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Echoes From the Past

by [Sheila Paulson](#)

I'm sitting at the cantina at the rebel base doing my damned to get as drunk as possible so I can put the whole thing out of my mind, at least for awhile, and winding up as sober as a customs official, when along comes Luke Skywalker and plops down in the other chair and stares at me like he's wondering what's going on inside my head. Just what I don't need right now.

"Han," he says real soft like he knows 'm hurting. "Don't you think you ought to tell me about it?"

I give him a real unfriendly look and say, "Look, kid, why don't you just beat it?" I ain't never talked in that mean a voice to the kid before, but he doesn't even seem to notice.

'Han," he starts off, sounding worried and I cut him off short.

"I ain't buying it, kid."

"I know something's wrong," he says, sounding kinda wise, the way old Kenobi used to sometimes.

'Why don't you take that Jedi crap and shove it."

But he only smiles a little, like he don't mind what I say to him. Probably he's been talking to Chewie. Well, what the hell. I don't need to tell him all the story, do I? Maybe just a little, and then he'll go away and I can get drunk and forget the whole thing.

So I shrug a little. "Okay, kid. Have a drink, will ya." I pour him a glass of the stuff. No need for me to drink alone if I don't have to. "Drink up. I'm buying."

He takes a drink and looks at me expectantly. I guess I can't put it off much longer. So I start in Maybe it'll even feel good.

"Rigahst ain't much of a world, kid. I was there about thirteen years ago, and I ain't been back til last week when I agreed to take that message tape to the Rebel underground there. I'd made a fast getaway the last time, but after thirteen years, who'd remember that? Chewie and I unloaded the regular cargo, all nice and legal with papers to prove it, and then I told Chewie I had a stop to make and I'd be back in a couple days."

"A couple of days?" Luke asks me. "It takes that long to deliver a message tape?"

"Hell, no, kid. I was gonna look up an old friend."

"Female, right?" Luke gets this big grin on his face.

I don't smile back, and he wipes his grin off fast. For a farm hick, he's not so dumb. "Yeah, female. I knew her a long time ago, and she was pretty special. Too good for me, and I knew it even then. Best thing I ever did was to leave her and not go back. But hell, as long as I was there, I wanted to see her again, even if she didn't know I was there."

"And did you?" Luke asks me.

"No. I found someone who knew her. She'd been dead a couple years."

Luke looks sympathetic. "What happened?"

"I don't know. Didn't want to find out. I just took off and left. I'd rather not know, if you get what I mean. Damn, I wish I would have stuck around just a little longer." I shrug. It's done, I guess.

"Well, I walked out of the place and all at once, a couple of the local police jumped me. 'Han Solo?' they asked me. I told them yeah, and what's it to them. Seemed like I was under arrest. 'What for?' I asked. 'My cargo's legal, and I ain't broke no laws.' And they told me I hadn't this time, but thirteen years ago I had. They got long memories on that damn planet. The two of the didn't look like much, so I decided to make a break for it. And one of them was the fastest man with the blaster that I ever saw." Even now that bothers me; some backwater jerk beat me, Han Solo to the draw. "And his blaster was set for heavy stun. Lights out.

"The next thing I knew, I was in headquarters and their captain told me real regretful like that they couldn't keep me. He just found out I was wanted by the Empire, and that took precedence over local complaints. The damn bastard would have liked to hang me up by the thumbs or connect me to one of those high-duty mind probes, but he had to hand me over intact--or almost --and it was just killing him. Sweet character. Someday I'll go back there and show him a thing or two." That's just talk. I'll never go back to Rigahst, not

even if my life depends on it and I think Luke knows it. He only nods, but he looks awful serious.

"Anyway," I go on, "He decided to let his boys work me over a little as a reward for their good work. The Empire wouldn't mind a bruise or two, he told them. But it wound up more than a bruise or two, more like a couple broken ribs and a concussion--well, you know that. You was there when Chewie hauled me back here.

"I woke up in a cell that must have seen its better days before the Clone Wars, but it had a solid lock and a remote camera so they could watch me. I hate those things. At first I hurt too much to do much of anything, but after awhile, I started feeling a little better, and I amused myself by making faces at the damned camera and maybe a few gestures that weren't too polite, and wondering when they were gonna turn me over to the Empire. Chewie didn't expect me for a couple days, so he wouldn't be trying a rescue, which was just as well. I didn't need Chewie getting caught. He wasn't in any local trouble, but the Empire probably wanted him too, and maybe he could get back and tell the rest of them what happened. It'd be tough on him, but we always knew that something like this might happen. There wasn't no way for me to get out either. The cell walls were big heavy blocks of stone, and in my condition, with the camera watching everything, I wasn't gonna be throwing blocks of stone around.

