pulled so tight across Vlad's chest and arms, and the soap he used to clean his hair. She reached out and brushed two fingers over his widow's peak, liking that trait about him. She told him so.

"I am sure that somewhere back in my line, there may have been a reason to include that recessive trait in my heritage. Perhaps even one that acknowledged it as pleasing to the eye." He caught up a handful of her golden hair. "And your coloring. Like porcelain and spun gold."

She sat up straighter, a head taller than him now and looking down. "Was there a poet in your genetic heritage?"

"Do not talk filthy."

"I will do as I wish," she promised, trailing a hand slowly down the side of his face and resting it on his shoulder. "You are in my realm, this time. You are *my* bondsman."

His grin promised that it was not likely. Still. "That might prove interesting." He reached for her.

Katrina shoved him back against the cushion, holding him there. "You were not given permission to speak," she said. Then she leaned in quickly, finding his mouth firm against hers, keeping their bodies apart but drawing him into a long, passionate kiss. She could feel it in the tension of his shoulders that he wanted to resist, stand up to her—to be the dominant, not the dominated. She wouldn't give him that chance, pulling him closer so that to break away would mean acting the prude. She felt that tension ease as he lost himself in the enjoyment. Surrendered. If her mouth was not occupied, she would have smiled.

Then, with a violent shove, throwing most of her weight behind it, she drove him hard back into the sofa, rearing back and shaking hair free of her eyes. "What..." he started to ask, and she shook him again.

"What's my name?" she shouted down at him, hand clenched over his shoulder, nails biting into leather and the side of his neck. She shook him, never giving him the chance to recover his poise. "Say my name, bitch!"

Vlad's brown eyes were wide with surprise and a measure of uncertainty. "Katherine..." he stammered. Then, "Katrina! Katrina!"

"That's right," she purred, ice blue eyes narrowing down like crosshairs seeking some distant target. "And what was that about *me* being desperate?" She caught at her gown and rolled over his lap, straddling his thighs with a knee on either side, smiled down at him.

"You know one summer, at band camp..."