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Call Back the Dream Part 2

by [Sheila Paulson](#)

Luke Skywalker had once said to Ben Kenobi, "I'm never coming back to this planet again," and at the time, he had meant it, but now here he was on Tatooine again, and voluntarily too. In a few minutes, he was to rendezvous with Chewbacca and Lando Calrissian. They'd know by now if Han was here to be rescued.

Since the Empire as well as Jabba the Hut were familiar with the *Millennium Falcon*, it wouldn't have been very smart for Lando and Chewie to take the ship openly into Mos Eisley where it was well known. Chewie knew of a safe landing area well outside of the spaceport, that he and Han had occasionally used when they were on smuggling runs, and it was here that Luke was to meet the others. He'd hitched a ride as far as Mos Eisley and rented a speeder there to get to the rendezvous point.

It was strange to be back on Tatooine again, and Luke found that it unexpectedly filled him with an odd nostalgia. Life on his uncle's moisture farm may have been dull and confining to a boy who dreamed of the stars, but it had also been secure and safe, though that safety had been built on illusion, and now, Luke couldn't help feeling a pang of regret and grief for his lost youth. Things had been so much easier then.

He parked his speeder near the *Falcon* to find Chewie waiting at the foot of the ramp. The Wookiee growled a greeting, practically dragging Luke inside, and sealed the ramp behind them. Luke could see worry in Chewie's eyes, but that was better than the grief he had feared he might see there. It meant that Han was still alive, and though the Corellian was probably still in danger, there was at least a chance that he could be saved. Luke was determined to help make sure of that.

The Wookiee only urged him to hurry, leading him to the cockpit, where Lando Calrissian sat in the left seat, Han's seat, readying the ship for takeoff.

"Where are we going?" Luke demanded. "Isn't Han on Tatooine?"

"No, we're going after him," Lando told him. "We weren't going to wait for you very much longer, Luke."

"Where is he, then?"

Chewie explained as Lando translated. Han had begun to teach Luke to understand Chewie's language, but he still had a long way to go before he was fluent. It seemed that the bounty hunter Boba Fett had brought Han to Jabba three days before, received his pay, and departed. Luke suspected that Chewie regretted not getting a chance to kill the bounty hunter and found himself regretting it a little, too. Jabba had not had Han recovered from the carbon freeze, but had instead sold him to a slave ship.

"What!" cried Luke in horror.

"It's true, I'm afraid," Lando said. "Jabba wasn't about to tell us, but Chewie persuaded him to talk." Chewie allowed himself a snug look. "Jabba's still alive,"

Lando admitted reluctantly, "But not very healthy," he added with relish. "He told us that he'd sold Han to a ship that deals in slaves for the arena."

"The arena?"

"Gladiatorial contests for the Emperor and his court. They usually fight to the death."

Luke looked shocked, but he sounded very determined when he spoke. "Then we'll have to get Han away from them before they get there," he said. "You've found out where they were going, haven't you?"

"Demetra's their next stop," Lando told him. "And they only left yesterday. With any luck, we ought to get there before they leave."

"And then what?" Luke wanted to hear their plans.

"Then we'll either use the money Han had planned to pay Jabba to buy his freedom or we'll find some other way to get Han free." Lando looked a little smug. "I'm not too bad at that sort of thing."

The tone and the words reminded Luke of Han, and he squashed down a pang of grief at the thought of Han in the hands of slavers and someone else here in Han's place. He could well believe that Han and Lando had been friends, but it was still hard to warm to Calrissian, who Luke felt was partly responsible for Han's predicament. Of course Lando had had to content with Darth Vader and had managed to free Leia and Chewie from him. Luke still had nightmares about his own encounter with Vader, so he had to give Lando credit for coming out of the situation as well as he could. Lando was a survivor.

"I hope you're good at it," he said. "I'm going to be counting on you to help us out." He couldn't help but think that it was partly his own fault too that Han was in danger, since Han had been used to lure Luke to Bespin, and he couldn't go back to Yoda without doing something about it. He'd left Dagobah to save his friends, and he couldn't return with the job unfinished.

But Luke knew that it was really all Darth Vader's fault. Luke might not have been able to save Han, at least not yet, but the encounter with Vader, terrible though it had been, had left him with a grim determination to keep Vader from doing any more damage to either him or his friends. He couldn't prevent the nightmares that haunted him still, but he could prevent the dreams from influencing his actions. That would mean that Vader had won and Luke would not permit that.

Vader haunted Luke's sleep, the same dream over and over, his final confrontation with the Dark Lord, as vivid as it had been when, trapped on the gantry platform, he had heard Vader speak unbearable words. "I am your father." Luke always woke to his own shouted protest, "No ! No!" But denying it didn't make it not true. If Vader really was his father, then Luke would have to find a way to live with that, It was going to take a lot of time and hard work, but he was starting to realize that he had the strength to do it.

But there would be time enough for that later when this crisis was resolved. "How long will it take us to get to Demetra?" he asked.

"We'll be there at 0600 hours," Lando replied. "Okay, Chewie, ready for lightspeed?"

Chewie nodded and reached for the switches, giving Lando a doubtful and suspicious look. The stars blurred.

"You see," Lando said smugly. "I told you it was working right. It got us this far, didn't it?" He turned to Luke. "They had trouble with the hyperdrive on the way to Bespin, and Chewie doesn't believe yet that it's been fixed."

Luke had heard from Leia about all the trouble the *Falcon* had had with the drive on their escape from the Hoth base, and he didn't quite blame Chewie for his doubts, especially since most of the repairs had been made by Lando's people. He'd experienced some of the trouble himself, and it didn't give him a lot of confidence in the ship. But the *Falcon* had been thoroughly checked out by the rebel mechanics before Lando and Chewie left for Tatooine, and it had passed inspection.

"Well, it seems okay," Luke said. "Now we'd better make some plans for when we get to Demetra. Getting Han away from the slavers won't be easy."

"Do you think you're up to it?" Lando asked him. "You had a pretty rough time of it back there, and you don't look too good yet."

"I'm up to it," Luke said. "I have to be. How about you? I'll expect you not to let us down."

Chewie added a comment that won him a sour look from Calrissian. "Look," he said to Chewie and Luke. "I'm sorry about what happened back there. I didn't exactly have a choice, you know. There wasn't anything more that I could have done for Han. You know that, don't you? Chewie, we've been over this before." He turned to Luke, who got the feeling that they had been over it a great many times before. "I'm not going to let you down," he said seriously. "You've got my word on it."

Luke looked at him levelly for a minute, then he nodded. "All right, Lando," he said. "But I'm going to hold you to that."

Lando grinned. "Fine," he said.

Chewie made a comment that caused Lando to study Luke's face for a moment. "You look tired, kid," he said. "It's a long way to Demetra. I think we all ought to try to get some sleep before we get there. I'll take the first watch. You and Chewie go and get some sleep. I'll call you later on, and we can make our plans right before we get there. How's that?"

Luke and Chewie looked like they wanted to object, but they both knew it was sensible. Getting Han free wasn't going to be easy, and they would need to be on top of things when they got to Demetra

"All right," Luke said. "Come on, Chewie." He climbed to his feet, and Chewie got up and followed him. The Wookiee didn't expect to sleep. It was going to be a very long time until morning.

"The first thing we've gotta do," Han Solo said, "Is to get you two outta uniform and into something that's a helluva lot less conspicuous. If we dress like the locals, then we'll blend in better."

They had sheltered in a twisting alley back out of the crowd. As yet, there had been no evidence of pursuit, but it could come at any time. Daneen could hardly go looking for contacts in the uniform of a Kecipor Line officer, Han realized. They had to change their appearance and do it quickly, before the search began.

"He's right," Niada agreed. "But he'll have to be the one to get the clothes, Dani, because the uniforms would be remembered."

"I'll go," Han agreed. "But I don't have any money."

"Here." Daneen dug into his pocket and produced a small leather pouch. "That's all I've got, so treat it right, buddy. We'll wait here."

Han pocketed the wallet, grinned at the two of them, and disappeared into the crowd.

"You realize," Lathan told Niada, "that if he really hasn't lost his memory, we've probably just seen the last of him--and the last of my credits."

"Do you believe that, Dani ?"

Dan hesitated, then he shook his head. "No, I guess not. I don't think he'll let us down."

"Of course he won't."

"Do you trust him, sweetheart? I wouldn't want you to get hurt by being too trusting."

"I won't That's how I wound up on the *Kestrel*, after all. But I do trust Han. I don't think he'd let somebody down who's helped him. He'd pay his debts no matter what else he might do."

Dan nodded thoughtfully. "Yeah, he always had that reputation. But he didn't pay off Jabba." He made a face. "I worked for Jabba once, did one run for him. That was enough for me . I don't think he would have made it very easy for Han to pay him back."

"Anybody who'd sell someone into slavery doesn't deserve any consideration," Niada said savagely. "I'm *glad* we jumped ship, Dani. Are you?"

He looked down into her eager face. Already she looked brighter, some of the grimness gone from her eyes. The pressure of being trapped on the *Kestrel* had been halfway to breaking her spirit, but now, even with danger and an uncertain future ahead of her, Niada looked almost lighthearted. "Yes," he said. "I'm glad." And he meant it.

Han wasn't gone very long, returning in about twenty minutes, carrying a bulky package and wearing a long, hooded, sand colored robe. He looked so different that Daneen and Niada didn't recognize him until he turned into the alley, then Niada gave an amused giggle.

