

Cold and Blood

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Rated PG

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Summary: Written for the “Cold and Blood” opening line challenge.

Story Size: 371 words (2Kb as text)

It's cold. I taste blood.

I never wanted to be a soldier. I never wanted to be a tactician. I certainly never wanted to be a general, sending people into a battle that I know will result in death. Yet this rock, this war on a planet that was never my own, with people who either fall on their knees before me or plot my demise, has made me all of those things. Sometimes I don't know who I am anymore.

In the distance, I see a small shuttlecraft lift from its launch pad and explode into a million tiny pieces. Once upon a time, I swallowed bombs. Now I'm detonating them.

As my blood soaks the ground, I hear Zara's panicked voice shouting for a medic, but I can't take my eyes off the yellow sky and the pink clouds and the red sun, hanging huge and low on the horizon. For the countless time, I wish I'd brought a camera, since the colors are so foreign and eerie and beautiful that even a writer like myself would never be able to do them justice.

It's strange what you think of when you're dying.

The pain in my body recedes as the darkness descends, and I'm almost grateful when I can no longer keep my eyes open. With my eyes closed, I can pretend that the battlefield is a Kansan plain and that the floating sensation I feel is actually flight. I can pretend that the sky is blue and the clouds are white and the sun is yellow and warm on my skin. And I can pretend that the woman who cradles me in her arms and wets my face with her tears is the wife of my heart and not the one chosen for me in the interest of political expediency.

As we wait, her for her medic, me for my end, she lifts my hand to my chest and closes my palm around the ring I always wear around my neck.

“Live, Kal. Live for her.”

It's cold. I taste blood.

THE END