

Give Up

by

Dracarys

It had taken her days to find her mother, and they both were in a sorry state. Months of wandering alone had reduced Raziya to a solemn husk of herself, malnourished, starving, a skinny wretch whose ribs could be seen trying to claw themselves from her body. Her waist was almost inexistent, and the dust from walking so long over beaten, cracked wasteland had plastered itself to every inch of her. Her paw pads were bleeding incessantly, and her once-dazzling emerald eyes were now wan and drawn. It was all the bite of the smallest flea to her, though; she carried on dutifully, as best as she was able, all for the babe that she carried with her in her bony jaws, little scruff between her still-sharp teeth. She had prioritised her son, for sure, for her was the only thing for which she lived, now. He was her entire world, her orbit. He had to make it, even if his mother didn't. And that was why Raziya was taking him to his grandmother, where she knew he would be safe.

Well, to tell the truth, Raziya didn't even know that. The last the young princess had seen of Queen Zira, she was fleeing from the kingdom in the hammering rain, even as the lightning struck and thunder crashed. The battle raged on atop the promontory of Pride Rock, the king versus the would-be usurper: the pretender, the bastard Simba, whose case was as unjust as the murder he warranted of his uncle's livelihood. If the stories were to be believed, Simba had killed his own father - what kind of king would this patricide be, if he were allowed to flourish? He had to be stopped, the king - Raziya's royal father - had proclaimed, though he must have feared for his life, or the safety of his family. Why else bid them flee from the Rock, in the shadows, like base criminals? Raziya had been a coward then, she admitted. Her mother had suggested returning to the Pridelands to seek out her husband and try to find him - which she had done, in the end - but her daughter was less sure. She had seen the weight of the young pretender, in comparison to her father's own fabrics. She had feared for his life from the beginning and then, in the aftermath of it, some part of her just knew that there would be nothing to seek out in the Pridelands. She'd said as much, but Zira had refused her, cast her out for her insolences. At first, Raziya had been afraid. But that was before she'd adapted.

But now she had a son to care for, and she felt half a cub again. She was still that, she supposed, not even out of adolescence yet. And now there was a small life that depended on her - and so far, she was failing him. Zira would have milk, she knew it; the queen had been new with child when they fled the Pridelands, and would likely have a brood about her even now. Raziya looked forward to meeting her new siblings, the uncles and aunts of her little son, and she though gave her a small smile, though it was drowned in the gust of wind that brought with it scathing hot sand that ripped talons across her face. She spat out what sand had collected in the open gap of her mouth, for she was holding her son by the scruff of her neck, and her jaw was agape. She had to find somewhere safe to rest her son, she had to.

The scouts found her two hours later, nearly stumbling blindly across the termite mounds. The sandstorm had abated by then, but in its wake it left upon Raziya a haze of dizziness, of stricken stupidity, and she almost fought the lionesses who dashed out to her, fearing they would harm the boy, and not recognising them for lionesses of her mother's retinue. She collapsed in her terror, and dropped the babe from her jaws, and when the lionesses made as though to grab him, she assumed it was all over.

But then she saw the squint-eyed lioness, the one whose gaze seemed both critical and pitying, and Raziya nearly wept, for she then recognised Sly-Eye, the acid-tongued but caring lieutenant to the queen herself. She was unable to move for a while save for the nodding of her head when the old lioness murmured gentle comforts to her princess, and then one of the lioness, Madoa, scooped up her son in her jaws and before Raziya knew it, she was being escorted to her mother, whose new demesne was the Outlands.

The Queen Zira did not smile to see her daughter, as was her custom, but she did take note of the chocolate-pelted babe in her daughter's jaws. There was no time wasted on shallow greetings.

- "You had a son?" Queen Zira demanded, her voice hoarser than usual, but no less sharp.

- "Mother, I beg forgiveness. It was a meaningless tryst, that is all. I was a foolish child, but no longer." Raziya was speaking half-truths. For her, it certainly hadn't been meaningless, but to

Choyo, the boy's father...

Zira eyed her daughter warily.

- "I've always known when you lie to me, daughter. Do not make a mistake you will regret." And then the queen suddenly became overtaken with an intense grief, so much so that she dropped to her haunches and hung her head, and that was when Raziya noted how drawn her mother looked, how old in her bereavement she had become. Zira was weakened, for sure. And there were no other newborn babes to be seen.

- "Mother," Raziya began tentatively,

- "you were pregnant when we left the Pridelands. Where are my brothers? My sisters?"

