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Family Matters Part 1

by [Leela Starsky](#)

NOTE: In my version of this galaxy far, far away, the Galactic Standard Year consists of ten calendar months, each containing 40 days, or four ten-day weeks. A Galactic Standard Day consists of twenty, fifty minute hours. But this is usually deferred in preference to local time.

This story is part three of an arc that started with *Forty Days to Bespin* and continued with *One Night on Bespin*. There are also references to my other stories, *The Princess and the Sith Lord*, *Mission to Galadan*, *Under Coruscant*, and *Ice*.

Inspirational music: "Blade Runner" soundtrack by Vangelis, "The Dish" soundtrack by Edmund Choi, "X-Men" soundtrack by Michael K-men, "Paris" the musical soundtrack by Jon English, and "Chess" the musical soundtrack by Benny and Bjorn from ABBA.

CHAPTER ONE.

She was on Coruscant. Lying in the middle of an enormous bed draped with mollemar silk, its brilliant colours subdued by the soft light from the aromatic burners scattered around the room. Grinning up at the predatory-looking Corellian poised over her, delighting in the fact that he was about to make love to her, Leia Organa decided that at this particular moment in time she was the happiest woman in the Galaxy.

She considered teasing Solo a little longer; considered wriggling out of his embrace and making him chase her around the bed again, but the noise of their boisterous game had brought Luke to the door last time and she didn't want the Tatooine farmboy there again.

A warm breeze drifted through the open window, stirring the feathers scattered all over the room. Feathers that had exploded from one of the pillows when she had hit Han with it. Leia's grin broadened at the memory and Solo's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"What?" he wanted to know.

Leia's look became gentle and she whispered, "Love you."
Solo nuzzled the side of her face as he manoeuvred himself between her legs and murmured, "Love you too, *wife*."

Wife. Leia let herself wallow happily in the moniker. They *were* just pretending, but it was nice to let herself believe it. Just for a little while...
"Husband," she heard herself tease softly.

"Mmmm," he growled, and she wondered if he had any idea what the sound of his voice did to her. How the deep rumble of it seemed to touch her very core.
I should tell him, she thought. *Tell him before it's too late...*

Then the carbonite slab hit the platform with a resounding *smack*.

Leia Organa woke with a gasp and the cold, hard reality of her cell slammed into her. She curled into a foetal ball, longing to escape back to her dreams. Escape from the prospect of Vader, escape from everything the Empire stood for, escape from the thought of going on without Han.

She took a shuddering breath and tried to calm the panicked race her heart was doing. Tried to force herself to relax, but she was trembling from cold as much as anything else. It had been such a pleasant dream too...

She closed her eyes, remembering the bed that she and Han had been forced to share in Farrouq's mansion on Coruscant over two years ago. When the risk to her life had required them to pretend that they were husband and wife. They had not made love then, but part of her wished they had.

A muffled wailing penetrated her cell and she put her hands over her ears to block it out. The door to her cell was thick, but by no means sound proof. Hearing the misery of fellow inmates was an integral part of the psychological torment of incarceration.

She had heard them drag Chewbacca out some time ago, his protests and bellows almost clear enough for her to make out his words. She hadn't heard him since and it worried her to contemplate what the Imperials might be doing to him.

Shipping the Wookiee off to some slave-labour camp probably. And this time there would be no Han Solo to rescue him .

Tears snuck out from beneath her closed lids. No Han Solo to rescue Chewie, no Han Solo to rescue *her*, and she seriously doubted Luke would be racing in any time soon.

The shock of finding out that Darth Vader was Luke's father had rendered Leia speechless. She remembered the wave of revulsion she had felt, and the awareness of it being expressed all over her face by the look of bitter self-loathing on Luke's, but she had been powerless to stop it. And while the saner part of her could understand how horrific the revelation must have been for Luke, her own overwhelming *pain* had left her unable to cope with the blow.

Chewbacca had dragged her back from the brink of insanity by demanding her help with shutting down the ship, and Leia had responded immediately. This was something she could do; something she could comprehend.

Then Calrissian and Chewbacca had gone to the trouble of disabling the droids and hiding them in one of the smuggling compartments before the *Falcon* settled into the docking bay the Super Star Destroyer was dragging it into.

It had disturbed Leia at the time, not because she thought hiding the droids was a silly thing to do, but because it had left her alone in the cockpit with Luke.

Vader's son.

Appalled with herself, yet still unable to speak to him, Leia wondered how Luke had suddenly gone from being her friend, someone she had loved and trusted for almost three years, to *Vader's son*?