Han looked affronted and a little embarrassed. "Oh, come on, Doc, it ain't that bad."

"No, it's a wonderful disguise. It's just that, even dressed like that, you strut. I think I'd know that walk anywhere."

"Oh, thanks. You're a big help, do you know that? I hate the damn thing. Makes it too hard to get at my blaster." He shoved the hood back impatiently and passed the package over. "Here's yours."

It contained brown robes and a knee length tunic for Dan. He grimaced at the sight of them but, when dressed, he gave no evidence of being in uniform except for the shine of his boots. At Han's insistence, he began to rub them with dirt and sand to dull the gloss.

For Niada, Han had brought a turquoise colored tunic, elaborately embroidered, to be worn over a cream colored underdress. The women of Demetra were given to bright colors and elaborate styles, so such garb would not be out of place.

Niada was surprised to see that Han had not only picked a color that would set off her fair hair and blue eyes, but also that it fit surprisingly well. For her as well were cream colored ankle high boots and a turquoise ribbon for her hair.

Niada retreated behind a packing crate to dress, and when she emerged, both men stared at her in appreciation. The style was very flattering, and she had managed to create for herself a reasonable facsimile of a Demetran woman's elaborate hairstyle, the ribbon braided through it. The collar of the dress was drawn up to cover nose and mouth in a traditional manner that had begun as a protection from sand and dust and had nothing to do with modesty. It also made a good disguise.

She asked mischievously. "Will I do?"

"You'll do and you know it, you wretch," Dan hugged her. "We all will. Let's get going. Even in disguise, I'd like us to be well hidden as soon as possible. Cap'll call out the Imps to find us, and they can be damn thorough."

"Got any ideas?" Han asked, wishing Demetran custom allowed him to wear his blaster outside his robe where he could get at it if need be.

"Yeah, one. There's a cantina here--the owner is a friend of mine. She's a tough old bird, but pretty game. I doubt she'd know the first thing about finding rebels, but she could give us a place to lie low."

"You mean Molly?" Han asked skeptically. "You're gonna take Niada there? Think that's a good idea?"

"She'll be safe enough. Molly'll keep her away from the other girls."

"Other girls?" echoed Ninth. "Other girls! Lovely. You're taking me to a bordello. Just what I always wanted." Then she realized something. "Han! You remember Molly?"

"Course I do. Everybody knows about Molly." He heard what he was saying then and his brow furrowed. "Can't remember what she looks like or anything else about her though. Damn." It must be one of his general memories, of the same nature as recalling the Kecipor Line and the names of various planets. Niada had explained that to him. The amnesia only affected things that touched upon his personal life. If knowledge of Molly and her girls was generally known among spacers, it wasn't too surprising that he could remember it instinctively, but it didn't help one bit when it came to getting his memory back.

Niada looked at his frustrated face and reached out to pat his arm comfortingly. "Don't worry, Han. It'll come back, given time."

"And maybe Molly will remember you," Daneen encouraged. "That would help, I think. She might even know the names of some of your friends or your copilot."

"The Wookiee," Han said. "Yeah, I wish I knew that much. Don't feel right, not knowing."

"It will come," Niada said. "I know the waiting is hard, but..."

"Yeah, well..." He shrugged the problem aside.

"Let's get moving." He pulled the hood up again to shade his face, and Daneen did the same.

No one seemed to notice them on their way to Molly's place, with the exception of a few spacers who gave Niada brief appreciative glances then looked away quickly. On Demetra, it was not considered good manners to stare at a female in public, and those who might have been inclined to do so were put off by the sight of the two tall men who flanked her. A lady's kin could avenge a supposed insult, and no court on Demetra would convict them for it.

For those who wanted to look at ladies with impunity, there were places like Molly's though few Demetran women worked there. Molly's was like any spaceport bordello, a little better run than most, and as such, it had a good reputation among the spacers and was well patronized.

"But it'll look funny if we go in there with Niada," Han insisted.

"I don't intend to walk in the front door, Solo. I've known Molly for years. We'll go in the private entrance." Dan fell silent abruptly, worry clouding his blue eyes. Han followed his gaze and saw the captain of the Kestrel striding down the street toward them, accompanied by three of his crew, who were guarding a fourth man.

"He's heading back to the ship," Han said. "Probably doesn't even know about us yet. Act natural, and he won't even see us." He took Niada's arm in the accepted Demetran fashion, and Daneen reached for her other arm. Together, the three of them strolled down the street, trying to look as if they had simply come out for an afternoon walk.

And it worked. Cap paid them no more attention than he had anyone else on the street, and the crewmen were too busy guarding the new slave to notice. Safely past, Han and the others turned automatically to watch them.

"He'll be back at the ship in ten minutes," Niada said. "We better be in hiding by then, Dani."

"We will be, love. This way." Daneen led then through a door in a high fence and down a narrow passage between buildings. At the end of the passage was another door, and Dan reached out to open it.

He was confronted by a tall man with a scar down one side of his face and a blaster in his hand. At the sight of then, he looked puzzled and wary--it was not customary for the locals to come calling, especially accompanied by a female.

Dan shoved back his hood, laughing at the expression on the man's face. "It's all right, Martel. It's only me."

"Dan?" Martel began to smile. "The boss lady will laugh herself sick to see you in that getup. But if this lady's Demetran, you can go away again. We don't need that kind of trouble."

"It's all right," Niada reassured him. "I'm not a local. May we come in and tell you about it inside?"

"I suppose you better." He stood back to allow then to enter. "I'll get the boss lady," he said. "You can tell the story to her. I don't think she'll turn you away, but that'll be her decision." He gave then a resigned look and left then standing there.

"Are you sure he's on our side?" Han asked skeptically.

"No, he's on Molly's. I only hope it's the same thing."

They waited a few minutes, then the inner door opened. "Well, Dani my sweet," said a female voice.

"Why does it always take trouble to bring you back to see me?"

The speaker was a woman on the wrong side of fifty who had tried to conceal the fact by coloring her faded curls to hide the gray and by painting her face elaborately. She wore many rings, set with every glittery stone imaginable, next of then genuine, and a scarlet robe that was too tight and emphasized her full-blown figure. Gaudy and bizarre as she appeared, her eyes were shrewd and discerning, and her face intelligent.

"Molly," Dan said in relief. "Just the person we want. This is Niada Karlee and that's Han Solo. We need a place to lie low for a few days."

"I might have known. You are a terrible boy, Dani. You only come home when you are in trouble. I don't know why it is that I put up with you. But if I must, I must. Wait here and I will make the arrangements for rooms and food for you. You look hungry and tired, all of you." Her eyes came to rest on Han. "Especially you."

Niada nodded. "Yes, I'm a doctor, and you could say he's my patient. With your permission, I'd like to put him to bed quite soon."

"I'm not a damn invalid," Han objected.

Niada smiled at him. "I know, Han. But you do need the rest. It's been a long hard day for all of us, but longest of all for you."

"I'll send Martel with a meal," Molly volunteered.

"May I help you?" Niada offered.

"Of course, child. Come along."

When they had gone, Han turned to Daneen. "Home, huh?" he asked.

"Yeah, well," Dan grinned a little. "She took me in when I was a kid. It wasn't here but on Wendoril. She didn't come here till a few years ago. I didn't have any family left--my old man bought it on the Kessel run, and my mother was one of Molly's girls. I think maybe she was Molly's sister, but Moll would never say. She raised me and saw to it that I got my first shipping job. She knew that spacing was in my blood and that I would've hated being a dirtsider." He grinned. "She's tough and hard on the surface, but she'd do anything for somebody she cares about. She always gave me the best—schooling, clothes, money, and never asked for anything in return. We'll be safe here."

"Yeah, I guess so. Does Niada know?"

"About Molly?" Dan shook his head. "Nah, I just could never tell her. She's from an important family back on her home world. They probably could have bailed her out, but she was too ashamed of winding up on the *Kestrel* to ask them for help. I've been afraid she'd go back to her old life when her term was up. "Me, I'm just another hotshot pilot with a shady past. I can't hold her."

"I kinda think she'll stick with you," Han volunteered. "Y'never know. Things work out that way sometimes."

"Sure they do. Come on, Han, you know better than that."

Martel came in then with a tray of food. "Here you go, Dani. Finest food the house has to offer. She said to send in the best." He shook his head as he put

their plates before them. "I thought you were a couple of those damn, spineless Demetrans trying to sneak in the back way to save the family honor."

"Nice," Daneen said. "Martel, this is Han Solo. You ever run into him before?"

Martel turned to look at Han. "Can't say that I have. Should I?"

"No. Forget it. How's business?"

"The boss lady's doing real well for herself. You aren't bringing her trouble, are you?"

"Hope not. We want to lie low for a few days, that's all."

"That's what I was afraid of. "What'd you do?"

"Jumped ship," Dan admitted casually.

"What! What happened to the *Starwind*?"

"Marius is looking after her for me for awhile. I got caught smuggling and wound up bonded to the *Kestrel*."

"And you jumped ship here? I ought to throw you out right now. You know damn well the Kecipor Line has it in with the Emperor himself. How much longer was your contract?"

"Five years. But we couldn't wait that long. Han was slated for the arena ."

"A slave!" Martel moaned. "You brought a runaway slave here? "Do you know what's going to happen to us?"

