

Through Heart Shaped Pupils pt. 1
A Tales of Zenathia Story

The Cat and the Wolf

“Good... very good Toz.”

The gratuitous amount of empathy in Mr. Hatsumi’s voice sent a shudder down Yumeto’s back. Purple heart shaped pupils look over toward the middle aged wolf man hunched over his nephew’s basic sword stance. The teenage Zenathian feline’s cream hand ran through her thick hair cut short and kissed in the color of peaches. Furred digits dampened by gun oil swept her bangs back. The pink afternoon light beamed upon the rooftop patio, and her ears wobbled. The distant hum of hover car’s emanated from the haze wrapped visage of the Spire. The relaxing tones of traffic split as Toz’s mewling voice spilled into warm city air.

“It’s heavy.”

Yumeto rolled her eyes to the wobble of the training blade within Toz’s padded furred hands. The wolf boy was two years her elder and yet struggled with even the most basic of disciplines. Rough tongue pitched against the roof of her mouth, and a click pecked at her fanged muzzle.

“Something to say, Yumeto,” Mr. Hatsumi asked swiftly. Yume blinked peach eyelids and shook her head.

“No Mr. Hatsumi.” Thin cream colored fingers returned to work as Yume returned her gaze to the small pistol she was cleaning. She collected her swab and cloth, gingerly working over the worn components. *This thing must be over a hundred years old. Wonder where the old man got it.*

Waves of bubbling acid lapped at the quay side. Far from Mr. Hatsumi’s dojo, Yumeto haunched behind some wooden crates. Fingers flexed around the grip and trigger of the pistol, and Yume pulled in a breath. Rolling from behind the crate, she straightened and raised the pistol. *One fluid movement... just like that...*

Yume’s eye stared down the sights of the pistol, and purple hues widened at the imagined death of her enemies. *Bang... bang... Take that, MilGov toadie...*

The flaring orange hues of the evening light danced upon the surface of The Wall in the distance. The habitat bubble’s translucent presence shimmered across the acidic seas surrounding Port Aster. Yumeto’s heart shaped hues focused on that horizon, that distant line between the sea and the wall. *What is out there... is it you, mom?*

The scuffling of feet turned her attention down the pier. Toz approached, his training sword in hand and a hurt look in his sharp red eyes. Taking a deep breath, the Zenathian feline could

smell the tension radiating from the teenage wolf boy. She slid the pistol into the waistline of her pants.

“You don’t look so good, Toz.” She forced a smile.

“You think you’re better than me, Chikaraishi,” Toz growled, ears folding back in aggression. Yume could feel the heat of his anger and took a step back as he encroached to just a few feet away.

“I didn’t say that,” Yume hissed and her tail bit the air in agitation. Toz’s chest puffed up and he stabbed his finger at her. For a moment, Yumeto was tempted to bite it. Staying her aggression, she crossed her arms.

“I’ve never seen you touch a sword. Lift a blade.” Jealousy wet the eyes of the wolf, that much Tochi could see. She rolled her eyes as irritation tickled the nape of her neck.

“That’s because I don’t need to.”

“Right, because it’s all about guns and bombs with you. Just like your dad. And how’d that turn out for him, huh?”

Yumeto’s eyes narrowed, and her lips scrunched up. Her voice low, she menaced. “Careful now, Toz. We both lost our families that day.”

“You still have family, Yume,” Toz scoffed and unsheathed the training blade, taking up his stance. “Spar with me. Right now. Let’s see who is better.”

Cream colored hands balled into fists that trembled. Yumeto’s tail stilled and she shook her head. Nostrils flared to the acrid scent of the acid sea. “You don’t want this.”

“I do. Are you afraid? Here.” He threw his sword’s scabbard down at her feet and gestured to it. “Take it and let’s do this.”