Leia sat up, wiped her hands across her face and wished she could wipe away the last forty hours. Wished she was still on the *Falcon* with Han. Thinking about him had tears springing behind her closed lids, and Leia pressed her fingers against her eyes in an attempt to stop them. But all she could see was Han's face as he was lowered into the carbonite pit, his eyes telling her how much he loved her and how afraid he was. Not for himself; for her, and her chest ached so much it hurt.

*Everything I touch, everything I love **dies**.*

Despite her efforts to the contrary, Leia sobbed. She hid her face further behind her hands, aware that she was undoubtedly under surveillance and angry with herself for showing weakness. The memory of the invasive surveillance she and Han had suffered on Bespin washed over her. The lustful, sneering looks from the Imperial officers. It exacerbated her despair, and she could feel her body trembling as she struggled to squash her emotions.

She wanted to scream. Wanted to rage. Wanted to lash out at those responsible. She wanted to kill Vader for taking *everything* she cared about and destroying it in the most violent way possible. Alderaan, her home, her family, her *life*. Leia knew Vader was not responsible for the Empire, but she was too distressed to think rationally. He had become the focus of the Empire for her and, as a result, the reason why she was a Rebel. And now he had taken not just Han and Chewie from her, but Luke as well.

Abruptly Leia's distress and outrage reached flash point, ripping a scream from the depths of her soul as she threw herself against the door. Not in any attempt to escape, but to overwhelm the pain in her soul with physical pain while she screamed herself hoarse.

Finally spent, she slid trembling to the floor, wishing desperately for the numbness that had overwhelmed her after Alderaan's destruction.

Vader felt her. Felt her dark rage like a palpable force and moved to the screen that displayed the Princess' cell, and was awed by the potential she represented. The young woman was a hair's breadth away from using the Force. Using the *Dark* side of the Force. Her unbound anger would make her formidable.

His Master would see her as a threat, without question. Would insist upon her immediate termination. By his rules there could only ever be two Sith; a Master and an Apprentice. But Vader had decided to change that rule. The Dark Lord of the Sith had lost faith in his Master with the destruction of Alderaan, and he was well aware of Palpatine's intentions for his son. The Emperor wanted Luke dead, without a doubt, but if Palpatine could replace his current Dark Lord with a new one; one that wasn't bound by the constrictions of a life-support suit, Vader had no doubt at all that Palpatine would do so. Vader, of course, had his own agenda for his son, which he supposed his Master suspected too. It was the way of the Sith; for the Apprentice to kill the Master and take on an Apprentice of his own, and Vader intended to have Luke as his Apprentice. But the Princess of Alderaan was a wild card none of them had foreseen.

Could he take on two Apprentices and survive? Vader felt certain that he and his son working in unison would be unbreakable; but would the girl sour that? Would she come between father and son in a way that would render his plan unworkable? It was possible. Yet he sensed that if he turned the girl, his son would swiftly follow. Her presence would certainly curtail any more suicide attempts from Luke, and there was a distinct possibility that she would bind the three of them more adroitly than he and Luke could ever be alone. With her, Vader sensed, his usurping of Palpatine was a certainty, without her it was only a possibility.

How could *Organa* have spawned such a child?

He turned to the screen that showed his son, knew that he had felt her as well, and decided it was time to talk to him. Soon they would be on Coruscant and the game would become deadly.

Luke was in pain. Everywhere. His head ached, the arm from which his hand had been severed was throbbing and the abrasions and contusions all over his body reminded him of their existence every time he moved. But it was the chipped and broken bones that really hurt. The pain-killer that Leia had given him had worn off several hours ago and, it seemed, the Imperials were in no hurry to top it up. They didn't want him comfortable. They wanted him incapacitated and controllable.

They had him under twenty-hour guard in a private section of the medcentre, and Luke wondered when Vader would make his appearance. He had expected to find the Dark Lord waiting for him when they were dragged off the *Falcon*, but hadn't seen Vader since boarding the Super Star Destroyer. He knew Vader was there, was as aware of Vader's presence as he knew Vader was of his, and couldn't help wondering what the Sith Lord was waiting for.

He was half asleep when he felt Leia's rage touch him like cold spectre, and the implications rendered him speechless. He had suspected her Force sensitivity for several years now and, when he had finally broached the subject on Hoth, had been met with a mixture of hostility and humour. Leia did *not* want to know. Luke knew what the Dark Side felt like. Yoda's teaching there had left an indelible impression, and Vader's presence was a constant reminder. To feel a wave of it from the princess was almost heartbreaking, and Luke couldn't stop himself from crying out, physically and mentally, "Leia, *no!*" But he knew she hadn't heard. She was far too deep in her own misery to hear him.