"Nothing at all," said Molly serenely from the doorway. Niada was with her. "Don't worry, Martel. I can handle this. You trust me, don't you?" Martel only looked skeptical. Molly smiled at him then turned back to Daneen. "Now then, What's all this about runaway slaves and the Kecipor Line?"

Dan told her the whole story. She listened quietly for the most part, nodding from time to time and occasionally interjecting a question or two. Martel's face ran a gamut of disgusted frowns and grimaces, but he didn't say anything either. Finishing the story, Daneen simply waited, looking at Molly expectantly.

Stop that, you rogue," she said. "You know you could always get to me with that innocent look and those big blue eyes."

"Then you'll help us?"

"Well, of course. Did you doubt it?"

Martel groaned and stormed out of the room.

"He ain't too happy about it," Han said.

"He's gone to prepare for trouble," Molly told him. "He worries about me, that's all. But he'll do anything he can to keep you safe, and his talents are not inconsiderable." She gave Han a sympathetic smile. "So you have lost your memory. That must be pretty frightening."

And because she was so calm and matter-of-fact about it, Han found himself admitting, "Yeah, it is, kinda."

"You are lucky to have met Dan. I've known him since he was a child, and he is one of the few people I know to whom I would entrust my life." She grinned at Han and Niada, then reached out to rumple Dan's hair affectionately as if he were still that small boy she had first known. "Not my fortune, mind you, but my life."

Han grinned back. Here was an attitude he could appreciate. "Makes sense," he agreed.

"So I am to hide you," Molly said. "That is not difficult--in fact, it's easy. But for how long? And then what? I know you, Daneen my boy. You never leave loose ends."

"No. Well, Niada wants to find the Rebel Alliance." He smiled at Niada reassuringly.

"This I can't do for you," Molly said. "I can begin to find contacts, but that is all." She frowned. "Niada, I can believe in you as a rebel perhaps, but these two? That seems just a bit unlikely to me. Do they look like rebels to you?"

"Well, no," Niada admitted with a smile. "They don't. But they don't have much choice right now."

"Let us worry about that," Dan said.

And Han added, "The rebellion can always use good pilots."

"I've no doubt of that. More power to them. I'm sick of the Empire. Makes it hard for a respectable woman like me to earn an honest living."

"Honest living, is it?" Dan asked, amused.

"Eat your dinner and no snide remarks, boy. I'm wise to you."

"This from the woman who once told me that respectability was a fate worse than death," Daneen told Han cheerfully.

"Well, isn't it?" Han asked, straight-faced.

Molly laughed richly. "I like you," she told him. "You eat too. And then you are going to bed. No arguments either, Han Solo. From what I've heard from Dani just now and from Niada, it sounds like you need it. A neural stimulator is not my idea of fun and games."

"You can't argue with her," Dan warned Solo. "If you do, she will haul Martel in, and he's an expert in unarmed combat. You wouldn't stand a chance against him."

"Wanna bet?" But Han said it automatically. He knew that Niada and Molly were right. The last two days had been rough ones, and the next few weren't likely to be all that easy either. He'd better grab a chance at a good meal and some rest

while he could. Besides, he was dead beat, his muscles aching from resisting Meldor's torture, and the strain of not being able to remember anything was an added pressure. If he didn't sleep soon, he was probably going to collapse altogether, so he looked up at Molly and nodded. "Okay, you win."

"That's good," she said, smiling at him. "Now eat." Something about Han Solo made her feel motherly. "Tell me," she instructed, sitting across from him and pushing the plate of food toward him, "just how much you do remember about yourself."

Han began to eat, mainly to stall for time, but she plastered on an infinitely patient expression, prepared to wait forever for his reply, so he gave in. "Not very damn much," he admitted. "And that's mainly general. About me--well, that's all gone. Sometimes something halfway comes to me, but it goes away again. Dan told me I had a Wookiee co-pilot, and for a minute, I could kinda picture him, but he looked, well, sad about something, and then that faded. Then there was something else." He hesitated, looking up at Niada, who gave him an encouraging smile. "Niada said that I called her Leia when I was half asleep. But it didn't mean anything, not really."

"Ah," said Molly, nodding. "And you don't remember anyone of that name?"

Han shook his head wearily. Damn, he was tired. "I don't remember her, whoever she is. I don't remember anything that matters." He slammed his fist down on the table. "Dammit, just leave me alone."

"Of course," she said at once. "Come I'll show you where you are to sleep. Tomorrow, you will feel better, and then we can make plans."

Han climbed wearily to his feet, and then he staggered, catching at the edge of the table for support. Niada came to his assistance at once, and Dan helped her. Molly showed them the way to a bedroom in the private part of the house. Han was only vaguely aware of being eased down on the bed and divested of robe, boots, and shirt. He revived a little, trying to object when they took off his blaster,

but Molly said something reassuring, and it was easier to just relax and do nothing. For a minute, he wondered if there had been some drug in his food, but he couldn't rouse himself enough to really think about it. The bed was too comfortable to fight, and he surrendered to it gratefully as sleep claimed him.

"He'll be all right, won't he?" Daneen asked.

"He will be in the morning," Niada said. "I gave Martel something to put in his food to help him sleep. He needs the rest so badly, and he's stubborn about taking it. I only hope he'll be safe here."

"They'll have to get past Martel to get him," Molly assured her. "Is he all right, child?"

Niada looked at her seriously. "As well as anyone would be who has been through what he has. He'll sleep the night through, and he should be much better in the morning."

"Well, we made it," Lando said.

It was early the next morning, and the three of them were standing outside the docking bay where the Kestrel was berthed. Relieved to find the ship still here, Luke would have liked to go racing across immediately to rescue Han. Chewie had already started to do so, and had to be forcibly restrained by the other two.

"We can't just go barging in shooting," Luke told him regretfully. "We have to stick to our plan. I still think that just one of us had better go. I'll do it. You two wait here."

"Ah, kid, you're no hand at fast talking," Lando objected. "Let me do it. I'll make us a better deal."

"We're not interested in deals," Luke retorted. "Only in getting Han free."

"You don't trust me either, do you?" Lando was frustrated and beginning to sound angry.

Luke looked at him steadily. "You're wrong, Lando. I do trust you, at least with this. I know you want to help Han, and I know you didn't like what happened to him. Darth Vader wouldn't have given you much of a choice."

"No, he didn't," Lando agreed. "He told me what I wanted to hear, and when I started to get suspicious, he fed me other stories. I went along with him at first because I wanted to hold onto what I had there and because I had my responsibilities to those people to think about, but I should have known that it wasn't going to happen." He gave Luke a sudden look. "It was all lies though, everything he said to me. He doesn't hesitate to lie to advance his purpose."

Luke's eyes came up to Lando's. "You're saying that he might have been lying to me when he said he was..." He fell silent, digesting Lando's words. There had been another nightmare on the way to Demetra, as vivid as the others, but as time went on, he was finding them easier to live with. This might help even more, if it were true.

"Yeah, I think he was lying," Lando said. "He'd tried everything else he could to get to you, and you'd stood up to him, so he tried that. Think about it, Luke. Who would you be more likely to believe, Vader or Kenobi?"

That was certainly something to consider. As yet, Luke wasn't sure what to make of it all, but he hoped that Vader had been lying. He wanted Lando to be right, but he knew that he couldn't accept it simply because it was what he wanted to believe. He would have to find out the truth before he could learn how to cope with it. "I don't know, Lando," he said. "But one thing you are right about is that you'd be able to deal with the Kestrel best. No, Chewie" he continued as the Wookiee began to object. "It's the truth. "We'll need to stay in reserve. We can't let them see our strength yet."

Chewie didn't like it one bit and said so, loudly and at great length.

"I know," Luke agreed when Lando had translated. "I want to be the one to rescue Han, too. But it's more important that Han be rescued than it is to fight about who actually does it. Go ahead, Lando."

Calrissian gave Luke a broad grin. "I won't be long," he said and turned to enter the docking bay. Luke and Chewie watched him go, standing side by side. Chewie gave a mournful howl that Luke could not translate and slung his arm around the boy's shoulders. It wasn't quite clear whether he was trying to comfort Luke--or himself.

There were two armed guards at the boarding ramp of the Kestrel, and as Lando approached, they drew their weapons and leveled them at him. "State your business," one of them growled in unfriendly tones.

"I wish to speak to your captain about a slave."

"Cap's busy."

"It will be worth his while."

The two of them exchanged glances. Cap wouldn't thank them if they prevented a profitable deal. "Okay," the first man said. "I'll take you in. But if it's not a good deal, don't be surprised if he throws you out. And no weapons. Leave your blaster here. You can pick it up on the way out."

Lando shrugged and complied. If it came to shooting, he'd do better to wait for Luke and Chewie; in any event, he preferred using his wits to a weapon. "Sure," he said. "No problem. I'm a businessman, not a fighter."

"You'd better be. Come on."

The captain was in his office, talking to someone in a viewscreen when Lando was ushered in. "Well, widen the search then," he said irritably. "This is costing me enough already." He switched the screen off and looked up. "Who the hell are you? Didn't they tell you I was busy? Get out of here."

"I'm Lando Calrissian, and I'm here to make a deal with you," said Lando quickly. "I hope to make it worth your while."

Captain Withers relaxed a little. "That sounds like my kind of business. I need all the profit I can get right now. I'm going to have to take on crew, and that's not cheap. All right. What's your business to be?"

