



*All I Want For Sithmas Is You*

"No, no, you're doin' it wrong."

Cora sighed in defeat. He looked hopelessly at his little creation — it was meant to be an autumnal forest scene, but was really looking more like someone had taken a hose to a canvass — and then back at his cohorts in cookery, who were shaking their heads at him. They already had a full plate of primly decorated cookies beside each of them, at their elbows. He was still on his first; and it was a mess.

"This is...different than typical painting," muttered the Pantoran, his lip jutting out. He had been apprehensive, if delighted, by the idea of a cookie-decorating party with the Tenbrisses, but found himself at a loss when staring at the containers of sprinkles and sparkles and tubes and bowls of homemade icing and food dye crammed onto the tiny kitchen table. The cookie shapes already dictated a certain direction of medium — a tree should be some kind of tree, of course. But the boys' trees looked not much like trees and yet so much more festive, where his efforts were a sham.

"I don't know what I'm doing," admitted the noble, hanging his head. He frowned at the curl of pink hair that stuck to his cheek with a bit of drying red icing, peeling it off.

"We'll show ya," said Noga, reaching over and snatching the cookie Cora had been working on. He snapped it in two, handed half to his little brother, then shoved it in his mouth. "Sh'not bou bein righ."

"Pardon?"

They were talking solely in Mirialan, and while Cora had grown apt at the language and at the family's particular dialect, it was hard to understand Noga with his mouth full.

"He said it's not about being right," Leda explained, squirting a mess of purple onto a mitten and then shaking yellow and green sprinkles over it. "It's about having fun."

"Yeah, that." Noga jumped back in. "Stop trin' so hard, Caramel."

"If you say so," Cora said dubiously. Even after all his time with the family, it still was odd to him that one was supposed to do something imperfectly in order to do it right.

"Duh I'm like, the cookie MASTER."

"Hey!" protested Leda. "I'm mastery too."

"You're dumb and second."

"Nuh-uh!"

"Uh-huh!"

"Ay, ay, ay, boys! You're both second. I'm best," taunted Ruka, who stuck out his tongue. His younger brothers stopped poking at each other to turn on him as a united front.

"NU-UH!" they both whined, and Ruka just waved a spoon at them. It was a new, nice set of sturdy wooden spoons, an early Life Day gift from Cora, along with the creamy apron the Mirialan currently wore.

"So," Cora interrupted, waving to get the younger boys' attention. He gestured at his new design, a snowflake that had been striped hot pink and some sort of splotchy orange that hadn't been mixed through. "Is this better?"

The kids studied it intently, whispering to each other and peering at him, stroking their smooth faces as if judges on a holonet show. Cora made as if to faint from suspense, and they chuckled.

"Yeah, that's better!" Noga said. "Now—"

"—you eat it!" finished Leda, stuffing another cookie into his mouth.

"I thought the point was decorating them first?"

"It's decorated."

Well, he couldn't really argue that.

"Go on," advised the Sith behind him, lifting the treat in question with a scrunch of his nose and an invisible hand, so that it hovered before Cora's mouth. "S'tradition."

The Pantoran shrugged then dipped forward enough to take a large bite out of the proffered,

frosted cookie, chewing and swallowing slowly. It was chewy and crisp at once, flavorful and delicious the way all his partner's food was. He was about to compliment as much when a warming sensation overtook his tongue and, very quickly, clawed down to his stomach.

*Warming* being closer to *on freaking fire*.

Cora flapped his hands at his mouth, looking an unusual, unhealthy shade of mulberry as he gasped, tongue sticking out. "Whyisitsospicy?!"

"Everything should be spicy," answered all three boys in unison, the phrase flowing smoothly, as if it had been echoed hundreds of times. They snickered. Cora whimpered as his throat tried to turn into a spit roast.

Ruka walked over and, like some sort of angel from on high, handed him a tall glass of thick milk, floury fingerprints on its sides. He kissed the Pantoran's cheek after Cora gratefully chugged in desperation, gasping for dear life when he was done. "Sorry, highness. Family recipe, lots of chilies and bitter chocolate and cinnamon in these. I made a batch of dough without any extra kick just for you, though. It's the blue."

Sure enough, when the Jedi's watering golden eyes followed his secret husband's scarred, black-nailed, flour-coated fingers, there was a tray of cookies on the counter that had a pale indigo shade to them. He felt himself smiling. He might have blushed, had his blood vessels the capacity to dilate any further — as it was, he felt like his sinuses would be clear for a week.

