

Warning: ANGST, violence, character death.

The woman was tall with a lithe build, making her appear almost delicate. Her figure was the perfect hourglass; her pale face seemed to be made out of porcelain in its flawless quality. She sat at the windowsill, brushing her nearly floor-length hair, while watching the sombre landscape outside the castle. The blonde strands, so fair they looked white, gleamed under the lights in the room and she brushed it for a long time until she began to work it in an intricate queue.

A soft moan from the bed called her attention. She looked over her shoulder and saw one of the boys shift in his sleep. His twin brother crinkled his nose at the disturbance but did not wake up. Their younger sister sighed, snuggling closer to the two boys.

She smiled at the children then turned her blue-eyed gaze towards the window again. Her arms worked methodically on her hair once more. Other than the children, she found no comfort from the predicament she was in. At least the brushing soothed her thoughts and allowed her to recollect a time when she had been happy.

Just before the Omega Centaur was attacked. Marian sighed, and tried to push the unpleasant thoughts away. *An exploring mission... that was all that it was meant to be.*

Another moan drew her attention towards the bed again. She stood up, went to the bed and saw the boy with his brow knitted and his lips quivering. She lifted him into her arms, careful not to wake him, and began to lullaby him quietly. His hands coiled around her hair, the slender, long fingers twirling the silken mass comfortingly. He sighed and his face cleared, all signs of the nightmare he had been having gone.

Yes, sweetheart, sleep peacefully. She smiled at him and sat back down. *You're growing heavier every day. Soon I won't be able to lift you anymore, Lotor,* she thought lachrymously, well aware that, although the children were far bigger than the average human child their age, their father thought of them as no more than runts. *I know it's not your fault you're half Doomite... I am truly sorry such a fate was imposed upon you, my darling...* She looked at the other two children on the bed. *If only I had had the courage to end my own life, you wouldn't be here now... You're the children of King Zarkon and fated to know nothing else but misery for the rest of your lives.* She looked hatefully at the bracelets on her arms. They seemed to be made of spun silk. *I have tried to escape, please know this, but these... They prevent me from leaving the living quarters.* A teardrop landed on Lotor's forehead as the haunting memory replayed in her mind. *Can you forgive me?* She looked at the three children again. *Can you ever forgive your mother for being weak? Had I ended my life when I was first captured and declared his bride, at least I would not live with this guilt... The guilt of knowing that I have brought you, my lovely children, into a life that will be replete with naught but strife. How much longer will I carry on this guilt? I have been living with this chimera as a perpetual companion for too long now.*

Lambent golden eyes suddenly opened and regarded the face before them. Lotor knitted his brow, reached out and caressed his mother's face, wiping away the tears.

"Mom? Are you hurt?" he asked quietly.

She smiled and squeezed him softly. "No, baby. I just have something in my eyes."

"Oh, okay." He looked at the bed; his lips curved into an impish grin.

Marian shook her head and couldn't help the smile that overtook her. Lotor squirmed briefly, and she set him down. With a running leap, he landed on his siblings with an ululating war cry. The two innocent victims woke up with a start and yelled out their surprise. Marian tried not to chuckle at the tomfoolery, and she was suddenly very glad to be alive and to be able to simply enjoy her children at play.

Lupus, Lotor's twin brother, jumped up from the mess of pillows, blankets and limbs that the bed had become, and tackled his brother, buffeting him with a pillow. Lotor giggled, trying to reach ammunition to return the attack. Vulpes interrupted the two boys by leaping upon them suddenly and knocking Lupus away. She sat on Lotor and looked at her mother proudly.

Marian stood up. "Okay, enough play. Let's go and have some breakfast."

The three tangled again trying to be the first out of the bed. They crashed to the floor and finally managed to get up and stand before Marian, who was shaking her head, trying not to laugh. She inspected them carefully. Strangely enough, Lotor was the one who sported the longest hair of the three. The red mass reached his knees and covered most of his face. Lupus kept his hair just past his shoulders and Vulpes to her waist. All three, however, were

ghostly pale like their mother and could have easily passed as human except for their lambent saffron eyes and their ears were elfin.

“To the washroom. March!” Marian pointed. “I want to see my reflection on those teeth.”

“Are we gonna have to keepar mouth open for long?” Vulpes asked thoughtfully. “Cuz we maybe get tired.”

Marian giggled. “Of course not, pumpkin. It’s just an expression.”

“What’s an expression?” Lupus asked curiously.

“This,” Lotor made a face at his brother and ran to the washroom.

“Well, that’s a form of expression,” Marian looked amused. “It’s when you say things that you don’t really mean literally. You just want to illustrate a point.”

“Oh... I gets it.” Lupus looked thoughtful.

“It’s ‘I get it’,” Marian corrected.

“No, mom, I got it.” Lupus scowled, not understanding. “Really, I did.”

Marian shook her head and herded Vulpes and Lupus after Lotor.