"You have a slave on board. I wish to buy him."

"I have many slaves on board, but I'm no common slaver to sell to anybody who walks in here. My slaves are all for the arena."

"And if I were to offer more than the arena does?" Lando was bluffing. He didn't know what the arena paid, and they'd managed to come up with only 25,000

credits, a healthy sum, but not really big money in this business. Jabba would have had to collect on Han's debt besides paying off Boba Fett, who wouldn't come cheap, and the Hut would have wanted to make a profit himself. 50,000 might not have been too much, but he didn't have 50,000, so he'd have to do the best he could with what he had.

"I doubt you could top the arena," Cap said, apparently willing to listen. "Who are you interested in, and we'll see?"

"Han Solo."

Lando didn't see Cap do anything to summon his guards, but all at once there were two of them there with weapons leveled at him. "Hey," he said, lifting his hands in a conciliatory gesture, "Easy, man. I don't want any trouble."

"Well, you've got trouble, mister. Han Solo, is it? Are you in on this?"

"In on what, damn it? What kind of businessman are you anyway? I come in here in good faith to make a straightforward deal and I get blasters shoved in my face. If you won't sell, you won't, but don't get violent about it." An idea came to him. "I suppose Han's been giving you trouble. He's not one to take the idea of slavery lying down. I'm willing to take him off your hands and save everybody a lot of trouble. It'll be such easier for all concerned."

"He's not here," Cap said coldly, motioning for the two guards to withdraw.

"Not here! You've sold him to somebody else?" A new and horrible idea occurred to Lando. "He's not dead, is he?"

"No, he's not dead—yet. If I get my hands on him, though, he won't stay healthy very long. I guarantee it."

"He's escaped!" Lando had to work hard to keep the jubilation out of his voice. Good for Han and just what he should have expected of him.

"Yes, and took two of my crew with him, damn him. Now you show up. I find it hard to believe that you don't have any connection with his escape."

"I only arrived on Demetra this morning, and I can prove it. We've come straight from Jabba the Hut."

"Jabba. I might have known. I suppose that filthy scum wants to renege on his deal?"

"Not a bit of it," Lando said cheerfully. "He's no friend of ours--and we left him none too healthy."

"Ah," said Cap, sounding obscurely pleased. "So what's your interest in Solo besides thwarting Jabba, an idea I find has some merit?"

Lando hesitated. He wasn't sure how the Captain would respond to the truth; he scarcely seemed the softhearted type, and he was fed up with Han to begin with. No, Lando would have to tell him a different story. "Well, you see, he won my ship away from me, the bastard, and I want a go at getting it back from him. Pretty hard to do if he's in the arena."

"You can't just take it now that Solo's out of the way?"

Lando drew himself up stiffly, the picture of offended dignity. "Where's the challenge of something like that? I'm a gambler, not a thief. Besides," he added practically, "his copilot is a bit much for me to handle."

"All gamblers are crazy," Cap said, amused. "And you're crazier than most. Damn it, if I had Solo back, I'd sell him to you just to be rid of him, but I don't so I can't. Tell you what, though. Come up with 30,000 credits and he's yours, and good riddance to the pair of you. Don't have that much?" he asked, seeing something flash in Lando's eyes. "That shouldn't be any problem for a gambler like you. "Win yourself the difference. Or bring my two missing crew back and you can have him for only twenty. Can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"No," Lando agreed reluctantly. "I suppose you can't. All right. I'll have a go at it, but if I know Han, finding him won't be easy. He's pretty sharp. Or else I'll bring the money back when I've got enough. How's that sound to you?"

"Suit yourself," Cap said. "As long as I get my money, I'm satisfied. Okay, get out of here. I've given you enough of my time." He reached forward to activate the viewscreen again, dismissing Calrissian with a gesture.

Luke and Chewie saw Lando coming back alone, and even though they had tried to prepare themselves for the possibility of his failure, they couldn't quite prevent the crushing disappointment they felt. Then Luke's gaze sharpened. "He's smiling, Chewie," he said encouragingly. "He must have good news."

Chewie gave Luke a doubtful growl, then turned back as the black man joined them, flinging questions at him nonstop.

"Hold it, Chewie," Lando said. "Han's alive and apparently well."

"You didn't see him?" the Wookiee asked.

"No, he's not there."

"Not there?" echoed Luke. "Where is he then?"

Lando laughed. "He's escaped." He waited a minute, enjoying the reaction his words had produced, then continued. "He jumped ship here, and what's more, he apparently persuaded two of the *Kestrel's* crew to go with him."

"That sounds like Han," Luke said. "Chewie, do you think you know where we might be able to find him?"

I know some places he might hide out.

"Good. Then let's get started looking for him."

The morning sunlight woke Han Solo, and for a bit, he let himself enjoy the comfortable bed, the absence of pain, and the sense of being well rested. He seemed to be f it again this morning, ready for anything, and it felt good. Flinging back the blankets, he climbed to his feet, stretching luxuriously. Today, he was only a little stiff, nothing he couldn't handle. He'd be fine.

He thought of his amnesia then, and while he dressed, he tested it cautiously, probing at the wall that cut him off from himself. He wasn't ready to think about the torture yet, but he forced himself to think about the nightmare in an attempt to make sense out of it. Yes, there had been stormtroopers there, stormtroopers who obeyed the orders of the being dressed in black. If he pushed hard enough at the edges of the memory, Han could feel that the Wookiee had been there too. That made him uncomfortable. The Wookiee had been his copilot, supposedly his friend, but if he had been there when Han was frozen and hadn't done anything to help...

Even as Han rejected the uncompleted thought, he had a sudden vague flash of memory again, of the Wookiee looking at him sorrowfully and helplessly. It must be that there was simply nothing he could have done to save Han. That was much easier to face than the thought that the Wookiee had just stood by and let it happen.

"Damn it," he muttered, "I wish I could remember your name, fella. Can't keep saying 'the Wookiee' much longer."

The door slid open to admit Niada, who gave him a cheerful smile as she saw how much better he looked. "Did you say something, Han?"

"Just...uh...talking to myself," he admitted, embarrassed. "Trying to remember. You ought to approve of that."

"I do. I'm glad you're trying. I told you it would be easier when you felt better. And you look a lot better today."

"Yeah, I feel okay."

She nodded. "Good. Let's go to breakfast."

Daneen was there before then, and he got up to give Niada a hug and kiss. She returned the embrace before she sat down. "Dani, how are things going? Any contact with the rebels yet?"

"Well, Molly made a contact for us," he told her. "I'm supposed to meet with him this afternoon?"

"Alone?"

"No, I'm going to take Han with me." He turned to Solo. "Niada wondered if you might be a rebel already, even if you can't remember it. They might know you, and that'd be a help to both of us."

Han shook his head stubbornly. "I'm not a rebel," he insisted.

Dan smiled. "Yeah, I've said the same thing

myself. I'd still rather be back on the *Starwind* with Marius--he's my partner--even doing the Kessel run, than getting mixed up with the rebellion, but there's not any choice for me any more than there is for you right now. We'll probably wind up gunrunning, and I can live with that."

Niada raised her eyes to his. "Dani, I don't mean to push you into something that you don't really want."

"Don't worry about it, sweetheart. I grumble a lot--all freighter pilots do; it's our nature. It's okay. Once we get into the Alliance, I'll get in touch with Marius and recruit him too. I want you to see my ship. She's a beauty."

"What kind of a ship?" Han asked with interest.

"Messaki design, but Marius and I modified her so that she's as fast as any Corellian ship."

"Not as fast as mine," Han said positively and automatically. "Ain't no Messaki ship ever built that could match a Corellian ship. Why do you think the Empire uses Corellian ships? Cause they're the best."

"Well, my ship's rebuilt and she's fast. I redid the drive, worked out a new cooling system and just overhauled everything. She's not really a Messaki ship any more--she's a Lathan ship."

"Oh yeah. This I gotta see. I'll still put my ship up against yours though."

"No offense, but I don't think that battered old rustbucket of yours could take the *Starwind*."

Han was pulled up short by that. He'd been arguing the merits of Corellian ships in general and discovering that pride in his own ship was practically instinctive, but when it came right down to it, he couldn't recall the details of his ship any more than he could remember the Wookiee or anything else. If he didn't work too hard at it, small bits of memory would trickle through, but really trying to force it was no good at all. Even the name of his ship eluded him.

"Hey, man," Lathan said quickly, "Don't take me wrong. I'm sure you've got a great ship."

"She might be," Han admitted bitterly, "I just can't remember her. Or anything else."

"You will," Niada soothed.

"You keep saying that, Doc, and maybe you even believe it, but just how damn long do I have to wait?" He turned and stormed out of the room.

Dan half rose, but Niada reached out to stop him. "Let him go," she said.

"Hey, Ni, I thought he was starting to remember."

"He was, a little, I think, but he hasn't got it. resolved in his head yet. He isn't quite ready. Give him a little more time, Dani. He'll be all right."

That afternoon, Daneen and Han set out to try to make contact with the rebels. Still wearing Demetran clothing and provided with false identification papers by Molly, they were fairly inconspicuous and felt a little safer than they had the day before. But there was a lot of Imperial activity in the port; stormtroopers in large and stall groups moving purposefully through crowds that parted quickly to allow them to pass, high ranking officers with their attendant bodyguards, stall groups of armed men not doing anything but standing here and there, movements to and from headquarters. It was enough to worry Han and Daneen, who hadn't noticed anything like it the day before.