But he knew Vader had felt her, was drawn to the darkness in her like a sandworm to vibrations in the sand. And, like the sandworms of Tatooine, he moved with a singular purpose: to *feed*. But unlike the sandworms that had been contained to one sector of his home planet by a man-made mountain range, Darth Vader was free to feed on the galaxy.

Darth Vader, his *father*.

Luke grimaced, grieving the loss of the father he had imagined all his life. The father Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru had told him about: the freighter captain. It was the freighter captain who had inspired Luke to hone his piloting abilities, and becoming a freighter captain himself had always been an attainable goal. The

father Kenobi had invoked in his imagination was of another calibre entirely. Anakin Skywalker the Jedi Knight. The Jedi Knight, Kenobi had told him, had been betrayed and murdered by Darth Vader.

Suddenly the father of his imagination had been thrown into an entirely different theatre. One of galactic peace-keeper and warrior. And Kenobi had woken the same abilities in him; had helped him touch the Force. From that moment there was no turning back. Luke had made learning as much as he could about the Force and the Jedi Knights his new goal, and had spent the last three years wielding the only hard evidence he had of the man who had sired him: his father's lightsabre. Something he had lost, along with his innocence, on Bespin. Ironic that it was his father who had parted him from it.

He felt the Dark Lord approach the medcentre and closed his eyes in resignation, Yoda's prophetic words echoing in his mind: "You will destroy all for which they have fought and suffered." How could he have been so *stupid*? So *arrogant*? And why hadn't Yoda and Ben *told* him?

Luke heard the telltale rasp of the respirator as Darth Vader entered the medcentre. Listened while the Dark Lord dismissed the troopers standing just inside the door as he stepped into the small room, and then the door hissed shut. Luke felt his father deactivate all the surveillance devices in the room with a thought, and opened his eyes to regard the dark figure at the end of his bed. He sensed they were each waiting for the other to break the silence.

Not one to mince words or waste time, Vader said, "You felt her."

Luke nodded. There was no point denying the fact.

"How long have you known?" the Dark Lord asked.

"I've suspected her for a while now," Luke replied flatly.

"But you haven't taught her anything?"

"She..." Luke considered Leia's reaction to his suggestion that she might have been the cause of Han's miraculous recovery after the cave-in on Hoth. That the princess had somehow used the Force to save the Corellian's life. "She didn't want to know," he said.

Luke felt Vader subtly probe the surface thoughts and emotions in his mind, seeking a quick answer, and didn't have the energy to block him.

"She fears it," Vader observed, and Luke sensed the Dark Lord's inability to comprehend Leia's lack of power lust.

"She fears what she may *become*," Luke clarified, knowing he did not have to voice his thought, *...a Sith Lord like you.*

Vader paced away to one corner of the small room, then turned to look back at him, his hands clasped casually behind his back. "And you?"

"I will not join you."

"Yet you accept the truth that I am your father."

Luke looked away; sickened afresh at the prospect of accepting the figure at the end of his bed as the person he had longed to emulate all his life. He sensed Vader touch his mind again and felt his face redden with embarrassment and a sudden flush of anger.

"No," he said crossly. "I accept that *Anakin Skywalker* was my father."

Vader stiffened slightly then said, "That name no longer holds any meaning for me."

"Then you are not my father," Luke snapped.

Vader seemed to consider this for a moment then he said quietly, "They tried to kill you when I turned. Do you remember? You were about two..."

"What?" Luke asked, frowning. "*Who?*" *Who would kill a two-year-old?*

"The Jedi," Vader replied. "They sensed your potential and labelled you too dangerous."

Luke's eyes narrowed and he tentatively tested the Dark Lord for suspected falsehood. And met with resistance. Then abruptly an image came to him. An image of a woman with long, dark hair holding the lightsabre he had lost on Bespin. His *father's* lightsabre.

"Your mother revived you," Vader said quietly.

Luke concentrated and, using the Force, explored the image further. Was it a true memory, or something Vader had just put there? It *felt* true. And the woman certainly looked like the one in the holo he'd kept in his bedroom on Tatooine. The holo Aunt Beru had given him when he was seven.

In the vision, he was looking at the woman from an angle that suggested someone was holding him. Someone wearing black gloves...

Luke withdrew from the vision and looked at the black spectre at the end of his bed. "You were there," he said.

"I sensed your... distress," Vader admitted, but Luke got the definite feeling from the Dark Lord that he meant 'death'.

"They *killed* me?"

"Your mother revived you," Vader repeated.

The *Jedi* had killed him? They'd considered an infant *that* dangerous? Luke shifted uncomfortably as he considered this new information. Just what did they think him capable of, he wondered, then looked at the answer standing at the end of his bed. *Much anger in him; like his father*, Yoda had said in his initial protests against training Luke. Was Yoda right? Was he destined to repeat his father's mistakes?