The queen didn't make any move to reply, only gave her daughter such a harrowing look that she knew the answer without being told. After a few moments, Zira got to her feet, and beckoned to her daughter to follow her.

- "Come. Into the caves we shall go, for it is far too warm out here."

And so Raziya followed, nervously, limping from her broken paw-pads. She was given relief inside the caves, however, for the stone was cool to walk upon, and in the distance, the faint lapping of an underground spring could be heard.

- "My daughter... You were not here to see us exiled from the Pridelands." Zira released her grief into a low growl.

- "The pretender... Simba... there was nothing left of your father to even bury. He let the hyenas feast upon his corpse, and allowed the offal to fester in the sun! What justice is this that the crown serves us? What is this foul treatment they call the law?"

Raziya flinched under her mother's fast growing rage.

- "Mother, I beg of you, don't do anything rash; if you have lost children as you seem to imply, then you are weak, and must heal."

- "Perhaps. I did indeed lose the children of my body. A son, you must know, and two daughters. I wanted to name them, but I always let your father do the naming. Yours was the only name I bestowed."

- "A lucky name then, for I stand here before you where others have perished."

- "Just so, sweet daughter. And how I have missed you." Zira drew her daughter in with her forelegs to a warm embrace, and for a few brief moments, the princess felt tears upon her fur.

- "Mother," Raziya began, once the queen had pulled away from her once more,

- "I have a favour to ask."

- "Of course you do." Zira's reply was swift, hostile, and delivered with gnashing teeth.

- "You never did anything in this world without making demands from me or your father first!"

- "Your Majesty, please!" Raziya prostrated herself before her mother and social superior, dropping her gaze.

- "I beg your mercy for my son, my little boy. He is the blood of Scar, and carries his very look about him. I cannot provide for him, not in my current state, but you can!"

The queen was silent for a long while, and Raziya knew she was thinking on her daughter's plea. When she spoke, she did so slowly, quietly.

- "Madoa brought him in, didn't she? Put him with the other cubs."

- "Yes, mother. I recognised Nuka among them," Raziya ventured fondly, allowing herself a smile,
- "but there were a few I didn't recognise. The small dusky one, with the red eyes looked a lot like the old queen - Sarabi. And then there was the pale shaggy one, of blue eyes, but with a black tuft. A she-cub and a male, I assume."

- "Yes, indeed." Zira grinned.

- "The one who looks like Sarabi, as you say, is the old coot's granddaughter. Born but a day ago. A premature birth, mind, but still a birth."

- "Sarabi's granddaughter? But Sarabi had no cub but..."

- "...Simba, I know. I wove my way into the king's cave at night and begged of him an exchange. I thought my wiles would be enough to provide a safe place for my pride to thrive, but instead, he carted us to the Outlands. Little Safi is the spawn that followed. A weakling, too vulnerable and soft. She won't survive long."

Raziya took the news with a shudder. Sometimes her mother's ways were too... erratic. She ventured to veer the subject away from Simba.

- "I know that the other female is Vitani, though the last time I saw her, she was but a babe. Who is the male?"

- "You were not around Mheetu enough to know his look," Zira began, almost wistfully,

- "but you must have seen him. I thought you would have recognised him."

- "Mheetu? Sarafina's last get?"

- "Yes, child, Sarafina's - and Scar's. I... adopted him, in a sort of way, before fleeing the Pridelands. Sarafina insulted me too many times; she has paid for it now in a lost son." Zira's anger was etched deep into the dust upon the ground; her claws were carving neat lines beneath her.

- "Do you think you might... adopt my own son? Your grandson?" Raziya looked her mother in the eye, which once would have been a fatal error, but now it was a desperate appeal.

- "You have milk enough to feed him, and I am too weak to do so myself. My milk is drying mother, and I have no wish to stay here."

And here the queen looked wounded.

- "You're not staying?"

- "No, mother, I mean to flee this land forever and forge a new start. Perhaps exact revenge upon Simba in a few trifling ways first. He is my lifelong enemy, I do not wish to give him triumph after murdering my father, but I do not wish to bring risk to my family through my actions. I need you to safeguard my son, and raise him as Scar's grandson - Scar's heir."

- "You are Scar's heir, child." Zira glared at her daughter, and Raziya suddenly felt helpless before her mother.

- "You have the brilliance of his eyes, the sheen of his dark coat, the malice of his soul. You are Scar's blood, Scar's legacy. You must remain."

- "I have no wish to, mother," Raziya countered, more firmly this time.

- "I will not stay, but my son must."

There was a long silence. Then,

- "So be it. You may go."