"They might be looking for Niada and me," Dan remarked unhappily. "Breaking bond is a crime, and Cap would report it, I think. He might not be as eager to report you though, Han. It'd look bad on his record to let a slave escape."

"He'll be looking for me himself though, and he's not gonna be too happy with me. " Han didn't sound overly concerned for Cap's feelings. He had no intention of ever encountering the man again.

Dan grinned. "Think how he must be feeling about ma and Niada... I think this is the street. Through here."

They passed through an archway into a narrower street, but after a few steps, Han came to a stop and reached for his blaster. "I don't like this. It feels like a trap."

"Trap?" Dan didn't doubt Solo's instincts, but the Street looked too peaceful to mean trouble. "There's nobody around," he objected. "You sure, pal?"

"Yeah. That's what I mean. There oughta be a few people around at least. If everybody's hiding in the buildings and avoiding the street, well, that spells trouble in my book. Doesn't need to be for us. Could be the Empire tracking down rebels. I don't think we oughta hang around here such longer."

"I think you're right," Lathan decided. "Okay, pal, let's get outta here." He looked around quickly, spotting a small alley. "This way?"

Han shrugged. "Okay, but let's move it. I've got a bad feeling about this."

A commotion on the main street added impetus to their retreat, and they dived into the shelter seconds before several dozen stormtroopers marched through the archway and into the deserted street. Han and Daneen watched them from their hiding place, relieved to see them pass their alley without even looking at it. But Dan was frowning. "I think they're heading for the place we were going. Somebody must have tipped them off about rebels there. Dammit, and there's not

a thing we can do about it. We can't take on that many stormtroopers, just the two of us."

"Maybe they've cleared out," Han said without such conviction. Then, when Dan gave him a skeptical look, he added, "Well, they should have noticed the street like we did. Anybody who has to hide out learns quick to notice things like that."

The stormtroopers were pouring into one of the buildings, weapons at ready, and soon blaster fire began to sound. "They didn't get out," Dan said. "Damn it. Now we're stuck without a contact."

"Yeah." Han watched the building, hearing the sound of blaster fire finally die away. "We're lucky we weren't early."

"That's what's got me worried. We were really a little late. Maybe the trap was for us and they sprang it too soon."

"I thought Molly set it up."

"She did. I trust Molly, but she wasn't working with people she knew. Could've been a trap. Molly might be in danger too. We'd better get back and make sure she's all right."

"Then what?" Han asked. "We've gotta get off Demetra fast. Maybe we should hit a few cantinas, see if we can book passage. Lot of freighter pilots haul anybody who paid him enough."

"In case you haven't noticed, we're not exactly rich."

"We could work something out. Quiet! They're coming back."

He and Lathan pressed deeper into the shadows as the troopers went by with four or five prisoners in their midst. "Yeah, they must be after rebels," Dan said. "All the Imperial activity may be tied in with that. Maybe we better skip that part of the plan, at least here on Demetra. We ought to be able to find some pilots we know here someplace."

"It wouldn't help if we ran into somebody I knew," Han said, some of his bitterness coming back. "'Cause I couldn't guarantee we could trust him."

Dan clapped him on the shoulder. "We probably know some of the same people," he said reassuringly. "I think the stormtroopers are gone now. Let's head back for Molly's to make sure she and Niada are safe and tell them what happened. Then we can start making the rounds of the cantinas."

Luke Skywalker had seen the stormtroopers go through the arch, and, worried that they were after Han, he had taken a seat in an outdoor cafe with a good view of the entrance to await their return. He wasn't due to rendezvous with Lando and Chewie for a few more minutes, and since he hadn't been able to pick up any word of Han yet, he wanted to make sure this didn't have anything to do with him. He'd been trying to sense Han's presence with the Force, and he was convinced that Solo was someplace not too far away. If the stormtroopers found Han, then Luke would be here to help him get free. So he dropped his hand to rest on the butt of his blaster and waited.

The stormtroopers were coming out now with their prisoners, and Luke tried to get a good look at them to make sure that Han was not among them. There were maybe five prisoners, but to Luke's relief, no Han. Glad that his friend had not been caught this time, Luke got to his feet and headed back to the *Falcon* for his meeting with the others.

When the two men in Demetran garb came through the archway and into the street, he had already gone.

Luke made his way back to the ship to find Lando just ahead of him as he entered the docking bay. In a few minutes, Chewie arrived.

"Bad news," Lando said as soon as they were in the ship. "The Empire is cracking down on rebel activity here on Demetra."

I think I must have seen one of the arrests," Luke said. "That makes it harder. I wonder if Han might be trying to get in touch with the rebels here. Chewie, you know him best. What do you think?"

I think he'd try to find a pilot he knew and get off this planet as fast as he could.

"He'll have heard by now about the Empire's crackdown," Lando said. "He might lie low for a couple of days."

Luke shook his head. "No, I think he'd want to get offworld right away. I don't want to waste any more time. Let's check in all the cantinas. Either you or Chewie is bound to see somebody who might have seen Han or knows where he is if we keep trying. He's here someplace. I can feel it. I wish you could have learned more about the men who jumped ship with him though, Lando. That might have helped."

"The captain wasn't really willing to tell me anything," said Lando, "And I didn't think it would have been smart to push him. Sorry."

Luke shrugged. "I know. Well, let's get on with it."

"You okay, kid?" Lando asked.

"Just fine," Luke replied with determination. "After this is all over, we can all go somewhere and sleep for a week, but for now, Han is the one who matters." He checked the setting of his blaster then turned and led the way off the ship. Lando and Chewie exchanged brief smiles and followed him.

Han Solo was tired. Freedom and a good night's sleep had done much to improve his health but he hadn't quite regained his strength yet, and by nightfall, it was beginning to show. As the last sun set and darkness began to spread across the port, he followed Dan to yet another cantina, realizing just how exhausted he was. It might be a good idea to make this the last stop of the night.

Lathan turned and stared at Han. "You look beat, pal. "Why don't you go on in and get off your feet. I want to take a look around out here first. I'm starting to get a feeling that there might be some kind of trouble."

Han's eyes raked the square. "Sounds like a good idea," he said, frowning a little. "You check out here, and I'll have a look inside."

"Keep your eyes open for Kestrel uniforms."

"I been doing that all day," Han said scornfully. "I'm not *that* tired, Dan."

Daneen grinned at him. "Okay, buddy. See you in a few minutes."

Han nodded and walked into the cantina. Inside, the light was dim, and he hesitated a moment in the entryway to allow his eyes time to adjust. The place didn't really feel dangerous, but Han knew that didn't really mean anything, and he was handicapped by his memory loss, which might prevent him from recognizing potential danger if he saw it.

Preparing, himself for trouble, he started down the steps into the dim interior. At the bottom, he came face to face with a Wookiee.

Han froze. This was the first Wookiee he'd seen since coming to Demetra and he realized that he couldn't be certain if he knew him or not. Oddly enough, he was a little frightened, not of the Wookiee himself, but of what might happen next. Niada had told him he'd remember when he was ready, but Han had always thought that the sight of someone from his past would help him to get his memory back. He'd believed it and counted on it, perhaps unreasonably so. But what if it wasn't enough?

Chewie hadn't paid much attention to the hooded Demetran at first, but the way the man had stopped dead, staring at him, made him suspicious, so he leaned forward to get a look at the shadowed face. Then he let out an unrestrained howl of joy and grabbed Han before the Corellian could retreat, hugging him tightly. Chewie had almost lost Han, and for awhile, he'd been sure that he had. The last sight he's had of him, encased in carbonite and looking more like a statue than a living being, had haunted both his sleeping and waking hours ever since. But here was his favorite human, the best friend he'd ever known, alive and safe. Chewie alternately questioned and scolded, only slowing down when he realized that Han had gone stiff as a board and wasn't responding at all, either to the greeting or the questions.

Han? he asked blankly. *What's wrong?*

Han had simply panicked. All along he had believed that he would remember if he met somebody he'd known before, but here was the Wookiee, obviously his copilot and friend, and he couldn't remember anything about him, not even his name. He stared intently into the other's eyes, almost embarrassed at the relief, happiness and love that were all too clearly revealed there, and he didn't know what to do. The Wookiee was talking nonstop, but Han could scarcely concentrate on what he was saying. The Wookiee's urgent question felt almost like a threat to him, and he couldn't make himself respond to that. It was all he could do to understand them in his current state. Hearing the tone of that last desperate appeal and seeing puzzlement begin to filter into the Wookiee's face, Han suddenly struggled to free himself. "Let me go," he said urgently. "Let me go."

Chewie obeyed instantly, surprise and hurt evident in his eyes. *Han?* he asked again.

And Solo stood there totally at a loss. *What do I do now?* he thought wildly.

"Han!" This time, the speaker was human. Daneen came bursting into the place at a dead run, gasping for breath. "Stormtroopers," he panted, grabbing Han by the arm. "Heading this way. We've gotta get out of here fast. C'mon."

Han hung back, wanting to question the Wookiee, needing to get some answers, but Daneen's words had been heard throughout the place and had managed to create a panic, causing people to scatter. Han and Chewie were borne in different directions by the cantina's patrons, and the last glimpse Han had of him was the Wookiee trying in vain to force his way through the crowd to Han, howling disconsolately.