Luke closed his eyes and berated himself; *I should never have left Dagobah*. He focussed on the various pains in his body for a moment, using it to distract himself from the pain of failure and betrayal. *Ben, why didn't you tell me?!* "He didn't teach you self-healing, did he?"

Luke opened his eyes, startled by the nearness of Vader's voice, and found himself looking directly into the visor of the Dark Lord's helmet. Was even more shocked to realise he could see the man's eyes. They appeared to be blue, like his own.

Luke shook his head, unable to answer Vader's question, and felt a wave of anger from the Dark Lord as he stalked back to the other side of the room. "Made sure they taught you all the *warrior* skills," he growled scathingly. "Turned you into a guided missile and pointed you at *me*."

With a shock, Luke realised Vader was right. That was exactly what Yoda and Kenobi had done. Trained him with the express idea of using him to kill Vader. Using him to correct *their* mistake. *He betrayed and murdered your father...* Luke felt a surge of anger flush through him at how well he had been manipulated. Of course they hadn't told him Vader was his father! He might not have been such a *puppet* if they had!

Vader's hand encompassed his face and Luke was surprised to realise he no longer feared the man. He felt the pain in his body lessen, knew that his father had somehow used the Force to help him, and couldn't help wondering what catastrophe had forced him into the suit.

"I am not healing you," Vader told him. "Just lessening your pain. I can't risk you trying to escape or kill yourself."

It was a reprimand of sorts, and Luke accepted it. He was grateful to feel a little more comfortable and the lessening of pain made him able to think a little more clearly. It made him wonder why Vader did not use the Force to heal himself. In his limited experience, Luke had always thought of the Dark Side as being more selfish, yet Vader obviously had the ability to help others.

Exploring this new insight, Luke came to the surprised conclusion that the man before him was not evil. Dark, yes. Savagely efficient, yes. But not evil.

"What made you turn?" he asked.

It took so long for the Dark Lord to answer that Luke thought he was going to avoid the question all together.

Finally he removed his hand from Luke's face and replied simply, "You don't know the power of the Dark Side."

"Easier, more seductive," Luke said, quoting Yoda, then risked baiting the man further by adding, "There's still good in you; I can *feel* it."

Vader regarded him sharply and Luke sensed the Sith Lord was glaring at him, despite the fact that he couldn't see the man's eyes from this angle. He felt a spike of anger from Vader, which faded as quickly as it had come.

"It is too late for me, my son," Vader said quietly.

"I will not join you," Luke told him, hoping he sounded more convincing than he felt. "I will not turn, and you'll be forced to kill me."

"Perhaps," Vader agreed without looking at him. "Or the Emperor will." He paused in the act of opening the door and looked back at Luke. "The Emperor must not find out about the princess. He will kill her without question."

"What are you going to do with her?" Luke asked, terrified of the answer.

"Teach her how to conceal herself," Vader replied, and opened the door.

Luke watched the door shut as the Dark Lord left the room and wondered how receptive the princess would be.

Leia looked up apprehensively as the door to her cell slid open. Her anger had subsided somewhat but her irritation levels were at their peak. Her menses had started on Cloud City, but now it had stopped again, probably due to the stress of

waiting to be tortured. Leia wished it would simply come and be done with. Not that she had any way of dealing with it *here*. That thought left her even more affronted and, despite the personal nature of her complaint, Leia had decided that the next officer through her cell door would cop her full ire. When Vader stepped into the cell she hastily reassessed her decision.

"I am not here to torture you, Princess," the Dark Lord assured her matter-of-factly.

"Really?" Leia snapped defensively. "Then what do you want?" She folded her arms across her chest and suggested sarcastically, "Here to regale me with your scintillating conversation?"

"We are one day away from Coruscant," Vader explained. "I want to show you how to protect yourself."

Leia regarded him with disdain. "From what?" *What could be worse than you?*
"From the Emperor."

"Why?"

"You have the Force, Leia Organa. As soon as he senses this he will kill you."

Senses? The Emperor was Force sensitive? That explained a lot, but why Vader would want to protect her from him was a mystery.

"What have you done to Luke?" she demanded.

"He is in the Medcentre."

"And Chewie?"

"You care about the Wookiee?"

"Yes, I care about *the Wookiee!*" she snapped. "I care about a lot of things which I'm sure *you* could never comprehend."

"The Wookiee has been assigned to a position where his talents will be most useful," Vader said.

"*Slave labour,*" Leia said scathingly. "Why not just execute us and be done with it?"

"Executing a potentially valuable resource is short-sighted and foolish. I can assure you, Princess, I am neither."