"Then all at once, I noticed something. The camera was off. The nasty little red light was out, and when I moved around, it didn't track me. Maybe they gave up, or didn't want to bother, damn them. Well, I got to work on the stone blocks, but even as I did, one of the stones started to move on its own. *Hot damn*, I told myself, *I'm getting rescued*. So I gave them a little help and hauled on the stone, and all at once it popped out and this kid crawled into the cell and grinned at me." Damn, I'm not gonna be able to tell this thing right. My voice doesn't sound any too steady, but Luke doesn't seem to notice.

"Kid?" he asks in surprise.

"Yeah. He wasn't no bigger than this." I measure his height with my hand, rather sketchily. The liquor must be starting to get to me after all. "Well, he got to his feet and gave me a big cocky smile. He looked at me with big brown-gold eyes and said, cool as you please, 'Your name Han Solo?' I told him yeah, and why'd he want to know. And he said, 'Well, if you're Solo, I'm here to rescue you.' Get that, Luke. 'I'm here to rescue you.' That is one dumb line," I say to Luke, kind of amused.

Luke smiles reminiscently. "I don't know," he says like he's remembering. "I think it's a pretty good line myself."

"You would. Anyway, this kid stood there--he was about twelve years old, and he looked like he was pretty tough for his age. And, damn it, he had a blaster strapped to his hip like it belonged there, and I got a feeling he knew how to use it."

"Sounds like you, Han," Luke says, smiling broadly.

"Shut up!"

Luke looks at me in surprise, his smile vanishing. "What?" he asks blankly. That wasn't what he expected me to say.

"Never mind," I tell him hastily, covering for myself. "Anyway, he said he was there to rescue me, and so I said to him, 'Who are you, kid?' And he said to me, 'I'm a rebel, what'd you expect? We got a message tape out of Captain Davan's office already, and we couldn't leave you for the Empire.'"

"And they're sending kids into prison to break people out?" I asked him. "Tell me something I can believe." And he got the stubbornest look I ever saw on his face and said. "I'm a volunteer. I know the tunnels better than anybody, and there're some of them too small for grownups to get through. Besides, I had another reason so they let me come."

"Well, I didn't worry about the other reason right then. 'If they're so small, how the hell will I fit?'"

"I got shovels, and I made some of them bigger. You'll fit. You're thin enough." And he looked at me critically. "Arrogant little bastard." I take a hasty swallow of my drink and refill my glass. Damn, I better watch what I say. This ain't getting any easier.

So I go on with the story. "Well, the kid told me we had to get out fast because the rebels could only hold off the power of the remote cameras just so long. So we crawled into the tunnel and pulled the stone closed behind us. Then the kid took out a light cube to help us find the way out, and pulled a comlink and said into it, 'All clear, reconnect power.' He switched the thing off before he even got an answer. 'Come on,' he said to me. 'We gotta hurry.'"

"Hurry, no less! You ever climbed through about a hundred kilometers of narrow tunnels, Luke? Try it sometime with broken ribs if you think it's anything to write home about. And this kid was crawling along, cheerful as you please, chattering away about how he was gonna be a star pilot when he was a little older. He got some crazy freighter pilot to promise to take him on as ship's boy or something when he turns thirteen. Hell, I didn't even start that young myself. So I asked him, 'What about your family?'"

"I ain't got no family," he said, real cold and nasty. "I don't need no family, either and I don't want one." Then he got wistful. "Did you have a family?" he asked me. Hell, that was the last thing I wanted to talk about. But the kid just pulled me out of a bad situation, so I guess I could tell him a little. I owed him one. I didn't have to tell him everything, did I? Sure, I had a family once, Don't remember them too good, though., My old man took off when I was about four. I remember him a little, I think. He was a pilot too. Wasn't one to settle down. Guess I'm lucky he stayed as long as he did. I remember my mother better. I was about eight when she died. We'd gone to live with her brother, and he'd always hated my father. Used to tell everybody I was just like him and I'd amount to nothing, the way he did. Maybe he was right," I say bitterly.

Luke looks at me soberly for a minute. "No, he was wrong. We all know that, Han." He sounds like he really means it.

I find that I'm smiling a little in spite of everything. "Thanks, Luke," I tell him.