Some instinct prompted Han to yell at him, "No, get clear." There wasn't time for anything else, but he felt better for saying it, as if he'd lifted a heavy weight from his chest. Then Dan was all but dragging him out a side door, and after that, they simply ran.

Once they were sure that they were clear of danger, they halted in the shadows of a scraggly blue tree to catch their breath. Neither of them spoke at first, relieved at their near escape. Han wasn't quite sure what to say about what had happened back there anyway.

Then the light dawned on Daneen. "Hey, that was your copilot back there, wasn't it?"

Han shrugged. "I guess so."

"Han, I'm sorry. We should have tried to bring him with us."

He looked at Solo closely, suddenly alert to the other's mood. "You look terrible. "What's wrong? I'm sure he got away. I didn't see him with the ones we saw being taken in."

Han nodded. "Yeah, I think he got away. But...oh, hell, Dan, I didn't remember him."

Dan looked surprised. "I didn't think you did. Did you tell him you'd lost your memory?"

Han shook his head. "Wasn't time," he muttered, and it sounded like a pretty lame excuse, even to him.

Daneen studied him a minute. "You're nearly out on your feet," he discovered. "You shouldn't have tried to do so much yet. Let's get you back to Molly's. Niada will kill me if I drag you home unconscious."

"I'm okay," Han said automatically. Maybe we oughta..."

"Whatever it is, it can keep till morning." He was really alarmed at Han's appearance. The Corellian had done more than enough for one day, and Dan wasn't about to let him do any more. "Come on," he insisted. "We'll get you home. I bet it will be a lot clearer to you in the morning."

Han was nearly asleep on his feet--that last run had done it, coming as it had immediately following the strain of the meeting with Chewie. Niada had warned him that he would get tired easily, and now it seared that she hadn't been exaggerating. Han felt that there was something urgent he had to do, but he couldn't quite rouse himself enough to say so. He was only dimly aware of Dan getting an arm around him for support, then they were heading back to Molly's. They looked like they'd had a few too any, with the more sober of the two trying to help his comrade home. No one gave them so much as a second glance, which suited them just fine.

Niada had been playing cards with Molly while Martel looked on, but at the sight of Han, she leaped to her feet, the cards spilling from her hand. "Dani! Is he hurt?"

"No, love, just out on his feet. Don't worry. Let's get him to bed and I'll tell you what happened."

Han roused a little. "Lemme go," he muttered. "I gotta go down to the..."

"You've got to rest," Niada interrupted. "Han, you're exhausted. Trying to do something now won't help you to regain your strength."

"Dammit, will you just listen," he snapped. But the effort of staying alert was too much for him, and when the others guided him into a chair, he didn't have the energy to resist.

Molly said, "Martel will carry him up to bed. Is he all right, Niada?"

"I think so, but I'm worried. He shouldn't be quite this tired."

"He had a shock," Dan told her. "He ran into his copilot."

"But that's wonderful. Where is he?"

"We got separated in the crowd. The thing is," he explained, "Han couldn't remember him at all."

Niada looked up at him with sudden understanding. "And Han thought that seeing him would do it?" She touched Han's shoulder lightly. "Han, listen to me. It's all right. You'll remember. I promise."

"I think he's asleep," said Molly. "Best thing for him, poor boy. Martel." she motioned the man over. "Take Han up to bed."

"I'll go too," Niada said. "I want to make sure he's all right."

"He's all right then?" Luke asked, adding doubtfully, "Isn't he?"

Chewie hesitated, unsure of how to answer that. He had described the meeting in the cantina to Luke and Lando, but he hadn't said much about the sense of strangeness that he had felt during the encounter. *I don't know,* he said at last, and Lando's voice echoed Chewie's doubt when he translated the answer.

"You said he wasn't hurt, and it sounds like he knew there was going to be trouble and wanted to keep you out of it," Luke said. "He did warn you to get clear. And now that he knows you're here, he'll come looking for the *Falcon*, and we can get out of here." He added, "You're certain he wasn't arrested?"

Chewie nodded.

"Then what's wrong? I can tell something's bothering you."

The Wookiee shrugged. *I don't know. Han was...different somehow. I can't explain it. It was almost like he didn't even know me.*

"That's funny," Lando said. "I ran into a man this afternoon who knew Han. He said he'd seen Han and was going to speak to him, but Han gave him the cold shoulder--looked right at him and ignored him. It's weird. I could see it if he pulled that on me. But not with Chewie. I don't think that he could have just been surprised to see you."

Chewie shook his head. *No, I think something's wrong. It just didn't feel right somehow. Maybe he's sick, or hurt.*

"He was on his feet, wasn't he?" Lando tried to reassure him. "So he can't be too bad. Besides, you said he had somebody helping him. Was it anybody you knew?"

*I have seen him around, but I don't know his name. * Chewie just couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. He and Han knew each other so well that the slightest change would be obvious, and this was much more than a slight change. Even if Han were trying to pretend not to know Chewie to keep him out of whatever danger he was in, he would surely manage to give him some sort of sign, if only a wink, a look, a gesture. But he had done none of these things. Instead he had looked confused and scared, approaching his normal self only when he yelled for Chewie to get clear. Chewie trusted Han more than he trusted any other being in the galaxy, and he knew that Han had not intended to hurt him. There had to be a good reason for his actions. It was up to his friend to figure out what that reason was, and to give Han help if he needed it.

Once he was certain that Han had escaped the stormtroopers, Chewbacca had come straight back to the *Millennium Falcon*, half expecting to find Han here before him, and the more time passed, the more Chewie worried. He was certain that Han was in trouble and needed him, only where, in this bustling port, was he to look for him? If Han wasn't here by now, then he must have gone to ground for the night somewhere else. He tried to explain all of this, and his listeners grew more worried as they listened.

"Do you think," Luke asked reluctantly after thinking it over, "That maybe the carbon freezing...did something to him?"

"It worked perfectly," Lando said at once. "I checked it out right away, and he was in perfect hibernation. There shouldn't have been any problems."

"If it went right at your end, could something have gone wrong somehow when he was revived?" Luke wanted to know. Chewie howled mournfully at the thought.

Lando obviously found the question unwelcome. "I think the Kestrel would have had a skilled medical department with the proper equipment to see that it was done right. Look, I don't know. It's true that the carbon freezing process we had wasn't supposed to be used on people, but it did work. Han is alive and well. We know that much. Let's not worry about that."

Luke nodded. "You're right, Lando. I think we're on the wrong track with that. Han was well enough to escape from the Kestrel, and I get the feeling that people don't manage that very often. We just don't know enough yet."

They went over it for a little while longer without reaching any conclusions. Lando reported that he'd managed to get into a card game and had won the rest of the 30,000 credits to buy Han's freedom. Luke told him to take the money to the Kestrel in the morning. Han didn't need to have the slavers after him if it wasn't necessary. Lando agreed.

After awhile, Chewie got up and wandered off. Luke looked after him in concern, knowing how hard all this must be on him. He would have liked to go after the Wookiee, but there was nothing he could offer in the way of comfort, so he let him go.

That night, Han Solo dreamed again, but this time the dream was worse, longer and more detailed, and far more painful. It started out like the other one, but it was more vivid this time. The Wookiee was there, and when he heard the order for Han to be put into the carbon freeze, he went berserk, knocking stormtroopers in all directions, and only Han had been able to quiet him down.

But he scarcely had time to be relieved that the Wookiee had, after all, tried to save him, before things got worse. This time, at the command of "Put him in!" he didn't wake up. This time, it was going to happen. He was being lowered into the pit, and though he couldn't utter a sound, he was screaming inside. Lower and lower, and then it happened, and it hurt for a sudden agonizing moment, not even enough time to cry out, and then there was nothing; no pain, no light, no dark, no sound, no silence, no touch, no movement. There was nothing at all.

But he was still aware. Trapped in his carbonite prison, he couldn't move or feel or cry out. He could do nothing except exist. He was absolutely alone, and it was the most terrible loneliness he had ever experienced. It went on and on with

nothing to measure the passage of time until it seemed like years, centuries, eons, had passed. Someday, somehow, he might be freed from this trap, and there would be nothing left of what he had known; no face, no town, no star, nothing. The people who found him would want to know who he was and where he had come from, and he would be able to tell them...

Nothing.

Han Solo woke up screaming.

Niada was there in seconds, or so it seemed. It took him a moment to become aware of her presence, to feel the grip of her hands, to see her pale, frightened face.

"It's only a dream," she was saying over and over. "Just a dream. Han, please, hear me. It's just a dream. You're safe now. It's over."

He was shaking with reaction and cold. and it was all Niada could do to hold him steady. It seemed ages before his eyes focused on her, and even then, she wasn't sure he knew who she was. It frightened her.

"Han?" she asked, casting a quick glance over her shoulder to the doorway, where Molly stood, with Daneen just behind her. She shook her head at them, and they withdrew, then she turned back to Solo. "Han, can you hear me?"

He shut his eyes for a moment, drawing a shaky breath, then he looked at her again. "Was it the nightmare?" she asked him.

"Yeah." His hands were gripping hers so tightly that it hurt, but Niada didn't draw away, sensing that he needed the contact.

"Was it worse this time?" she asked softly.

"Yeah. Worse," he admitted.

"Tell me about it."

"No."

"Han, it helps to talk things out, you know it does. It will be easier afterwards."

"I don't know if...if I can." He moistened his lips nervously. "It was... I don't wanna talk about it."