"Thank you," he managed around what he was *absolutely sure* was a blistered tongue. Ruka grinned at him, rubbed the back of his neck bashfully, got flour on it and in his hair in the process, and turned back to the counter, kneading more dough. Cora found himself briefly enraptured by the flexing of his partner's shoulder and back muscles. And also the apron. And remembering the last time he'd been in nothing but said apron.

"...aramel?"

"Huh uhm what? What?" Cora babbled, shaking himself and looking to the boys. Noga and Leda were both shaking their heads and chortling at him.

"You were looking at *niano's* butt again," teased Noga, making a lewd face with his tongue sticking out.

"Are you gonna make a butt cookie so you can eat it?" Leda added, quiet and way too sly for a nine-year-old.

"Gentlemen!" protested the Pantoran, fighting off a flush. "I— I was not and I am not and don't say such things! It ill becomes you."

"Yeah," Ruka agreed over his shoulder. "If anyone's eating anyone else's ass, it's gonna be me, right babe?"

He winked. Noga and Leda gave a loud, laughing, "eeeeeeew!"

Cora debated burying his face in the bowl of powdered sugar. Instead, he just picked up a bit of flour and threw it at his husband. Ruka tipped his head back and guffawed, and the Pantoran felt any of his offense melt like frost on a summer day. His bones may actually have turned to syrup. Was that still possible?

"That's right," Cora rejoined after a moment, looking up through his lashes at the man across the kitchen from him. "And I'd not have anyone else, since you make me fall to pieces every day I get to see you smile."

This time, the boys really *did* "ew," complete with groans and gacking noises. Ruka, on the other hand, went stock still like a bantha in headlights. He fidgeted, ducked his head, wiped at his nose, leaving a smear of sugar there. "You too, my love," he mumbled at last, more to his bare feet than anything else, and hurriedly went back to making tiny people and trees and presents out of rolled-out cookie goodness.

The Mirialan started singing quietly, upbeat and dancing holiday tunes from his homeworld, and the Pantoran went and took up the blue cookies and started frosting those after carefully checking the icing for any spice, and Noga and Leda laughed, and it took the four of them all of twenty minutes to get into an all out flour-throwing war that spanned from the kitchen to the hallway and out onto the porch, where a truce was promptly declared because it was 'holy kriffing cold'. Cora generously agreed even though he had the upper hand, feeling rather toasty and at home in the chill.

When the baking and decorating was done and a plate or two of snacks had survived the traditional onslaught of sugar for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, they all gathered around the table and started stringing roasted corn together to hang up in garlands. They each had mugs of hot chocolate with them; and the Mirialan boys' drinks were all rather hot in the spice fashion too, which made Cora comment that they'd burned off their taste buds. Ruka just kissed him deep and filthy to prove 'his tongue worked just fine', an argument the Pantoran was *more* than happy to concede.

They had to stop before the table got put to, uh, very different use. Noga and Leda through kettle corn at them.

Somehow, before anyone knew it, it was the boys' bedtime. Leda was fast asleep with a cheek still full of kernels from his snacking, and Noga was nodding off where he sat. Ruka grabbed up Leda and carried him upstairs, while Cora gently shook Noga.

"Come on, sweetie, time for bed," he murmured, smiling gently at the young boy who got so much less snarky when he was sleepy. *I wonder who he possibly got THAT from*, Cora thought fondly. "Come on."

"Don' wanna..." mumbled Noga, trying to make himself more comfortable in the pillow of his crossed arms. "Go 'way, big brotha..."

"No, sweetie, it's Cora," huffed the Pantoran. "Come on, let's get you to bed. I'll help you."

"Tha's wha' I said," yawned Noga, glaring as he squinted his eyes open and allowed himself to be pulled upright.

Cora froze with the words. Then, he melted as the implication set in. His eyes quickly flooded, and he sniffed, and it was surely just...just the spice still in the air from the baking. Yes.

"Okay, *ninaito*," he replied, using the Mirialan term for little brother like Ruka did instead of the informal one for child like he usually did. Noga hugged him, and didn't let go, and so Cora lifted him up and carried him over to the stairs. Ruka met them at the top, blinking and moving aside for Cora to get by. The Pantoran tucked the boy into bed with his brother then left the room, padding back downstairs to join his husband in cleaning up with as little ruckus as they could make.

"You have a good time, babe?" Ruka asked him, leaning over from where he was elbow-deep in dishwasher to kiss and nuzzle him. Cora nuzzled back, a smile stretching his cheeks so hard it hurt his face a bit.

"Yes, angel, I did." He kissed Ruka's flour-tipped nose. "I loved it. And I love you. Happy Life Day."