Leia felt a deep wave of loathing flood through her. This was the monster who had tortured her on the Death Star, who had made her watch while Tarkin destroyed Alderaan, who had used *Han* as a test subject in the carbon freeze on Bespin. Leia fanned her hatred and glared at the Dark Lord.

"No!" Vader said sharply. "That is like illuminating yourself as a Sith Lord." Leia took a step back, horrified, and the Dark Lord pressed his point. "To hide yourself from the Emperor you must feel *nothing*."

Nothing? She wondered, and then it came to her, *Like after Alderaan...* Oh, how she wished she could reach that state of *not* feeling! Had been struggling to reach it since everything had gone to hell on Cloud City. But opening herself emotionally to Han had put a crack in the shields Leia Organa had built around her feelings. And like oxygen through a puncture in a vacuum suit, her emotions seemed to be enlarging the fissure as they escaped.

Vader's demand enraged her. How could she feel *nothing* when the cause of all her distress was standing in front of her? How could she feel *nothing* when Han had been reduced to a block of organic metal and was being delivered to Jabba the Hutt? Thinking about Solo smothered her rage with a thick blanket of depression and made Leia's lip tremble, forcing her to bite the inside of her lip to still it. She turned away from the Dark Lord; afraid he would see the tears in her eyes.

"Draw it in, Princess," she heard him say. "Draw it in and hold it tight. Cherish the pain and use it to make yourself stronger. Harder. Unbreakable."

Yes, Leia told herself, desperately trying to revive the person she had been on Hoth. *Like ice*. The Ice Princess. Cold, hard and unbreakable. *And currently brittle enough to shatter into a million pieces*, the unhelpful part of her mind told her.

A flare of anger lit in her again, but this time it was directed at herself, and was as cold and hard as the rest of her emotions.

"You have exceptional control, Princess," Vader told her and she glared at him, her eyes full of cold hate.

"Exceptional," Vader said again, then left her alone in the cell.

CHAPTER TWO.

The Emperor refused the prisoner transfer to Coruscant, much to Vader's surprise. He knew his Master would want to inspect the boy immediately, and was disturbed when the Emperor insisted on visiting him on the *Executor*. Disturbed because it suggested that his Master was displeased.

The Emperor had a throne room of sorts on the Super Star Destroyer. A large, mostly empty space, which was attached to suites he had never used. It was in this throne room that his Master had insisted on scrutinising Luke Skywalker. As Vader led his son through the ship to where the Emperor was waiting, he found himself wondering what he would do if his Master chose to kill the boy on the spot. Would he stand by and let Luke die? Could he be *that* obedient? With the Princess of Alderaan and all the possibilities she represented as his back up plan, Vader decided he could afford to lose his son. He did not want to; sincerely hoped he would not have to make that choice, but he was not prepared to risk his plans at the cost of saving his son.

In front of him, Luke stumbled and was jerked back onto his feet by the officers flanking him. The boy had barely slept since his capture over Tatooine, and was seriously exhausted from pain as well as lack of sleep.

At the risk of angering his Master, Vader used the Force to lessen the boy's pain, and watched him stand a little straighter as a result.

For his part, Luke was quite certain he was walking to his death, and was grateful for the ease in his suffering and the small amount of dignity it restored to him. He had been worrying about Leia for days now and found himself wondering if Han had felt something similar as he was led to the carbonite platform. That all-encompassing concern for a loved one about to be left behind. But Han had not known the sort of danger she was in; had not known she was being courted by the Dark Side of the Force. Luke had not felt the dark whisper of her anger again, but he suspected it was still there, simmering beneath the surface, waiting to come pouring out through a crack in her armour.

Luke took a deep breath and tried to quell his anxiety. All that was out of his control now. Now he had to focus on his own soul.

Darth Vader could feel the cool disdain for his son from the officers walking beside him. To them his son was nothing more than a captured rebel about to meet the full ire of the Emperor. He sensed an eagerness in them to witness the boy's punishment and would have liked to Force-choke them for their impudence. But they were neither worth the energy nor the ire such an action would

undoubtedly provoke from his Master, and he doubted the Emperor would permit them to stay.

The large doors to the throne room opened before them, red Imperial guards stepping aside to allow them entrance, and Vader directed his son to the dais at the far end. The only thing on the dais was a large chair that looked out through a wall of window, across the planet of Coruscant, which seemed to glow from within like the corusca gems for which it was named. The chair turned towards them as they approached and Vader sensed a lust-filled eagerness from his Master as he contemplated the boy.

"Leave us," the Emperor commanded the Imperial officers, and they immediately bowed and left the room, the great doors shutting behind them.