"Was it the same dream?" she probed.

"Part of it," he said reluctantly. He was shivering; he couldn't seem to stop. Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he pulled her close and held her tightly. It felt good to be able to hold onto something, not to be alone.

"Was it longer?" Niada asked him gently.

"Longer, yeah." He took a deep, steadying breath. "Okay. They said to put me in the carbon freeze--and then they did it."

"Is that when you woke up?"

He shook his head. "No. I was...conscious afterward, only...there wasn't anything else. I knew what'd happened to me, but I couldn't...I was trapped and...damn it, Doc, that's enough, ain't it?" He couldn't go on with it. Even that much hurt.

Niada looked at him in shock. To be imprisoned in carbonite and then to know it--it was no wonder he couldn't let himself remember. Even the thought of that kind of sensory deprivation made her shiver in horror. "So that's why..." she began.

"Why what?"

She looked into his eyes. "Why you can't remember. This has to be what you were blocking out. That's why the other nightmare bothered you so much, because this was what happened next. Oh, Han, no wonder it was so bad." She held him close. "But it's almost over now. You've faced it, and nothing will be so bad again."

"That's easy for you to say." But he couldn't help thinking that she might be right. He'd come through it more or less intact, and the thing that he'd feared the most--being trapped forever, or at least for years--hadn't happened. The Wookiee was here on Demetra looking for him, and it wouldn't be hard for Han to find him. There was only one problem.

"What about the fact that I still can't remember a damn thing?" He pulled away from her, leaning back against the wall. "It's not over, Doc. Not yet."

"It will be soon. Don't you see? Before, we didn't really know why you'd blocked things out, only that you had and that there had to be a good reason for it. I want you to tell me all about the dream, every bit of it. Once it's all out in the open and you've faced up to it, then you'll start to realize that there's nothing more in the memory to hurt you, that remembering will be safe. It might take a little more time, but it'll be easier now because there's something definite to fight."

Han took his blanket and wrapped it around his shoulders. He was still shivering a little, but already he was beginning to come out of it. He was pretty sure Niada was right, and it helped. Maybe seeing someone from his past had been the catalyst after all. Maybe he'd needed that before the dream could come.

Molly appeared at the door bearing cups of steaming klee and gave them each one. The mildly alcoholic drink was always served hot, and Han cupped his fingers around the mug gratefully, savoring the warmth. "You looked cold," Molly said. "Drink up, Han." She gave him a motherly, reassuring smile and left.

Niada took a swallow of her drink. "All right," she said. "Feeling a little better now?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I guess I'm okay."

"Good. Then let's get to work. You go over everything about the dream that you can remember, all right? I'll be right here with you, and we'll face it together."

Han didn't want to face it at all, but he knew that there wasn't any choice. "Okay," he said reluctantly. "Here goes."

It was hard, but once he got started, it proved easier than he had expected. Niada listened solemnly, realizing as he talked how difficult such a thing must have been to face. Han, who valued his independence so fiercely, must have found it harder than most people would. It would be another kind of slavery, with

no way to mark the passage of time. It was no wonder that he couldn't remember when remembering would bring all that back to him. What was amazing was that he had come out of it as well as he had. Niada suspected it would have turned her into a raving lunatic.

Han finally shrugged with relief. "That's as much of it as I can remember." He felt remarkably better, as if he had been carrying a planet on his shoulders and it had resumed its proper orbit. "Guess you were right, Doc," he admitted. "It did help. Now all I gotta do is go down to look for Chewie and..." He came to an abrupt stop, and Niada waited, still half expecting the instinctive withdrawal he'd always made, each time he started to remember something, but this time, he didn't reject the memory. Instead he smiled broadly. "Chewie," he repeated musingly. "Chewie! I remembered something." As excited as a child, he gave her an enthusiastic hug, looking very pleased with himself.

Niada was smiling, too. "It'll all start to come back now," she said. "I think you're over the worst of it, Han. Tell me about Chewie."

"Well, he..." Han fell silent. "That's as far as I've got," he admitted. "Hey, you sure it's gonna work out?"

"I'm positive. Up till now, you've been very uncomfortable whenever you've had a flash of memory. This time you were pleased and excited about it. You'll remember."

Han felt like he really wanted to remember now. Even the part about the torture didn't seem quite so bad--it was behind him and he could live with it. Chewie? Why couldn't he have remembered that much before? He had a feeling that the unexpected fleeting had been pretty rough on the Wookiee. "Hey, maybe I oughta go down to look for Chewie now," he said. It felt good just to be able to say the name. "He'll probably be worried about me."

"You will not," Niada told him sternly. "It happens to be the middle of the night, and you still need your rest. Finish up your klee, and then I want you to sleep."

Time enough to find Chewie in the morning. He won't go away now he know you're here."

"Yes, doctor," he said sourly, but then he grinned at her.

He slept without dreaming for the rest of the night.

"At least there isn't as much Imperial activity this morning," Daneen remarked cheerfully as he and Han searched the docking bays for Han's ship. Even though Han was almost positive he would know his own ship when he saw it, there was still a chance that he might not, so Dan had volunteered to come along to help him look. Niada had seen then off, pleased that Han wouldn't t be alone--she still tended to worry about her patient--and had cautioned then to watch out for the *Kestrel's* crew.

"She does tend to fuss," Dan complained tolerantly as soon as they were out of earshot.

"Just like a woman," Han agreed, and they exchanged sympathetic smiles.

It was a little quieter this morning with fewer stormtroopers about. They did see a couple of the *Kestrel's* crew, but they managed to avoid notice. So far, they hadn't found Han's ship, but Dan had run into an old friend and stopped to talk to him for a minute outside his docking bay.

Han stood off to one side, looking up and down the busy street, hoping to catch a glimpse of Chewie. Maybe this time, he'd handle the meeting better. With Chewie to help him, he felt a lot more confident of regaining his memory.

He didn't see Chewie, but all at once, his gaze fell on a fair haired young man who was heading in his direction. Han couldn't have said what it was about him that caught and held his interest, but something did. Maybe this was someone he knew.

Han had to resist the urge to go dashing across the street to confront the boy, but he was too wary for that yet, so he waited, watching him closely. Somebody he knew ought to be able to penetrate his disguise, he thought. And presently, the boy's eyes turned in Han's direction. They passed over the hooded figure, but then he suddenly stopped walking and looked again. Han didn't move. The kid frowned. Then he held himself absolutely still, his face cleared of all expression, like he was concentrating very hard on something.

Han stared at him in perplexity, not quite sure just what he was up to, then he noticed something that pushed the little mystery out of his mind altogether. There were four stormtroopers heading down the street in their general direction, and that could mean trouble.

Han didn't want to have anything to do with stormtroopers. The few vague memories that he did have, the incident from his nightmare and the earlier torture, had both involved stormtroopers, and for all Han knew, he could very well be, and probably was, wanted by the Empire. But instead of getting away from there as fast as he could, he found himself standing his ground, alert for trouble, waiting to see what the stormtroopers were going to do.

They came to a halt to consult with each other, looking over to the kid from time to time. If they noticed Han, they didn't give any evidence of it. After a moment, they evidently came to a decision, because they drew their weapons and headed straight for the boy.

Almost as if he had been watching then, his head came up, alert for danger, and he made a grab for his blaster. Han wanted for his too, only to be momentarily defeated by the awkward robes that he had known from the first were going to be a problem. "Over here, Luke," he yelled as he pulled off the robe in disgust,

finally getting his blaster free and taking out the nearest stormtrooper with one quick shot.

As the other three drew back a little, Luke came pelting over to Han, a big grin on his face despite their imminent danger. "Hey, Han," he began excitedly. "It is you. I thought..."

"Save it, kid," Han told him. "We gotta get outta here fast."

The remaining stormtroopers had regrouped by now and were starting to shoot back. Han grabbed Luke by the arm. "This way," he urged.

"Right with you," Luke agreed, and they headed down the street at a dead run. Pedestrians had scattered with the first blaster shot, so running was easy, but that left the way open for the troopers to get a clearer shot. Han felt the heat of a near miss brush across his arm, and he quickened his pace.

He got a hasty glimpse of Daneen Lathan, motioning to him as they ran past. Yeah, that was a good idea--let Dan get behind the stormtroopers and pin them down. He signaled agreement to Dan. Three of the stormtroopers and three of them. It wasn't even much of a contest, Han told himself. The next shot barely missed him and he revised his opinion rapidly.

"Han, in here!" Luke spotted a narrow alley and headed that way fast.

"If it's a dead end..."

"No, it's clear," Luke insisted. "Come on."

They ducked into the shelter fast and spun around to take another shot. The two of them fired simultaneously, and a stormtrooper fell. "I got him," they shouted, practically in chorus. Han gave Luke a dirty look then grinned, it didn't really matter who got the stormtrooper as long as he was out of the way. Only two to go.

"Come on," Luke urged. "They can call for a backup and pin us down in here." He retreated further into the alley, and Han followed him. If Dan stayed sharp, Han thought, it would be the stormtroopers who were pinned down.

Then Luke got off another shot, and a third stormtrooper dropped, just before they rounded a bend in the alley. All at once, it opened up before them and they found themselves in the main square, a vast bustling hive of activity, crowded with people and jammed with booths and shops displaying exotic merchandise from the far reaches of the galaxy. The walls of the alley must have deadened the sound of the blaster fire because no one was paying them the slightest attention as they burst into the open.