"I mean it, Han. Go on."

"Okay. Anyway, I left home--if you could call it that--when I was about fourteen, and I ain't looked back since. Never regretted it, either. So I told the kid this, and it's funny, but he got real sympathetic all of a sudden, and he started grinning to himself like he was happy. I couldn't figure that out, and the way my head was aching from the beating and crawling through the stuffy tunnel, I didn't even try. After awhile, the kid got out his comlink again and talked to his people. 'It's me,' he said. 'We'll be coming out of the alley in five minutes. Is it all clear, Jak?'

"'All clear,' the voice answered him. 'Are you all right, boy?'

"'Just fine, but Solo's hurt a little. Get the doc to meet us at headquarters.' He turned back to me. 'You got a crew or co-pilot we can notify to pick you up?'

"'I'll tell you when you tell me the code.' Maybe it was a little late to get suspicious, but I wasn't gonna get Chewie in trouble, and hell, I only had the kid's word he was a rebel. And he said, 'Your code first, Solo,' cool as you please. Damn it, the kid was pretty sharp. He knew his way around already. So I told him my half of the code, 'Alderaan'. And he came back with 'X-wing', just like he was supposed to. So I told him about Chewie and the *Falcon* and hoped like hell I was doing the right thing. And the kid gave me a big smile like I'd just given him a present or something and passed the information on. Then he turned back to me. 'Can I come and see your ship?' he asked, sounding like a regular kid for the first time. 'Sure, why not?' I told him. 'If I don't have to make a fast getaway, that is.'

"Then he came up with a real winner of an idea. 'Take me with you,' he said, like he didn't expect to be turned down. Well, hell, there ain't no room on the *Falcon* for a kid, and I told him so. Damn it, I could sympathize with him. There wasn't much going for him on Righast. Y'know, I almost thought about bringing him back here, but he wasn't really alone, not if he was working for the rebellion like he said and knew the codes and all. So I told him I couldn't, not this trip, but if he got a few years on him, I'd come back and see. He'd be a good pilot. Looked like he had a little Corellian blood, and Corellians are the best pilots around."

Luke looks real skeptically at me. "My father was the best star pilot in the galaxy," he informs me.

"Probably he was part Corellian, then," I tell him with a half smile. Force of habit, I guess. "Anyway, the kid was real disappointed when I told him he couldn't come, but he covered it up real fast like he didn't really want to in the first place. He was pretty good at

hiding his feelings. You have to be when you're on your own. When you're a kid, I mean. So we went on, and pretty soon we came to another blank wall, and we got another stone out of the way, and came out in a narrow smelly alley. It was night by then, which was all for the good, because it'd be easier to get back to the *Falcon*. Only the kid said we had to go back to headquarters first. They had a message tape for me to bring back here, and they wanted to see me. The kid told me, 'It's not far. Think you can walk a few blocks?'

"Hell, yes,' I said, though I wasn't too steady on my feet yet. I wished I had a blaster, though, and I told the kid that, even though I knew he wouldn't give me his. 'It's mine,' he said, determined like. Gotta respect him for that--I wouldn't have given my blaster up to somebody I didn't know, either. But I'd have to take it away from him if things got too hot.

"So we headed back to headquarters, and I hoped it wasn't too far. If it was a whole lot farther, I was gonna shame myself and fall flat on my face, and I didn't want to do that in front of the kid, somehow. But we came to the end of the alley, and the kid pulled me back into the shadows. The square was full of storm troopers. The alarm must have been sounded. 'All clear?' I asked the kid skeptically. He only said, 'We can't get out this way. Come on.' So we went back through the alley and all at once we were in the spaceport, but the opposite end from where the *Falcon* was berthed. 'This way,' the kid told me, and he took hold of my arm like I was a cripple or something. But he did know the way, and the alley was dark as hell. So we wound around through the edge of the port for a while. My head was aching like it was about to fall off, but I didn't say anything to the kid. He noticed, though, and pretty soon he called a halt and told me to sit down for a minute while he scouted the way. He knew the territory, so I let him go ahead. I didn't sit down, though, because I didn't think I could get up again if I did.

"Pretty soon the kid came back, and he looked at me like he was really worried. 'We can get through,' he said, 'but it won't be easy.' He gave me a really thorough look, as if he was trying to decide if I was gonna pass out or not. Then he came up and put his arm around my waist. 'You can lean on me if you need to, Han,' he said in a real soft voice, like he knew it bugged me to have a kid help me out. But it did help. We went along, and we came out to a place where a big stack of crates were piled against one wall. Out the other way was a big clear space, and past that there were about half a dozen storm troopers. 'They can't see us,' the kid whispered. 'Don't make a sound. Once we're past here, we're home free.'