Luke felt an element of surprise at the advanced decrepitude of the wizened man before him. He had not expected the Emperor to be so old. He was doubly surprised as he felt a cold wave of darkness radiate from the twisted creature, and berated himself for his lack of foresight. Of course the Emperor was a Sith Lord; it made perfect sense. As did the man's unflinching grasp on the galaxy. "So, Lord Vader, you succeeded at last."

Palpatine's voice seemed as ruined as his features, and Luke found himself wondering if perhaps the man was not as old as he appeared, that Dark Force use had taken an unspeakable toll on the Emperor.

Luke watched Vader bow and answer, "Yes, Master."

"Something of a poor specimen of manhood," Palpatine opined contemptuously, and Luke had to stop himself from laughing inappropriately. It was the sort of ironic comment that he could hear Solo laughing uproariously at, and Luke found himself wishing he could share it with the Corellian.

The Emperor leaned towards him a little and said, "I am looking forward to completing your training, young Skywalker."

Luke summoned his courage and looked the man in the eye. "You can kill me," he said calmly. "You can kill my friends. But you can't kill what we stand for. And one day you'll die. And your Empire will die with you."

Palpatine laughed. A hacking demented laugh. "*Die?* I have no intention of *dying*, I can assure you."

Luke took a leaf out of Han Solo's book and sneered at the withered man who looked so near death already. "Even *you're* not that strong," he said.

Palpatine hooted derisively, "Oh, but I *am*, young Jedi." He leaned eagerly towards Luke. "I have clones prepared and waiting for me to move into." Luke regarded him with arrogant disbelief and the Emperor chuckled. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"I don't doubt *you* believe you can do it."

"He can do it."

Luke glanced at Vader, the Dark Lord's quiet words causing a whisper of doubt to cross his mind.

"You cannot comprehend the power of the dark side," Vader added.

"If you two are anything to go by, I'd say it chews you up and spits you out!"

Thank you, Han! Thank you for attitude!

He must have hit a nerve because Palpatine scowled and hissed at him.

"Besides," Luke added smugly, "we all know how unstable clones can be." Perhaps Palpatine was already a clone? Maybe that's what the problem was? Where the madness came from?

Palpatine leaned back into his chair. "Your sister has provided the solution to *that* problem."

Vader and Luke both looked sharply at the Emperor and he cackled at them. Luke felt Vader probe his mind and looked at him as the Dark Lord asked suspiciously, "*Sister?*" As far as Luke knew, he had no sister, and it was obviously news to his would-be father.

"The child she is carrying has an unparalleled sensitivity to the Force," the Emperor said, then gloated, "The child will be *mine*." He smiled wickedly. "Will be *me*."

Luke suddenly remembered the Spice-induced vision he'd had of Solo's red-haired daughter almost three years ago, during his mission with Han and Leia to Galadan. And all at once he *knew*. Knew without a doubt, and he almost staggered. *Leia?* Leia was his *sister*?

The Emperor leaned towards him and said, "You've *seen* her, haven't you?"

Luke looked up at him, haunted by the image of the child, and Palpatine grinned delightedly. "You have! And you *know*."

Luke looked away, feeling something akin to panic. *No. Not Han and Leia's child!* "No," he murmured, then met the Emperor's eyes once more and repeated carefully, "No."

Palpatine smiled maliciously and touched one of the many controls on the arm of his chair. A door on the far side of the room opened and Leia was roughly led in by two stormtroopers. Looking at her, Luke was shocked by how ill she looked. He watched her sum up the situation in a second and label herself 'coercion'. She shouted, "Luke, don't do it!"

The Emperor laughed and she was led across the floor to them. No one could see the Dark Lord's face, but Luke could feel Vader's shock at the revelation that the Alderaan Princess was his daughter. Luke did not know how it was possible, but it explained Leia's latent Force talent.

At a signal from the Emperor, the stormtroopers let her go and left the room. Leia ran the rest of the distance to Luke and, ignoring the various pains throughout his body, Luke hugged her like he would never let her go.

"Are you alright-?" he started, but she cut him off.

"The worst they can do is kill me," she said into his ear. "Whatever it is they want you to do, don't do it."

Luke looked at her without letting her go. She was carrying Han's child and Han was who-knew-where. They didn't even know if he would survive. Luke searched, but could sense nothing of the child through the Force. Too early, and he suspected Leia herself didn't know. The thought of the Emperor taking the child filled him with fear and loathing.

Luke took a deep breath and crushed her to him again. She was his *sister*. "I love you," he told her and Leia frowned. He let her go and turned to face the Emperor. "Alright," he said. "You have me. Let her go."

Palpatine regarded him incredulously for a moment, then burst out laughing, "You think you can *bargain??*"

"I'll do whatever you want," Luke said darkly. "Just let her go."

"*No!*" Leia shrieked.