Yume’s arm’s unfolded, and she pushed the scabbard aside with her foot. It scraped on concrete cracked by war raged long before either of them had been alive. Yumeto’s ears flicked as she took a loose stance. She kept her hands low and her gaze focused.

“I won’t need it.”

Toz released a deep growl, and charged toward the feline, his blade raised above his head, and Yume could see the violence twinkling in his red hues. The world seemed to slow as they met. She slipped around his haphazard swing like a sheet in the wind. Her foot slid out and caught his ankle, and like that Toz sailed off the pier, his rage filled voice pitched into a helpless scream.

The acid hissed and sizzled as the training blade rapidly sank. Belches and bubbles erupted from the goo-like surface. Whimpers of terror filled every breath Toz released. Yumeto grimaced at the irritating sound and her arms quaked with burning exertion. Purple hues looked down to Toz and her grip tightened on the elder teen's clothing.

"Come on," she growled aloud, triangular ears folded back. Toz's claws dug into her Gi as he climbed her body back on top of the pier. His weight released, Yume let out a breath of exhaustion as relief filled the panic that had filled her earlier.

"Holy shit.. Yume, you saved my life," Toz gasped, sitting upright next to the feline. His black furred wolf ears tilted downward. "I... I'm sorry."

Yume's ear tilted toward Toz and her gaze narrowed slightly. The indignation she'd felt at the mention of her father still stung and whiskers twitched. "Yeah.. it's whatever."

"Are you two fighting again." Mr. Hatsumi's voice shouted from the quayside and even from here Yumeto could see his brows twitching with disapproval. "Get over here!"

"Shit," Toz commented as shame pulled the corners of his muzzle low, "I lost my sword. Mr. Hatsumi is going to tan my hide into leather this time, for sure."

Yumeto felt a slight pang of guilt. She'd sent him toppling, after all, even if she hadn't anticipated how far he'd truly fall. She waved a clawed hand and shook her head. "Don't worry about it. I'll cover for you. Come on, let's go."

Yumeto walked behind Toz and her sandal clad feet scraped the ground. The ominous specter of their mentor grew larger with every step. Her whiskers twitched as they came to stop. *Just stay calm, control your breathing.*

"Where is your sword, Toz,"

"We were sparring," The Zenathian feline blurted out, her hands gripping the sides of her Gi, "I got a little sloppy when I disarmed him and the sword fell into the sea." *Easy lie...*

Mr. Hatsumi's brow arched and the steel of his eyes shifted toward Toz.

"Is that true?"

"Er.. uhm.. More or less, Uncle."

Is homie for real, right now... Yumeto glared over at Toz after he delivered his weak affirmation. Brows arched in disbelief, an expression that nearly mimicked that of their mentor. Her throat rattled with a low growl.

“To lie is to erode one’s integrity. What is discipline without integrity,” Mr. Hatsumi chided the two youngsters. “Still... perhaps this mutual deception marks the turning of a new leaf between you two.”

Dang... we got lucky... Yumeto bowed deep and her gaze fixated on the ground. Rising, she nodded her head.

“I think I might walk home tonight, Mr. Hatsumi,” she said. Toz and his uncle looked back at her in worried surprise but she waved off their concerned expressions. “Don’t worry, I’ll be fine.” *I ain’t no bitch like your nephew.*

Yume turned the corner to her neighborhood and her shoulders rolled with relief. Outside her tenement block, dangers lurked in every corner but here on her street, she at least knew those corners like the back of her hand. Her gait slackened, and she slid her hands into the canvas jack. *Home at last...*

Heart shaped hues of lavender wicked up the squalor of her home turf. The crunch of broken glass brought a twitch to her ear, and she looked down before shifting her gaze up to the shattered windows of the building next door to hers. She could hear rummaging inside, but she didn’t bother waiting to see who it was. Loaf of bread and bag of milk in tow, she continued down until she arrived at the squarish apartment building she called home.