"I love you too. Happy Evening," Ruka replied, grinning himself, the scars on his face not able to hold his mirth back. "Hey, um, I have something for you."

"Oh?" the Pantoran questioned, his rising brows making the golden marks on his forehead twist. "I thought we already did presents."

"I kinda had one more. Just give me a minute to finish up here, ay?"

"Alright, love. Do you want any help?"

"Nah, nah, you go sit, shoo. I'll be there in a sec."

Cora tiptoed quietly away, grabbing a few things from the table to put up as he went despite the Mirialan's protests, and settled himself on the family's ratty two-seater couch in the laundry room. There was only enough space to stick his legs out and kick the machines, but it was one of the warmest spots in the house when the drying unit ran, and prized for it.

He was almost dozing off, having settled into his spot, when Ruka nudged his knee with his own. The Jedi blinked muzzily up to see his partner's arms all full of something, his hands occupied by frosted cups of hot drinking chocolate. Cora gasped in a mingle of delight and concern, taking one to free up his boyfriend's grip.

"Thanks," the other murmured, flopping down and narrowly avoiding sloshing their drinks everywhere. He arranged himself, squirming until he got his body around Cora's and the thing he carried sort of pushed into the Pantoran's lap. "Here. Happy Life Day, again, kinda."

Setting his mug carefully on the floor below him, Cora took up the object. It wasn't wrapped like their other gifts — of which there had only been a few, upon agreement, and most for Noga and Leda — and looked to be an album, its faux leather cracked and worn. It creaked when the Pantoran opened it and promptly squealed.

"Oh my Ashla..." he breathed. "Is that...?"

"Yeah, that's ma and me."

Cora nearly vibrated right out of his spot. He was holding a *photo album*. There were holoshots printed on flimsiplast tucked into these pages. A quick flick through the book revealed that a good chunk of the ones at the back were blank, unfilled, as if someone had stopped trying or caring, but the first several were packed. On the very opening page was a prim, neat shot of a woman Cora recognized as Ruka's mother, standing with a newborn in front of a street. The very street they were on now. Perhaps it had been right after she'd moved to Kias?

He stared at the picture for a long time, seeing the Mirialan woman for once smiling without alcohol to aid her, looking healthy, young. Baby-Ruka's face wasn't really clear, so he turned the page and examined another set of holos.

"Oh my Ashla, you're so precious!"

"Ay, ay, *stooop*. I am not."

"Yes you are, look at this!" A photo was shoved at the green-skinned boy's face for emphasis. "You're adorable. Eee. The scowl is even the same."

Ruka merely grunted, crossing his arms and slouching.

"Yes, that one! Right there!"

"Ahh, *qulo los jalla as.*"

"I will not, and don't be rude to my mother," chided the Pantoran with good cheer, flipping a page in the small booklet. He snuggled comfortably against his boyfriend, bracketed by the man's outstretched legs, back pressed into his broad chest. Ruka grumbled more, resting his chin on the top of Cora's head as the blue-skinned boy smiled pleasantly up at him before turning his attention back to the album.

It was, Ruka whispered to him as the night wore on, the only one the Tenbriss family had, and most of it contained holos of Noga and Leda that Ruka had been as diligent in taking as he could. The story went like most of the Mirialan's: his mother hadn't taken many pictures of them, but Ruka had wanted to preserve every moment of his little siblings that he could, and so he had saved and scraped money for a disposable holocam and taken photos throughout the years, always keeping it with him until the storage film ran out. Mostly, the shots were of big events; Noga and Leda's small, shared birthday parties, their first day of school, things like that. But a few were candid, summers with ice cream or moments caught sleeping or playing. None had Ruka in them, always the taker, but that was okay; Cora had resolved to take plenty with his boyfriend already.

Still, what was there was precious, and the Pantoran was ecstatic to look. It was only fair, after all. The last time they had been at the Ya-ir house together for dinner, two nights ago, Angie had pulled out *The Book*, and it all went downhill, depending on one's definition, from there. Cora's mother had changed her attitude considerably towards Ruka since their return from the war, and she had been all too pleased to reveal a veritable shelf of holos, prints, and vids of her "baby boy."

Cora had tried to melt into the carpet somewhere around the third edition of just baby bath photos.

Still, Ru had obviously enjoyed it, keeping most of his comments in Mirialan for their audience's sake — "does it make me a pervert for staring at your ass as a kid? Cause babe, you grew up *fiiiine* and I just want to get you in a big tub like this one here and bend you over—" "Ruka! Shut up!" — and Cora couldn't help but love seeing him happy.

