

**Atra Ventus #11708**  
*The Magical 1% Entry*

—  
**The Whim of the Powerful**

*You're an idiot.*

The words stood proudly within the confines of his mind, but not even a hint of them was carried upon the steady breaths that pushed between the man's barely parted lips. Lok'tah watched as a pair of Loyalist guards stepped through the doorway and into the outer halls where he stood, the limp form supported between them being the recipient of his unspoken statement. For what else could he call the being who had obviously been unable to avoid capture?

Meanwhile, Lok'tah's weathered face merely looked on. Deep ridges, formed from wrinkles and scars tracing paths through his features, belied an existence that had seen more than its fair share, despite his relatively young age. What remained of his teeth mashed against his gums in a grotesque mockery of a mouth as his tongue slid into the empty spaces between. It was a nervous habit he had never quite pushed past.

Nerves aside, he wasn't the one under the oh so tender care of the Brotherhood he served — though 'served' may have been far too strong a word to accurately describe his affiliation. No... servitude implied he believed in the cause, when all he cared for was surviving through to the next day. He had no abilities or unique attribute that brought attention upon his so-called skills. That was for others. Not something meant for the likes of him. A 'Sanitation Technician' was the title upon his contract and that was the role he fulfilled. Sanitation. A marvelously clean word for a job that was anything but. And yet he carried it out day after day, meeting the most barren definitions of survival through the meager income it provided.

Lok'tah stiffened and stood straight — as straight as his haggard spine would allow — as another form stepped through the doorway where he waited. His fists twisted back and forth upon the handles of the hoversled he had been leaning upon with white knuckles betraying what could no doubt be sensed by the black robed woman. Sensed was the right word to use, he knew, recognizing the witch for what she was the instant his eyes had locked upon her. Lok'tah's eyesight may not be what it once was, yet he could make out the slicked back, blonde hair of the woman standing there. Her pale features were like porcelain contrasted by ruby lips that were perhaps a touch too heavily layered. Her tight, form-fitting jumpsuit clung like a second layer of skin to her features and by all accounts would suitably outline a beauty that would make a victim out of the most stalwart of suitors.

Unfortunately, all that gave way the instant you settled upon her eyes. Pure maliciousness lay within the emerald irises found there; a sensation akin to bony, dead fingers wrapping around your heart and squeezing oh-so slowly as your very soul cried for mercy. Corruption crept at the edges of those eyes in the form of veins, once blue, seemingly turned to black beneath her flesh and coursing down her neck.

It was her kind that he avoided above all others. It was them who held the power within the Brotherhood. Lok'tah made sure to force his gaze towards the ground, not that it was hard to do so once meeting her eyes even for an instant. He waited with his heart beating heavily in his chest while his tongue flit upon his gums once more.

"You look barely capable," the woman stated bluntly. Despite the sultry nature of her tone, there was no mistaking the threat left unspoken. He imagined, for a moment, her lip curled up in disgust as she took in his nigh decrepit form. He saw her features turning cruel with malicious intent.

Would these be his final breaths? Would he feel an unseen force gripping his throat and choking the life from him, or perhaps the sudden heat of plasma searing through his flesh and sinew?

Instead he experienced none of those things, only relief as echoing footsteps indicated the Sith's departure. His shoulders sunk alongside the long exhale of a breath he hadn't been consciously holding. Lok'tah's fingers unfurled from around the handles of the hoversled and he felt pangs coursing up his arms from his fingers. Just how hard had he been gripping them? He flexed his finger joints which sent fresh jolts through his nerves but he paid it no mind. The man was accustomed to pain by this point in his life and a little more out of necessity wouldn't bother him.

Lok'tah took a deep breath to steady himself before pushing the hoversled through the opening and into the room. The lights were dim, of course, as they were always dim these days. He may be appear old beyond his years but Lok'tah was far from lame. He paid attention to the holovids and kept himself informed enough to remain useful. His uniform ruffled in the quiet confines of the room as he shuffled along, an amusing contrast to the smooth pace the hoversled maintained.

Undesirable. That's the word they used so often these days to describe anything that was no longer acceptable within the regime. It was something Lok'tah endeavored never to become.

Eventually he came to the first of his tasks, the waste primarily located where it always was. His shaking fingers began moving along it searching for valuable metals or any items of worth that remained beneath the scraps of cloth. Whatever items he discovered were removed from the waste and placed into a prepared container. His focus never wavered from the task at hand even as his hands trembled. It hurt to move some days when the ache was greater than most. Why did it have to hurt? Had he not suffered enough indignities?