Raziya looked at her mother, studied her, tried to find a way through her harsh façade to any emotion that might be hiding inside. For now, however, the queen was a statue of iron, unmoved, and unchanged. Her eyes were empty of anything that might give away her thoughts, and her paws had ceased to scratch at the ground.

- "Mother, I cannot thank you enough for this kindness."

- "Then don't. Repay me by never setting foot here again."

Raziya blanched.

- "What?!"

- "You heard me." The queen's voice gave way to a tremor, and as she rose, her quaking gave away her grief, her humiliation.

- "I wish never to see you again. You have forsaken your blood; forsaken me, forsaken your father, and your son! Go, damned daughter, but never return. You are not welcome."

The princess' breath caught in her throat, and the tears flowed freely. She was free... but she was homeless, unwanted, and childless.

- "Might I see my son once more before I go?"

- "Once." The queen turned her back.

- "And that is all."

- "Thank you," Raziya sobbed.
- "A thousand times, thank you."

- "Get out."

- "Mother?"

- "Raziya."

- "I love you."

A pause.

- "My daughter, I love you more than you will know."

Raziya found her son crawling with the other cubs, all watched dutifully by the queen's lionesses. Her little boy found her easily enough, and came trundling towards her, mewling, and the princess' heart broke a second time.

- "My beautiful child," she whimpered,

- "you are safe with your family now. Your friends, your subjects. You will be loved, my sweet son, I promise you, and know that you are always in my heart."

Her son smiled up at her and reached for her crystalline tears with an outstretched paw.

Raziya released him from her embrace, and then turned her back. His cries stayed with her as she padded towards Sly-Eye, whose own eyes betrayed more easily than Zira's her hurt, her grief at seeing this final goodbye between mother and infant son.

- "Princess," Sly-Eye called,

- "he will be well cared-for, I promise you that. Zira will make him a great lion - a king."

- "I know," Raziya said, smiling bitterly, in spite of the racking sobs.

- "He must be a king."

- "He will be." Sly-Eye pressed a brief kiss to the princess' forehead.

- "Name him, at least. Name him and leave one last gift to your son."

Raziya thought on it.

- "Moyo," she suggested,

- "for the first prince of the Pridelands." And then, more confidently,

- "My son's name is Moyo."

Sly-Eye smiled.

- "A good name. May the love you bear for your son light your path, fair princess, and bring you happiness in time."

Raziya acknowledged her, and then, with one last look over her shoulder at little baby Moyo, her beloved son, she started out into the unknown. Into a new life.

- "Moyo, she named the babe. Means 'love'. A good name, I thought." Sly-Eye's voice echoed throughout the chambers of the cave, as did her grief. She loved the princess well, much like a daughter, and was torn to see her leave, to see her hurt by the loss of her son.

- "A weak name." Evidently, Zira was not in favour.

- "Love is weakness. Scar loved me; his love killed him. Raziya loves her son. And now she is exiled."

No, fool, Scar loved his power, and he loved the heirs you brought into the world. Never you. Sly-Eye knew better than to voice her thoughts. Instead, she merely dipped her head.

- "So you disapprove. What would you have us do about it?"

- "A new name, I think. One that means something. One that does not cry weakness."

- "Do you have any ideas?"

- "I have a thousand, but there is one of that thousand that calls to me."

- "Tell me, Your Majesty." And be done with it.

Zira stroked the cub with a single claw, along his spine, so gentle that Sly-Eye almost missed the hidden desire to open the babe's skin and bleed him.

- "Do you see his eyes, Sly?" Zira crooned, grabbing the cub's head and tilting upwards so that Moyo's eyes bored into her own. The cub looked frightened, and no wonder. The green of his gaze was piercing... emerald.

- "He carries his mother's eyes, Your Majesty."

- "Not his mother's. Don't speak of that one. I am his mother now, his real one has forsaken him."

- "His grandfather's then." Sly-Eye shivered. She has hated to see Scar's eyes when he was alive; so much hatred and scorn was hidden beneath. Now she was seeing them anew.

- "Yes... Scar's eyes."

- "Scar's, for a certainty."

A pause.

- "Do you know, Sly-Eye, what I am going to name my son?"

- "I have a thought."

- "Of course you do. You're smart. That's why you're my lieutenant."

- "Won't you tell me, then?"

- "Of course." The red-eyed queen smiled, and Sly-Eye balked. She grasped the cub with her forepaws, and held him to her face.

- "He is not Moyo. Never Moyo."

Sly-Eye could only watch her queen trace a claw oh so softly over the cub's left eye.

- "He will be Kovu."