"So we got about halfway across and he called a halt. 'Wait a minute,' he whispers. He went ahead a few steps and looked around the corner. All at once, the troopers saw us. They started firing, and the kid whipped out his blaster and polished off three of them easy as you please. Damn good shot," I tell Luke like I'm bragging. He gives me kind of a funny look.

"The fourth and fifth storm troopers went down, too, but the sixth one got off a shot that missed me by a fraction and hit the crates. The all at once the kid let out a wild yell and came charging straight at me in some kind of crazy tackle. Ordinarily that wouldn't have

knocked me down, but I wasn't in the best of health just then, and he knocked me clear of the crates. I landed hard, and my ribs hurt like hell. I didn't realize right then what was going on until all the crates came tumbling down."

I come to a stop and say. "I don't want to tell you any more of this, Luke." I don't look at him. but I can tell he's watching me very closely. I look around. and I realize there's nobody else in the room but Luke and me. Even the bartender is gone.

Luke says, "I think you have to, Han." And he didn't sound like some kid from a backwater who's never been anyplace in his life. He sound older, and there's that Kenobi feeling again. Even I can tell the Force is strong in the kid right now. I finally raise my head and look him straight in the eye. "Damn it, Luke," I say in a voice that doesn't even sound like mine, "I can't. Don't you see? I just can't."

"Try," he says. "I know it's hard for you, Han."

"Did Chewie tell you anything?"

"No, just that he thought I should talk to you. Han, you trust me, don't you?"

When he puts it like that it's different. Besides Chewie there ain't been nobody else I'd trust with much of anything, but I guess I trust Luke. Even now, when he's sitting there like some Jedi, his face all serious, I can see he's worried as hell about me. And I'm not used to that from anybody but Chewie. It sure ain't doing me any good sitting here drinking the foul stuff they serve on the base. I ain't sleeping nights, either. My wide-awake nightmares are real dandies. I can just imagine what the asleep ones would be like.

So I say, "Hell, Luke, I don't know how to say it. But I'll try. Where is everyone?"

"I told them all to leave before I sat down."

"Nice. They're all gonna love you, kid."

"Too bad," he said, real indifferent to their problems. "Besides, I figured you didn't really want an audience."

I look at him for a minute. He's right. An audience is the last thing I want. Even a one-person audience is bad enough. "Okay," I say, determined to get it out as fast as I can. Once it's said, it won't have to be said again. "Okay. The crates fell, and when I got turned around, I saw they'd mostly fell right where I'd been standing. And that's where the kid was, under the damn crates. I forgot all about my ribs and I got over there faster than I thought I could move and hauled the crates off him. Damn, they were heavy. I don't know what happened to the other trooper. I didn't even see him again. I got the kid free, and he was just lying there, not moving at all. But he opened his eyes and even grinned at me a little, a kind of half-smile. 'You okay?' he asked me like that was all that mattered. I nodded, 'cause I couldn't seem to find anything to say. I been around enough

to know the kid wasn't gonna get well. Even if they got him in a hospital right then, he wasn't gonna make it. He said in a real soft voice that I could hardly hear, 'I didn't mean it.' 'Mean what?' I asked him. And damned if he didn't say, 'I didn't mean it when I said I didn't want a family.' And then he smiled at me, a kind of happy smile like everything was just great, and the next thing I knew, he was dead."

Luke reaches out and touches my arm like he thinks I've told him everything. "Han, I'm sorry."

And all of a sudden, I gotta tell the rest of it. I gotta say it and face it and it ain't gonna be easy. "Wait a minute, Luke," I say. "I ain't done yet."

For a minute he looks kinda worried, like he almost knows what to expect, and I say, "Then a man came out of nowhere, a tall, grey-haired man, looked a little like General Dodonna, and he came running up. 'Han,' he said, all broken up, and I'd never seen him before in my life. What the hell, I wondered, but he didn't seem to notice me. He bent over the kid and looked at him, and he was practically crying. 'Oh, Han,' he said, and it dawned on me that he was talking to the kid. Then he looked up at me. 'You must be Han Solo,' he said. 'What the hell happened?'"