A sudden rush of air caught his attention, akin to an exhale, and drew Lok'tah's gaze towards the end of the table. He blinked several times before he moved back to the task at hand. The man pulled a holopad from his pouch and performed a quick catalogue of the items he had collected. Once assigned to the bin, he closed the container and placed it back on the hoversled. Pain, fiery hot and uncaring, burst from his knee and sent the human crashing to the floor.

Lok'tah merely lay there for several moments as the pain ran its course. Fresh tears dripped soundlessly from his eyes as he rode the final waves of agony that made up the reality of his life. He couldn't afford the luxury of medical procedures that would make him 'pretty' once more, not to mention an escape from the pain. So Lok'tah remained trapped. A prisoner of his own flesh.

He rose slowly, once a semblance of numbness had returned to his limbs, and groaned quietly while feeling his cheek sticking to a substance on the floor. As if the cruelty of fate had not quite had its fill, Lok'tah managed to sit up fully only to smack the top of his head against the table. Groaning once more as he reached up to rub his head protectively, he paused as an object slipped from the table and dangled in front of him. The man blinked several times as he fought to focus in the dimness of the room, only to realize he was staring at a... tail?

His brown eyes followed the limp object as it barely swayed from side to side, any kinetic force remaining from its fall fading away. Lok'tah brushed past it and finished rising uneasily to his feet, turning to look upon the table once more. The Ryn stared towards the ceiling with lifeless eyes while a look of horror was etched into her features. No other signs of movement came as the tail stilled itself once more, having been knocked free by his clumsiness and not some last remaining testament of vitality.

He was suddenly horrifically aware of the smell within the room. It was as if fear and death had become palpable substances and spread their mark permanently within. His nose, stubby as it was, curled in reaction to the metallic scent. Lok'tah reached up to touch his cheek and his fingers came away tinged with red. Bile fought to escape the confines of his stomach, forcing the human to curl inward violently as he forced it back down his throat.

It was so much easier to think of it as waste, this body that had once held a life the same as any other. So long as he maintained that illusion he was free of the burden of conscious. Waste had no family, nor did it have hopes or dreams. Waste had never experienced pain, fear, or loss. It was so much easier. So easy...

There was nothing easy about it. It was a cowardly act by a man that could only care about himself. That was the only power left to him, robbed of all else by the cruelties of life and conflict. He was a cripple and only climbed from the filth of decay each day for the sole purpose of surviving until the next one. Yet it was the only recourse left to Lok'tah. He composed himself once more with shaky, uneven breaths and looked upon nothing but 'waste' once more. He gripped it by its center of mass and hoisted the bulk of it onto the hoversled with a meaty thud as it dropped from the table.

He drew his forearm across his forehead to relieve his eyes from the salty sting of sweat as it dripped down along his brow. With another centering breath he grabbed a scrubbing cloth and went to work on the table. He could feel the muscles of his arm burning with protest as he moved in little circles from end to end, occasionally pausing to rinse off the material before beginning again. The process repeated itself somewhat as he swapped the cloth out for a mop and went to work on the floors. He wasn't able to fully extend his arms in order to reach everywhere, which resulted in Lok'tah shuffling around behind his mop.

Time passed of its own accord as Lok'tah quietly worked, though he never gave much thought to it. He merely did what he was paid to do, as he had always done. It wasn't his place to question the edicts of those who ensured he had food in his stomach, nor did he want to put his neck on the chopping block just yet. Life, as terrible as it was, was still a life to be lived. Lok'tah quietly put his cleaning materials on the hoversled with the rest of the waste before turning to make his leave of that horrid place.

"So you're more capable than you look," echoed a familiar voice within the confined space.

Lok'tah's eyes widened almost imperceptibly in response to the witch's return. A mixture of emotions coiled in his gut as questions bounced within his brain. How long had she been watching him? Why had she returned? What did she want from him? Is this the end?

So many questions he couldn't dare ask, lest the answers be as terrible as his fears would have him believe. Lok'tah shuffled forward with his grip upon the hoversled once more and his eyes cast down to the ground. All he wanted was to make it out of that room in more or less the same state with which he had entered it. Heavy footfalls echoed in his ears as the Sith strode deeper into the room with feline grace. Something in the way she moved told him that if she wished it, not a single sound would herald her movements.

As if he didn't already know that.

"Hold," the woman stated suddenly. The one word was like a punch to his gut, causing the male to stumble before bringing himself to a stop. "Before you leave, filth, is there something you wish to confess?"