That suited Han just fine. He and Luke ducked out of sight behind the nearest booth, safe for the moment.

"If Dan can get that last stormtrooper, we'll be home free," Han said and then turned to Luke with mock exasperation. "Now tell me this, kid. How is it that you could stand there and let them stormtroopers almost get you like that?"

"They didn't almost get me," Luke retorted. "I knew they were there before you yelled, didn't I? I was trying to use the Force. You didn't look like yourself in that getup, but there was something..." He smiled broadly, and all at once, Han found himself being hugged excitedly.

"Hey, take it easy, kid," Han told him, grinning from ear to ear, not the least bit displeased by Luke's reaction.

Luke drew back and studied his friend. "You all right?" he asked seriously. "Chewie was pretty worried last night."

"Yeah, I'm okay. Let's go find Chewie and..." He came to an abrupt halt as realization hit him. Somehow in the middle of everything, his memory had come back, completely and totally, and he hadn't even noticed. For a moment, he was lightheaded with relief. Luke noticed his sudden pallor and grabbed his arm to steady him. "Han, what's the matter?"

"Han!" Daneen emerged from the alley, looking very pleased with himself, a bit of a strut in his walk. Solo climbed to his feet and came out of the shelter, beckoning to him. "Did you get him?"

"Sure, no problem," Dan said, then added with mock anger, "I can't turn my back on you for a minute, can I? We've been avoiding stormtroopers for two days, and now you decide to take on four of them. We'll have to get to cover soon or there'll be trouble." He grinned suddenly. "It was a good fight though. You okay?"

"Yeah," Han replied giving him a brilliant smile. "Everything's just great."

He looked and sounded so different that Dan realized that there had been a major change. "You've remembered," he discovered, "Haven't you?"

Han nodded. "Yeah, it's all come back." Seeing Luke's perplexity, he said, "It's a long story, kid. Let's get back to the *Falcon* and I'll tell you all about it. Dan, why don't you go and get Niada and bring her to the ship? Then we can get outta here. Which docking bay is it, kid?"

"Fifty-three."

"Okay," Lathan agreed. "Meet you there."

Han slung a comradely arm around Luke's shoulders. "Come on, kid, let's go. "I've got a lot of questions for you."

"We've got a lot for you."

But Han stopped walking suddenly without waiting for any of Luke's questions because one of his own had occurred to him that could not be put off any longer. "Kid, I gotta know--I know Chewie's okay. But what about Leia?" He grabbed Luke's arms and half shook him. "Is she all right?"

"Don't worry, Han," Luke reassured him. "She's fine. She wasn't hurt; she's safe. She's been worried about you, but aside from that, she's fine."

Han's relief was overwhelming, but he pulled himself together quickly, remembering how Luke had always seemed to feel about the Princess. "Kid," she said awkwardly, "Did she say anything about..."

"About you and her?" Luke said quickly. "She told me. It's okay, Han. I understand."

Han gave him a crooked smile. "That's more than I'd do, I think. Sorry, Luke."

"I'll bet," Luke said with a grin. He was very proud of that grin. It had taken a lot of effort to make it convincing.

Han studied him carefully, and Luke laughed. "Don't worry about it. Come on, let's get back to the *Falcon* before we run into any more stormtroopers. Chewie's been worried sick about you."

"He's there now?"

"Yeah. He insisted that since you knew he was here, you'd come to the ship right away. He expected you last night."

"I know, but..."

"You really had him upset," Luke said. "What were you up to?"

"It's a long story, kid."

"Couldn't you have given him some sort of sign? He kept telling us that you had to be in trouble, and he trusted you whatever it was, but I think it hurt him that you acted like you didn't even know him."

"I didn't, damn it."

"What?" Luke drew back in shock and stared at Han. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I didn't remember one damn thing from the time they put me in the carbon freeze until I saw them stormtroopers heading your way. Not a thing. So how was I supposed to even know who Chewie was, let alone give him some sort of sign?"

"You're kidding, "Luke said involuntarily. "Aren't you?"

"What d'you think?" Han asked. "I couldn't even remember his name. He was right, I was in trouble, but there wasn't time to tell him about it. I knew a little 'cause Dan told me--he knew me by sight and remembered that I knew a Wookiee. Otherwise it might've been worse last night."

"But you're okay now, aren't you?" Luke asked anxiously. "You got your memory back?"

Han smiled. "Yeah, it all came back. I'm fine. Let's get back to the ship. I wanna explain it to Chewie right away."

The Wookiee was waiting at the foot of the ramp, and when he saw Luke enter the docking bay with Han Solo, he let out a gleeful howl and came charging over, but at the last minute, he pulled himself up short, and instead of giving Han another hug, he just looked at him questioningly, waiting.

It wasn't like Chewie to be so restrained, and Han felt bad about it even though there really wasn't anything he could have done to prevent it. "Hey, Chewie," he said quietly, giving him a lopsided smile that made him look just a bit unsure of his reception. "Is that any way to welcome me home?"

A broad smile spread across Chewie's face, and without a word, he reached out and grabbed Han in an enthusiastic hug. Han held on tight, feeling his world slip back into its proper perspective again. If he shed a few tears into Chewie's fur, no one would ever know. Han Solo had come home.

Later they sat in the *Falcon* exchanging stories and waiting for Dan and Niada to arrive. Han had quickly made his explanations to Chewie, who had listened with such interest and concern that Han found himself telling more of it than he had intended to. When he came to the part about Meldor's torture, Chewie had to be prevented from going straight to the *Kestrel* to get revenge for the way they had treated Han.

Solo had just brought his listeners up to date when there was a step behind him, and he turned, expecting Dan and Niada. What he got was Lando Calrissian.

"Well, I got them paid off," Lando began, then came to a stop as he realized that he had an audience of three instead of two. "Han!"

"That's right, it's me," said Solo with a noticeable lack of warmth. He got to his feet and advanced on Lando, who took an involuntary step backward at the expression on Han's face. He should have been prepared for the fist that suddenly connected with his jaw, but he wasn't, and the next thing he knew, he was sprawling painfully on the deck.

"That's for all your help back there," Han told him angrily. "Buddy." He made the last word sound like a dire insult.

Lando stayed down on purpose. "Look, Han, I didn't have any choice."

"You didn't have any choice," Han mimicked scornfully.

"Try taking on Vader and see how well you do."

Lando was beginning to lose his temper. He was getting sick and tired of explanations and attempts to justify himself. "I had some responsibilities, damn it. I couldn't just ignore all that. I had all those people to think of. Besides, Vader never told me he was going to give you to the bounty hunter until it was too late."

"So why didn't you tell me you had troubles?" Han asked reasonably. "Maybe we coulda come up with something to beat Vader."

"Beating Vader's not exactly easy, dammit. Try it some time. After I found out how things really were, I did the best I could for you. It just wasn't enough. I'm sorry, Han." He added, "But I'm not going to keep saying that, so either throw me out or let it go. I've had enough of this from Chewie already."

To his surprise, Chewie found himself intervening, explaining to Solo. Han listened to him, then turned back to Lando. "Chewie says you got him and Leia away from Vader. Guess I owe you for that anyway." He gave Lando a reluctant grin, still a little suspicious. "C'mon, get up. But if you ever pull anything like that again, you will live to regret it."

"I already regret it," Lando said, climbing to his feet and staying a prudent distance from Han. "Between Chewie trying to choke the life out of me while your precious princess stood by and didn't even try to stop him... What are you grinning about, damn you?" he demanded. "I ought to knock you down."

"Think you can?" Han asked cheerfully. "Go ahead and try."

Niada and Dan arrived before Lando could reply. Han introduced them to the others, then Niada rushed forward. "Han, you got your memory back!"

Han laughed, catching her in his arms and hugging her enthusiastically. "You were right, Doc, it all came back." And before she could reply, he captured her lips in a kiss that caused Daneen to start across the cabin to intervene.

Niada emerged from the kiss laughing. "I told you it'd be all right," she said. "Oh, Han, I'm so glad."

Dan cleared his throat ominously. "All right, Solo," he said with mock anger, "When you're through kissing my fiancée..."

"Your what?" Niada demanded, breaking free of Han and spinning around to confront Daneen, her eyes flashing.

"You heard me," Dan said, standing his ground.

Niada suddenly smiled. Han, who had been watching then curiously, left then to it, turning back to the others.

"Now all I gotta do is figure a way to get the Kecipor Line off my back," he complained. "It'll be worse than Jabba, dammit."

"It's all taken care of, pal," Lando said smugly.

"What? How?"

"They're paid off. We used the money you had to pay off Jabba and scraped together a little more."

"And Lando won the rest of it in a card game last night," Luke explained. "He paid off the *Kestrel* this morning, Han, so you're free and clear." He grinned. "Now that

you've got that out of the way, you're coming back, aren't you? The rebellion can use you."

Han didn't answer directly, turning instead to the Wookiee, who had been listening to see what his response would be. "Hey, Chewie, what do you say we get outta here? I've had it with this lousy planet. Besides," he added, giving Luke a sideways look, "I've gotta see a princess about a rebellion--and you know it don't pay to keep her worshipfulness waiting." He gave Luke a crooked smile, and Luke returned it without hesitation.

Han nodded, satisfied. Turning back to Chewie, he reached out to rumple his fur affectionately. "Let's go home," he said.

end

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