The day progressed without untoward events. Marian instructed the children in reading and writing German, her mother tongue, and Doomite. The latter had nothing to offer besides the guttural and harsh tone, and the children preferred the German, since they could sing and recite several works of literature. Marian knew that the children had a low attention span and high volumes of energy. Her lessons were delivered in a way that would keep them entertained and tire them enough so that she could retire them at a decent hour. Marian had lost countless nights of rest until she learned that unless they were completely exhausted, they would not sleep. Settling them for the night, even with threats, was pointless. They would remain still for a few moments before forgetting why they were in bed at all and then they would get up and start their havoc anew.

At the moment, Marian had them playing out Three Musketeers. Lupus and Lotor had fought over the part of Aramis and Marian had simply allowed the boys to have their fight while she dressed Vulpes for her role.

As predicted, Lotor and Lupus had forgotten the reason for their brawl and had also grown bored of pummelling each other. They looked up expectantly at their mother. They watched her dressing Vulpes’ hair momentarily before shrugging and running off to find mischief anew.

Is the Doomite blood so strong in you? She wondered. I do not understand the need for violence. It seems to just come to you naturally. She finished tying the ribbon on Vulpes’ hair. Even you, my little girl. You are just as rough as your brothers and quite vicious. Does anyone in this forsaken planet know how to be gentle? It’s a wonder children survive at all!

“Mom!” Lupus bounded back in the room. “Lotor’s stuck in the tuba again!”

Marian tried not to burst out laughing. She was well used to her children’s antics and had given up on trying to protect them against risks. In fact, they seemed to relish getting into trouble. Anything that would prove stimulating was quite all right by them. They liked to try everything as long as it was a novelty. They wanted to be shocked, marvelled, upset or hurt so long as they weren’t bored.

True to Lupus’ words, only Lotor’s legs could be seen sticking out of the strange Doomite instrument that Marian had baptised as a ‘tuba’ for lack of a better word, because she couldn’t say the name of it. Vulpes, seeing her brother’s predicament, ran over to the mouthpiece and blew as hard as she could.

“Ooowwww!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” Lotor screeched. “Stop that!” came the muffled cry.

Vulpes giggled and immediately did it again.

“Mom!” Lotor called. “Kill her or something!”

Marian hauled Lotor out by the ankles. “What have I said about this kind of language?”

Lotor, hanging upside down, looked sheepishly at his mother. “Oops.”

“Don’t oops me,” Marian scolded sternly.

Lotor sighed and turned his body enough to see his sister. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not!” She grinned and walked over to Lotor. “You naughty! You said the naughty stuff.” She waved a scolding finger in front of his face.

“We’re gonna spank you!” Lupus smacked Lotor.

“Both of you stop,” Marian admonished, and put Lotor down. “Now let’s go back and finish getting dressed. I thought you wanted to act in the play.”

The three ran out with their arms up in the air squealing happily, the tuba incident already fading from their over active minds.

Marian followed, amused again. Then her smile faded. She couldn’t understand why, out of everything that the children heard around the castle, the only thing they were willing to parrot was the death threats.

Lotor’s and Lupus’ fingers flew gracefully across the keys on the grand pipe organ as they played the piece of music their mother was teaching them. She noted that Lotor seldom erred and Lupus constantly made the same mistakes. Vulpes stood to the side singing gracefully in time with the music.

“What’s this non-sense?” came a booming voice.

The song came to an abrupt and crashing end as Lotor and Lupus jumped up from the organ and Vulpes squealed in fear, running over to hide behind the skirts of her mother’s dress. The boys exchanged worried glances but stood still, heads bowed before their father.

“I am simply teaching them art,” Marian explained.

Zarkon snorted in derision. “Art? What do you think they are going to be? Pansies?! No child of mine will be exposed to such flowery.”

“It’s nothing to do with flowery, my king,” Marian retorted defiantly. “I am simply instructing them in how to become proper individuals. They will be cultured, erudite and functional members of society.”

Zarkon’s eyes glimmered in a flash of ire. Although he had no more uses for the woman before him, since she had provided him with heirs, he could not deny that since her emergence into his life, he had grown almost happy. He was conceited of the fact that his children were beautiful and strong, even if they looked like runts compared to a pure Doomite. Marian was also the object of desire of other men and Zarkon prided himself in having her for a wife.

“There are other ways to achieve the same result, woman,” Zarkon sneered. “Like going out to the arena and picking up a blade! They are to become warriors.” He glared at the girl still hiding. “And that one, well... Unless I find a use for her soon, she can be... *spared*.”

“Don’t you dare talk like that!” Marian snarled.

Defiant, are you not, weakling human? Zarkon thought amused. *But this time you’re going too far. I think it’s been too long since I last punished you. I should have removed those brats from you when they were younger. You’re just going to make this litter turn into useless and ineffectual louts. I have been very lenient with you for several years now. Perhaps you have forgotten who I truly am...* He shook his head. *It was folly to allow emotions to rule my judgement. Things seem to be running amok and I do hope I have not lost control over it all.*

“Don’t you dare disobey me,” Zarkon narrowed his eyes. “They are my children. I will do with them as I see fit. They are here to serve my empire.”

“Won’t!” Lotor stomped his foot down.