She managed to draw out the last word of her question like the sound of a dagger pulling free of its sheath. A predatory gleam flickered in her eyes as Lok'tah turned feebly to stare at her in horror, her lips drawn into the snake-like grin of a hunter who caught its prey. How he could ever for a moment have thought her beautiful escaped him entirely. She was monstrous.

"Confeth?" he asked unevenly with his tongue slipping messily between his teeth. The lisp was abhorrent to even Lok'tah himself, which is why he so rarely spoke. Something told him that answering was the wisest course of action in that particular instant. "What ith there to confeth?"

She closed the distance between them in a blur of movement that was beyond his eyes' capability to follow. An long nailed hand gripped his shoulder tightly as she pressed in close from behind. "I'm giving you this one chance," she hissed, "to speak your mind and perhaps lessen my wrath." Her tongue slid out from between her teeth and dragged over the contours of his cheek, working a path through the splash of crimson that had begun to stain there. "Unless you want me to become truly monstrous."

Everything within Lok'tah froze in that moment as she repeated his unspoken thoughts back to him. There was something utterly wrong with the idea that not even your own thoughts could be considered safe, and it was just that which he discovered. He could feel a warmth flooding down his legs as evidence that he had soiled himself. The cold laughter of the Sith

seemed to come from everywhere at once, even mingling among the silence of his own mind. His unasked question had been answered. This was how Lok'tah was to die.

"Cara," another voice cut in from outside the room as a dark silhouette broke up the light of the entrance. "That is quite enough."

The softly lilting accent brought with it a sense of relief to Lok'tah. It wasn't so much the words themselves — as the voice forming them was far from warm and reassuring — but what they represented. They were his salvation. In that moment, he had no control over his fate. Lok'tah was at the mercy of the powerful few that truly ran the Brotherhood.

"I will not sit idly, Ventus, as he thinks me a witch," Cara hissed between clenched teeth. Her lack of response to the other man's instructions brought renewed fear to Lok'tah as his slick palms slipped upon the handle of the hoversled.

The newcomer strode slowly into the room and became ever more imposing as he neared. He stood more than a head taller than both Cara and Lok'tah and carried himself with the same self-assured confidence as full grown Rancor in its own territory. "If you did not act the part, perhaps he would think otherwise," the man coolly replied.

Light finally revealed the man fully with his black hair pulled back into a ponytail. His cheekbones were sharp with a trimmed beard running along his jaw, and yet his face seemed somehow crestfallen. His dark robes possessed only a left sleeve, allowing for the defined musculature of his arms to rest fully on display through the exposed arm. Grey eyes with gold starbursts around their pupils focused on Cara without wavering.

Lok'tah couldn't help but feel like the air was growing somehow thicker, like a great pressure were being exerted upon them, even as the Sith woman opened her mouth to respond. "Shouldn't the Voice's hound be back in his kennel—" Cara's words became caught in her throat while her grip upon Lok'tah's shoulder began to slacken. "No... please..."

Short whimpers and sudden, sharp inhales came from the woman at his back but Lok'tah didn't dare to look. He merely held his breath as he felt the Sith backing away with shaky steps. She suddenly howled with a mixture of anguish and sheer terror, a sound so sudden it could have been a gunshot. The pained cry caused Lok'tah to turn but he was stopped by the large man's voice once more.

"Leave us," he said, and Lok'tah had no interest in arguing the matter. Pushing the hoversled forward the crippled human shuffled forward as fast as his legs could take him no matter how it pained him. Pain, after all, meant he was still alive.

The door hissed shut behind him, although he was aware that he had done nothing to trigger it. The powers on display within that room continued to fill Lok'tah with dread even as another muffled scream could be heard. Fear fueled him onward. Fear for what could have happened to him at the mercy of the Sith, and the unmistakable display of just how powerless he truly was. Lok'tah didn't deviate from his path as he pushed the hoversled and waste to the incinerator drop off as was required of him.

The passage of time lost meaning to him once more as Lok'tah worked in a trance-like state. He had flickering awareness of laughter in regards to his soiled uniform and the jeers of his peers. He knew that he hadn't wasted any breath in explaining what had happened, not that anyone would have cared, let alone believed him. No, the only thing that truly mattered was that he had found his way back to his bunk. There he had at least the illusion of safety.

Lok'tah glanced around the dorm and at the other bunks, counting the cycles as he waited for the refresher to become accessible. He needed time to decompress, and time to recover from the harrowing experience he had endured.

And at the end of it all, he knew there was always a chance that the next day could be the same, if not worse. The horrid truth that the Sith Cara and those like her would still be among them day after day... and they were all merely surviving at the whim of the powerful.