

# What He Giveth, He Taketh Away

3 9 A B Y - C O R U S C A N T

For Sivall's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, Connor gave her a loth cat.

It was pure white with red eyes—an albino, and it loved her. She remembered waking up to Connor telling her to come down stairs, and showing her the Loth cat sitting at the foot of the grand staircase with a black bow wrapped around its neck. It wasn't a gift, he had told her, but a test of her responsibility. It only accidentally coincided with her birthday.

Siv named her Fia.

For eight months, Fi and Sivall were inseparable. They played together, ate together, slept together; neither one was ever too far from each other. After a lifetime of loneliness, Fia was a breath of fresh air to Siv; no longer did she have to spend her nights alone, to eat her meals alone, to exist alone. To Fia, Siv's warmth and love was better than the cold streets of Coruscant.

They would have been together forever.

But Connor had other plans.

Exactly eight months after Fia came into her life, Connor called Sivall to the courtyard for her final trial. She had failed the other two in spectacular fashion, dimming further the Grant's hope in her future as a Sith. This was her last chance to prove to her owners that she was worth their time, worth their money, worth their love—and she would, no matter the cost. This time would be different.

When the Chiss woman walked into the courtyard, Connor was already there, and in front of him Fia sat in a cage. The Loth cat looked panicked—never once had Sivall caged or subdued her. Fia was always free to run and play as she wished, because Fia always returned to Sivall's side. Instantly, an invisible force gripped her heart. *Something was very wrong.*

*Oh.*

With her heartbeat hammering in her ears, Sivall made her way towards her owner and sat on her knees in front of the cage that held Fia. The Loth cat looked at her with wide, terrified eyes. She felt it too, felt the edge in the air. The sith-in-training looked up at Connor, her eyes apprehensive, her stomach in knots.

*Oh no.*

"Today is your final trial," Connor stated. His voice, as always, was matter-of-fact. There was no arguing with him. That fact only made the knot forming in Siv's throat grow in size.

*No.*

"A major rite of passage for a site is called "The Sacrifice"," Connor's eyes drifted from Sivall to Fia, "A trial in which you must kill something you love to show your dedication to the dark side."

No. No.

Sivall felt like she was going to throw up.

“There are very few things you love, surely none of them worth the trial. So, we supplied you with this... *vermin*.”

*‘She’s not vermin!’* The Chiss woman screamed mentally, her hands clenching the cloth of her tunic as tight as she could, *‘She’s not! She’s wonderful!’* Her grip was so tight on the fabric of her top that draped over her legs, that her nails cut through straight into her palm.

“I’ve seen you grow to love it, and it... grew to love you.” Connor’s lip pulled back in a disgusted snarl, like such things were beneath him. “And now it will serve it’s purpose, just like you will.”

*No, no, no, no, nononononono-*

“Kill it. Prove you have what it takes to be a Sith.”

**No!**

The words were like a punch in her gut. Sivall gasped loudly, her hands flying up to cover her indigo lips. She had hoped, and hoped against hope, that he wouldn’t ask this of her. She had sent out silent prayers every night for eight months that Connor wouldn’t take Fia from her, that they’d stay together for the rest of Fia’s life. *And now he expected her to kill her?*

“N-No... no... please... father please...” The Chiss’s voice cracked with pain and heartbreak.

“Kill it.”

“Father *please*, anything else! I’ll do anything else! Anything.” She felt the tears now, burning at her throat and her chest and her eyes. It felt like her veins were pumping with liquid ice.

“Kill. It.” Connor’s eyes were free of pity, bearing down on Sivall who was still on her knees. Fia began to thrash in her cage, wanting to be free, sensing the danger. Hisses and caterwauls echoed from the loth cat, talons scratching against steel. Sivall reached out to her, both physically and through the force, not caring that Fia’s claws ripped through her skin like butter.

“Shhh.... Shhhh.... Shhh *ch’acah*....” Siv’s hands found their way through soft, perfumed fur, trying to console the loth cat flailing under her fingers. “Shhh, love. Shhh my Fia...”