"I told him about the crates, and even as I was telling him, I got a funny feeling things were about to get worse, even though they were at rock bottom right then. I finally got up my nerve to ask, 'What'd you call the kid?' And I didn't really want to know the answer."

"He looked at me. 'I wondered if he'd tell you,' he said. And I asked, 'Tell me what?' even though I thought maybe I knew the answer already. He said, 'This boy,' and his voice was shaking a little as he talked, 'has worked for us for a year. His mother died a couple of years ago. She worked for the Alliance, so I took him in. We didn't know how to reach his father or we would have tried. I think she would have liked that. And now that we've found you, it's too late.'"

Luke gasps, even though he must've already guessed what I was gonna say. And I go on. "Hell, Luke, he was my own kid. I didn't even know I had one till it was too late. And now he's dead, and he died saving my life, and I never did a thing for him when he was alive. Now do you understand why I didn't want to talk about it?"

Luke just looks at me for a minute, like he's at a loss for words. I can see in his eyes that he hurting for me, knowing how I feel. And all at once, I'm glad I told him, even though it doesn't really help, not yet. Then Luke finds his voice and he says, "I don't see what you could have done about it, Han."

"I could have been there."

"No. You didn't know about him when you left. You were right not to go back. Maybe if you'd known, it would have been different. She could have found you to gotten word to you, but she didn't."

"She knew she couldn't trust me," I tell him bitterly.

"No, I don't think that was it. She named him after you, remember. Han, if you'd known she was pregnant, you would have gone back wouldn't you?"

I think about it a minute and nod. "Yeah, I guess so."

And Luke looks kinda wise and sad. "But no matter how you might have wanted to, you wouldn't have stayed. you weren't ready to settle down, and you would have wound up doing the same thing your father did. This way, the boy at least knew that you hadn't known about him. He could still tell himself that it might have been different if you had known. But if you'd gone back and then left, he would have had to go through what you did, and he might have wound up thinking it was his fault that you'd gone away."

I look at him in surprise. "The way I always did."

Luke nods. "Han, at least he got to know you at the end. >From the way you tell it, he was glad of the chance I think that's important."

"But I never gave him nothing," I protest, as if, by saying it, I could somehow change it.

Luke says, "I think you did, Han."

"What?"

"You lived up to his image of you. You didn't disappoint him."

I think about that for a minute. Luke might be right, but it ain't enough right now. Maybe later when I think over the stuff he's been telling me, but not now. I feel like hell, and even Luke's understanding doesn't help enough. I feel so tired I hardly have the strength to go on sitting there. Maybe they let me out of the hospital a little too soon.

"Han?" Luke asks, worried. "Han are you all right?"

I can't find any words to answer him. I shake my head, and then I realize with horror that I'm gonna break down and cry and there's nothing I can do about it. "Luke," I say urgently, "Go away. Please!" And I put my head down on the table.

Luke slides his chair around beside mine and puts his arm around my shoulders. It feels kinda good. Maybe it won't be so bad to have him there after all.

I ain't cried in front of anybody since I was younger than my kid was, but now I just can't stop myself. Luke doesn't say anything at all, just sits there with me. Then a big furry hand comes down on my shoulder and a familiar voice rumbles in Wookiee, "Don't worry, Han. It'll be okay." I don't know when he came in, but I'm glad he's there.

"Oh, hell, Chewie," I say, and I can't say anything else. For what seems like forever I sit there with Luke and Chewie watching over me, and finally I start to feel a little better. I know that no matter what, they won't mention this again unless I want them to. Maybe I'll be able to work it out.

So I sit up again and I even manage to smile a little. They both look pretty relieved. Damn, I sure got lucky to have friends like them. I can't help thinking how things might have been different, if the kid hadn't died. Chewie would have loved him, and Luke would probably be good with kids. Better'n me, anyway. But it don't do any good to think that kind of stuff. I struggle to my feet and Chewie grabs my arm to steady me .

"What're you gonna do?" Luke asks me, a little worried.

I find that I'm yawning. "I think I might try and get a little sleep," I tell him. Luke knows I ain't been sleeping too good lately, and he nods in approval.

"Good idea, Han. I guess I'll see you later. If--you need me, I'll be around."

"Yeah, kid. I know. Thanks."

I give him a smile and kinda straighten my shoulders a little. "Y'know," I say, kinda thoughtful. "The kid turned out real well, when you think about it."

And Luke gives me a smile back and says, like I'm supposed to take it light, "It must be that Corellian blood, right, Han?"

And I look at him. "You know, Luke, you might just be right."

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