"*You are mine,*" Palpatine snapped, stabbing his finger at the young man. "*She is mine. The child is mine.*" Leia frowned and Luke could almost hear her shocked thought, *What child?* "It's almost a pity the child isn't *yours,*" the Emperor continued. "It would have been most amusing if *all* of us were Skywalkers."

He cackled and the look Leia gave Luke clearly said, *What is the insane bastard raving about?*

"In fact," the Emperor went on, "I may even marry her." He scowled at Vader. "Your father ran off with my last bride and *you* were the result. Seems fitting somehow that I take his daughter." He paused then added, "And grand-daughter."

Vader did not flinch, but Luke noticed the Dark Lord's hands form into fists and a realisation hit him. Anakin Skywalker had loved her; had loved their mother. Whoever Darth Vader was now and whatever he had done, Luke *knew* that the man he had once been had loved their mother. It was something Luke hadn't even realised was tormenting him, but to know that he had been conceived with love... That Vader was capable of it or had been... It took the edge off the horror Luke had been suffering since the awful revelation on Bespin. It occurred to him that, from the Dark Lord's reaction, he still loved her. Somewhere, in the depths of Vader's soul, the man who was his father still existed.

Leia wasn't making head or tail of any of it. Father. Bride. Daughter. What was the lunatic babbling about?? What she did understand, or what she thought she did, was that Luke had just pledged himself to Vader and the Emperor in an attempt to save *her*. And that was unacceptable. The galaxy would not survive *another* Dark Jedi.

Her final thought was, *Forgive me, Han*, then she twisted with a speed and agility he would have been proud of, snatching Vader's lightsabre from his belt,



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igniting it and slashing it through the space the Emperor occupied in one fluid movement.

Except that he wasn't there any more. But the chair was sparking spectacularly.

Palpatine, livid that she had got so close, raised his hands and lightning flew from his fingers and enveloped her. Screaming, Leia dropped the lightsabre and fell to the floor, writhing in agony.

"No!" Luke cried, rushing to help her, and heard himself scream as the lightning enveloped him as well. "The child!" he begged, hoping to appeal to the Emperor's own desires. "The child!"

The lightning stopped abruptly and Luke slumped across the princess in a vain attempt to protect her should the Emperor start spitting lightning again. Never in his life had he seen such a display except in fantasy or science-fiction holos. Was that a strictly Sith power? Was Vader capable of it? And why hadn't Yoda and Ben warned him? Luke summoned the energy to lift his head in time to see the Emperor switch his glare to Vader.

The Dark Lord seemed to hesitate a moment then bent and retrieved his lightsabre. Luke tightened his grip on the princess as Palpatine moved a step closer to peer at them. The Emperor made a derogatory sound in his throat then turned to Vader.

"Keep control of your offspring, Lord Vader, or I shall have to kill them." He stormed from the room and Vader called for medics. Luke was sure he could have walked, but Vader would not let him, forcing him onto the second gurney after they had both seen to Leia's.

Looking at her now, as they pushed her gurney out of the room just ahead of his, Luke could see she was barely conscious. Leia, his *sister*. Sighing, Luke closed his eyes and wondered how she would take the news. Considering her reaction to finding out that Vader was *his* father, Luke didn't think she would cope very well. As for the child she was carrying... She and Han had finally sorted out their differences it seemed.

Luke couldn't help feeling a certain level of irritation towards the missing Corellian. Although he had wanted his two best friends to acknowledge their feelings for one another for a long time, Luke was peeved that they had been careless enough not to prevent a pregnancy. Leia would be mortified when she found out, he was sure and yet, with Han missing, would be determined to keep the child. Han on the other hand... Assuming he survived his carbonite prison, Luke was worried how Han would react to the news.

As for the Emperor's plans... Luke was determined not to let them come to fruition. Somehow, he would have to get himself and the princess off the *Executor* and out of Coruscant space.

He opened his eyes as they entered the medcentre and saw them transferring the princess to a permanent bed. He heard her try to protest as they bound her wrists to the bed, then she slipped into unconsciousness.

Luke sat up, straining to hear the instructions Vader was giving the medic treating Leia, but was distracted when he realised that he was being scanned himself. This medic didn't look at him once, concentrating instead on the information displayed on the small scanner in his hand as he waved it back and forth across Luke's body. He spent a relatively long time focussing the scanner on what was left of Luke's right arm, then turned to Vader as the Sith Lord approached and pronounced, "He is well enough to attempt the surgery." Luke looked warily at Vader and the Dark Lord explained, "You are being fitted with a cybernetic hand."

"What about Leia?" Luke asked looking across at the princess' bed. "What are you going to do to her?"

"That is not your concern," Vader replied coolly.

"She's my *sister!*" Luke spat vehemently. "She *is* my concern!"