Fia began to calm, her red eyes meeting Sivall’s. She could see the fear there and in the heaving of the loth cat’s sides. Tears finally broke through the Chiss’s façade, rolling down her cheeks. Her heart was *breaking*, disintegrating in her chest. *She couldn’t breathe.*

“Kill it, or I will, and I will make it *suffer*.”

Sivall felt rage for the first time in her life. She had read in books that rage was like a fire, a roaring tidal wave of flame that burned everything in its path. But she didn’t feel fire. Instead, rage was like a cold chunk of ice in her chest, suffocating her under its weight.

The chiss woman's eyes slowly moved from the loth cat to point daggers into Connor's soul, rage rolling off her in waves. She saw her owner falter for a second for the first time since she had been brought to Coruscant.

Arms and hands gushing blood, Siv stood next to the cage holding her beloved pet. Lightning crackled off her like a brewing storm, her eyes glowing. Then before she knew it, she lunged—only for her face to connect to a hand, sending her flying. Her vision darkened for a second from the impact, her head reeling.

*"Don't you ever raise a hand towards me, you waste of oxygen."* The vitrol in Connor's voice was more potent than she had ever heard. And then she heard Fia yowl in pain.

The Chiss raised her torso off the ground, the world dangerously tilting on its side. She collapsed back to the floor, only for her swimming vision to catch Connor pull Fia from her metal prison. The loth cat floated from the ground, squirming and yowling and clawing at the invisible energy holding it aloft.

In all this time, Sivall didn't know Connor could use the force.

Fia's death was not quick. Sivall watched, helpless, powerless, crushed against the ground as her beloved companion wrung of all the life in her body. The weight of the grief she felt was unbearable. She could feel the loth cat begging for help, begging for her life, begging to be saved—but she couldn't. She couldn't move, couldn't think, couldn't *breathe*.

When Connor was finished, he tossed Fia's body aside like the loth cat meant nothing, and to him she meant less than nothing. Turning his fury from the defenseless animal, Connor lifted Sivall from the ground. The Chiss gasped and gripped at her neck as her owner crushed her windpipe with the force, tears freely flowing from her sanguine eyes.

*"How wrong we were about you,"* he spat at her, his teeth bared, *"The time we wasted, the money we wasted... All for a failure. You couldn't even defend the one life in this world that depended on you. You are nothing."*

When Siv thought that she, too, would join Fia, Connor let her go. She crumbled to the ground, gasping, the air rushing back into her lungs even as her throat screamed in protest.

*"I will have the help come collect you."*

With that, Connor stormed off. Even with her head spinning from the impact of being hit and the lack of oxygen, Sivall clawed her way across the stone paving to Fia's lifeless body. She carefully gathered the loth cat in her arms and rocked her, broken sobs escaping between pained gasps.

*"I'm so sorry, ch'acah. I'm so sorry. I'm so so sorry. Sorry... I'm so sorry..."* She just kept repeating the words, pleading for her beloved pet to forgive her in the afterlife. She didn't deserve it, she would never deserve that forgiveness, but she still asked. She mumbled apologies in till she lost all sense, till the maids came and gently pulled Fia from her arms, the loth cat's body already cold.

Sivall didn't resist, she just stared blankly at the floor. Even as the maids lead her away.

*Failure.*

*Nothing.*

*Please forgive me, my dear Fia.*

The maids placed her in a hot bath with relaxing oils and herbs. But she didn't feel it. She didn't feel any of it. Her Fia was dead. Not a gift, a lesson. One she failed. A failure that cost a life. Connor was right, everything he said was right.

The maids helped her to bed, and Sivall rolled over, hugging the part of the blanket where Fia would lay. She had cried so much already, there were no tears left. Just an empty longing and a hole in her chest where the loth cat used to be in her heart. Not even the maids knew what to say, so they said nothing. They knew empty platitudes would not help her.

They watched only for a moment, sharing worrying glances, before leaving her to cry in the dark.