Stairs... so many stairs... She passed by the dusty out of order sign by the elevator on her floor and paused by the door. Leaning toward the frame, she held still as lights traced across her pupil. With a warble the door opened and let out a somewhat melancholic bell to announce her arrival.

“Hey Aunt Kayce,” Yumeto called out, her ears twitching to the sound of some holoscreen program emanating from within the apartment. Bags of old clothing crowded the small apartment foyer. She pressed onwards, dropping the sack of groceries on the small shred of counter space in the tiny kitchen. In the living room, Tochi’s Heart shaped hues met the hazels of her aunt, and the older woman scoffed.

“What, that old man got you guys rolling on the ground or something,” she asked with a bite of sarcasm in her high pitched voice. “I mean really, what’s he teaching you that will be of any use. It’s not like MilGov would ever let someone with your record be a council guard.”

Caught off guard by the sudden dig, Yumeto’s head swung around and her ears folded back. *Fuck you bitch...*

Yumeto rolled her shoulders in a shrug and pulled off her jacket. This whole day was proving irritating. "That's not even what I'm doing it for."

"Well i mean, you could get a job then, instead of this training," her aunt persisted, and Tochi shook her head. Furred hands balled into fists.

"I keep my half of the rent covered, Aunty. So what's the big deal," Yumeto hissed and her gaze narrowed. An anger brought a tenseness to her spine and her tail fluffed. On her aunt's face momentary panic split cream lips and the older woman crossed her arms.

"Nothing..." she shouted aggressively and in the wake of her words a thick silence filled the room. Aunt Kayce leaned back under the muted fury of Yume's gaze before delivering one last swipe. "I'm just saying... ever since MilGov released your dad to us, things have been a lot tighter here. I mean it feels like WE'RE getting tortured now, am I right?"

Yume's eyes watered as her brow arched. Whiskers pulsed as her lips pressed together to produce a snarling frown. She turned away from her aunt.

"Oh don't make that face, Yume." Aunt Kayce waved her hand and her holoscreen program resumed. An errant flick of her wrist gestured toward the hall. "I put your dinner in your dad's room for you."

"Thanks Aunt Kayce," Yume said, opening her *gi* up as she entered the hall. Pausing at her father's door, she tilted her head back,

"Oh and auntie..." she called out. Purple hues waited for hazel eyes to meet her gaze, A sneering smirk twisted Yume's lips.

"Go choke on a chode."

"Yumeto Chikaraishi, don't you dare talk to me like that!"

Yume entered her father's room and slammed the door shut behind her, eyes rolling. *I don't need to dare to do it, you idiot. I literally just did it.*

"Fighting with your mother's sister again, Yume?"

The graveled voice of her father pulled Yumeto from her sardonic thoughts. Purple hued eyes lifted toward the bed her father spent every moment in. She drew closer, and her features softened. In the evening blue light of The Wall, Yume looked over the bandaged form of the man that meant the world to her.

“She’s talking out her ass again.” She said with a shrug and stepped over to her father’s bedside.

“Your mother would say that is quite a feat, considering how little she moves it,” Her father answered and the glimmer of a smile spread across scarred cheeks void of fur save for scant patches. Yume saw that smile and it spread to her face.

“Oh how I miss her. The sweetness of her voice. The warming reassurance of her touch.”

Carefully, Yume took her father’s only hand and pressed it to her cheek. A buzz of warmth resonated from the touch, her dainty hands tracing the swollen tendons of her father’s hand.

Azumi purred with resonance and bowed his head to his daughter.

“Thank you, Yume. In you, your mother’s kindness lives on.” He sniffled before a big smile stretched the bandages on his face. Orbless sockets covered in fabric peered pointlessly toward his daughter as brows arched with curiosity. “Tell me, what did you see today.”

A pain and an appreciation swelled within Yume’s chest. While it pained her to see her father so broken, simply having him again was worth her own private suffering. It scarcely compared to what he had been through.

“Well, when I went out this morning...”