Now, Cora examined another picture of a younger Ruka, perhaps three, or five. It was hard to guess. The shot was grainy, and like many others, the Mirialan looked more grumpy than not, as if disgruntled by the tiny bowl of noodles that he had gotten mostly down his shirt.

"You didn't smile a lot," Cora commented, lightly pinching his boyfriend's leg and pouting. Scarred lips bent to kiss his ear.

"I wasn't very smiley, never was." His tone turned rumbly and a little sweet. "Then I met you."

Cora blushed, turning the page again. This time, Ruka was actually happy-looking. He was covered in scrapes and bruises from who knew what, but he grinned as he lofted a faded ball.

"I remember that," said the Mirialan behind him with some surprise, chuckling. "Me and some other kids were playing in the street and the ball got kicked up onto somebody's roof. Mr. Narody. He was old and smoked spice and he hated us, sprayed kids with his hose when he caught them near his property. Everybody was saying it was lost, but I went over there and climbed up his wall cause there was a dumpster there and I got it. He whooped my ass for knocking his shingles off."

"Sweet Ashla, honey!" Cora exclaimed, fretting. Why did the Mirialan's stories always have to be so sad? He sat up and turned back to his boyfriend with worry, but Ruka was still grinning like a proud cat.

"Ay, nah, none of that. I got it back." The smirk spread, wicked and beaming just like in the picture. "That old franger couldn't run me off, nuh-uh. I just had to fix his roof later and he paid me in smokes."

"You smoked when you were like, ten?"

"Think that was seven, actually. But I stopped when mama got pregnant again and then there Noga was. Best damn thing I'd ever seen." His smile changed, then fell away, and he leaned back. "C'mon, babe, don't look upset, please? I thought seein' this would be good, make you happy..."

"I'm not upset," Cora said, curling close again. He didn't turn another page, instead just staring at the picture and listening to his partner's heartbeat under his ear. The Pantoran tried to imagine the both of them as children, thrown into a room together. A scraped up boy who frowned and smoked and little him, buttoned up and proper and always asking for another set of ballet shoes because he liked having lots of different colors. "Hey, angel?"

"Yeah, highness?"

"Do you think we would have been friends, when we were young? If we'd meet then?"

Ruka hummed behind him, his warm, accented baritone rumbling from his chest throughout Cora's bones and making him feel melty in the good way. "Probably not. I wouldn't have liked you cause I was stupid and a little kriffing brat. You woulda probably been all nice too, just like now, even if I was mean to you."

"I might have been scared of you," Cora admitted. Ruka only chuckled.



"But you would have been nice anyway. Offered me snacks or something."

"Well, of course. It's only polite," huffed the blue-skinned boy, making his tattooed partner laugh again.

"See? Ay, love, you're perfect. And I woulda been too stupid to treat you like it, probably." He paused a minute, fingers moving through the Pantoran's pink hair. "Or...hell, knowing you, you'd keep being nice anyway, and I would still end up falling head over kriffing heels for you and knowing I wanted to marry you since the first time I saw you and been twice as stupid about it. Just grabbing your hand and pulling you around and getting mad if you didn't pay attention to me and shit. Punch your arm just to get you to look at me. Go dig around for hours to find you a pretty piece of glass from the gutter, but it'd have to be the right blue, like you are. And I'd give it to you, and I'd say it meant we were married and you had to be mine forever and mean it. And you'd just be too nice to tell me to frang off..."

Cora's lip trembled. It was what made him realize his eyes were watering, and he wiped at them, causing Ruka to stiffen in alarm.

"Cor? You okay? I'm sorry, I—"

"Not a word, you dummy," Cora shushed quickly, pressing his finger and then his lips to his boyfriend's and secret-just-for-them-husband's to silence him. "I'd have married you and meant it too. Then and now. It doesn't matter. I love you. I couldn't ever not."

A reddish flush grew on Ruka's cheeks, making the pale mint-white stripes of his scars pop. He smiled shakily, chocolate drying at the corner of his mouth, and kissed Cora in return.

"That's cause you were always crazy."

"No, you were just always meant for me. And me for you." He said it a little shyly, blushing purple, but firmly, confident. Ruka's flush deepened, and he buried his face in the Pantoran's neck, grabbing him to hug him tight.

"I love you, Cor," mumbled the Mirialan into his skin.

Cora glanced at the album he'd dropped, at their mugs, listened to the sound of two little brothers breathing upstairs through the thin floorboards. He wrapped his arms around his companion, smelled his hair, and hugged him back.

And he whispered, "I love you too."