Marian’s eyes widened in shock and fear. She knew well enough what Zarkon could and would do to the children. To him, they were no more than tools, which could be easily replaced if they malfunctioned. Even if the old monarch had grown somewhat soft since their birth.

“What was that, boy?” Zarkon asked with a throaty growl.

“I said, won’t!” Lotor put his hands on his hips. “I wanna play!”

Zarkon moved towards Lotor who turned and ran. He stopped a few feet away and leered at his father.

“You’re fat, can’t catch me,” and Lotor ran off again.

Marian felt her knees weaken and reached for the table for support. *Lotor! You mad, mad child! Your father is going to kill us!*

Zarkon turned on Marian. “That’s what you get for teaching him this idiocy! The ruffian is defiant and a completely uncontrollable brat!”

Marian raised her chin in the air, trying not to show her fear. “Look in the positive aspect, Your Majesty, at least they are not cowards!”

Zarkon huffed. “They also don’t know respect. Perhaps it’s time I taught them that.”

“I’ll pass,” Lupus suddenly spoke, and ran after his brother.

Vulpes, terrified as she was of her father, darted after the two boys, leaving Marian alone to face the wrath of the merciless King. Seeing her children safely out of reach, Marian stood up straight and faced Zarkon. She had been well trained in melee combat in her time with the military before she was captured, and although she was at an extreme physical disadvantage and encumbered by the dress, she would fight Zarkon if she needed to. Zarkon began to follow the children .

“Leave them be,” Marian commanded.

Zarkon rounded on her, whatever remaining patience he had left quickly draining away. “What did you say?”

“I told you to leave them be,” she repeated, “do not dare touch my children.”

“Your children?” Zarkon laughed.

“They certainly want nothing to do with you.”

“I think you’ll be the first to go. I have no real use for you.” Zarkon moved.

Marian stood her ground and tried to punch Zarkon as he grabbed her. He took the hit with nothing more than a slight flinch and grappled her arms roughly. She ground her teeth against the pain and tried to prevent involuntary tears from escaping her eyes.

“You’re a coward!” she screamed.

Zarkon did not think twice. The human female in front of him had served her purpose. He had two heirs for the Crown and a girl that could probably fetch a high price in the market, since she was a Princess. With little effort, he picked up Marian and threw her against the wall. She cried out in pain and surprise but got up quickly, trying to face Zarkon again.

“Mom!”

“No, Lotor! Go away!” she yelled.

Lotor set his jaw and barrelled into his father in an attempt to protect his mother. He bounced off the broad back and crashed heavily to the floor. Zarkon stared unfazed at the fallen boy.

“I see you think you can stand your own. Let’s see just how good you are.” Zarkon raised his leg to kick Lotor.

“NO!” Marian cried out.

Lotor rolled and took only a grazing blow. He got to his feet, graced his father with a raspberry and started off again. This enraged Zarkon to the core of his very being and he ran after the boy. Marian, limping and hurting, ran after them. In a blind panic, Lotor did not see where he was going and stopped only when he cornered himself in one of the balconies overlooking the majestic throne room. Zarkon loomed over him, his eyes reflecting violence and hatred. He reached for Lotor.

“Leave him be!” Marian screamed again and punched Zarkon on the back.

“Foolish woman,” Zarkon growled and grabbed her.

Marian felt the pressure of the hands crushing her body. She struggled against him, but knew she would be impotent to break the hold. She let out a screech of agony as the hands tore her bones asunder.

“Mom!” Lotor jumped on his father.

Zarkon, growing increasingly more infuriated at his son’s behaviour, tossed Marian away from him. Broken and thrown off balance, she hit the intricately carved railing, meant to serve no other purpose other than decorative, and her weight was enough to rupture it. She fell from the gallery and lay still at the bottom, her cobalt orbs staring unseeing at the ceiling. Zarkon grabbed Lotor who had gone limp, staring at his mother’s prone form.

“Now, you little whelp...”

“Sire?” a raspy voice interrupted him.

Zarkon turned to the shadows and saw Hagar. “What you want?”

“It would be unwise to eliminate him now. He is vulnerable. It’s the perfect time to take advantage of that and shape him into what you want him to be.”

The grizzled King looked at son. “Hum... Not a bad idea.” He dropped Lotor.

The Prince simply stayed where he fell, still staring down at his mother’s body. He looked up slowly at his father, loathing and revulsion clearly shown in his eyes. He gazed back down and tears pooled in his eyes; a small sob escaped his lips before he could contain himself.

“I will have no son of mine display such weakness!” Zarkon bellowed.

Again, Lotor looked up at him. “Drop dead,” he stated deadpan.

He moved quickly, but not swiftly enough to avoid the claws, which came swooping down at him. He cried out as they raked down his back and he tumbled from the height

towards the floor. Perhaps because of the resilience of youth, he did not follow his mother's fate. Instead, he dragged his broken body and curled beside her, before he began to twirl his fingers in her hair.

“Goodbye, mom...” he murmured quietly and cried himself into unconsciousness as blood oozed out of his ruined back.