"Shall I have him restrained?" the medic asked Vader.

"Do you need to be restrained?" Vader asked him and Luke scowled.

"That depends on what you plan to do to my sister."

The medic must have decided that Vader could handle him, because he moved away into another room.

"You are rashly accepting of the claim," Vader said carefully.

So Vader was having trouble accepting the fact that Leia was his daughter, Luke thought with some irony. But Luke could feel the truth in Palpatine's revelation as much as he could feel the truth in Vader's. Leia was his sister, he had no doubt, but he surmised Vader would want DNA confirmation of her parentage.

"Maybe you should look up Solo's genealogy while you're looking up Leia's,"

Luke suggested sarcastically. "So you can be prepared for what their child will be like."

Luke felt an intense spike of anger from the Dark Lord and came to the swift conclusion that Vader was anything but impressed with the princess' choice of partner.

"You disapprove of Han," Luke said quietly.

"I disapprove of the Princess of Alderaan allowing herself to be defiled by Corellian *slime*," Vader said harshly.

Luke squashed an automatic impulse to leap to Solo's defence, knowing that Vader would refuse to hear it. Instead he asked hotly, "Who are *you* to tell her who she can and can't love?" He slipped off the repulsored gurney and walked over to Leia's bed. She was still unconscious and looked very pale, and it occurred to him that she was still wearing the snowsuit he'd last seen her in on Hoth. He touched her face gently and searched again for any sense of the child she was carrying in the Force, but still he felt nothing. Part of him hoped the Emperor was wrong, for Leia's sake, but Luke's memory of his Spice-induced vision strongly suggested otherwise.

He turned and looked at Vader who was standing at the end of her bed, then glanced at the cast covering the stump of his arm and sighed. "Let's get this over with," he said.

Leia struggled to consciousness, found herself strapped to a medbunk and immediately started straining against the straps holding her down despite the pain in every one of her joints. A 2-1B med-droid moved into view.

"There is no need to panic," it told her. "You are safe-"

"Let me go," Leia demanded.

"The restraints are for your own safety-"

"Let me *go!*" Leia shrieked, struggling desperately.

"Please calm down or I will be required to sedate you."

She caught sight of Vader approaching, a human medic at his side, and wondered if the Sith Lord could feel her terror. She suspected he could and wondered what sort of kick he got out of it.

"I want a complete genetic test done on the princess and the child she is carrying," Leia heard him tell the medic, and felt her heart lodge in her throat. *Child? They thought she was pregnant? Why would they think that?*

"There will be a risk to the embryo-" the medic was saying.

But there is no embryo...

"A *complete* genetic test," Vader repeated.

Why did they think she was pregnant?

"Yes, Lord Vader."

Leia suddenly felt dizzy as she tried to wrap her brain around the concept and wondered for a moment if this was some sort of bizarre response from Vader *feeling* her 'Force bonding' with Han on Cloud City. How could she be pregnant? Solo had assured her he was using contraception!

Abruptly the Emperor's words came back to her – *The child will be mine!* And somehow it all made horrible sense. The nausea, the vomiting, the amenorrhoea. *Goddess, no...*

"You will inform me *personally* the minute the results are available," Vader said. *No, I can't be!* Leia was verging on panic. *He told me... told me he was safe... He lied,* came the horrible voice in her head. The one that lay in wait to gloat at her, 'I told you so!' *But it doesn't look like you'll be pregnant for very long,* it added.

"Yes, my Lord," the medic assured him. "They should be available by the time Skywalker comes out of surgery."

Luke was in *surgery*? Then she remembered, *Of course... his hand...* Vader and the medic moved away and she could hear the medic calling instructions to his staff. *Preparing,* she thought. Preparing to take her child. She had no doubt that was Vader's intention. *The child will be mine,* the Emperor had said. Palpatine wanted her child so Vader was going to take it from her for him. Take it from her and grow it in a tank. Palpatine's new plaything.

Struggling frantically against her bonds, uncaring that she was rubbing her wrists raw, Leia felt a horror and fear greater than any she had ever known.

"Please be still," the 2-1B med-droid said.

They had taken Alderaan from her, then Han, and now they were going to take all she had left of Han. She had not planned the pregnancy, but it was becoming more precious to her by the second.

"Please be still," the 2-1B med-droid repeated.

Desperate and outraged, Leia screamed her frustration and terror at the droid, "Let me *go!*!"

"I will be forced to sedate you," the droid said, producing a hypo. "You are harming yourself."

"No!" Leia shrieked, lunging away from the droid. But her arm was still bound and the droid pressed the hypo against her wrist. "No," Leia begged. "Please!" But heard the hypo discharge despite her plea.

Her screams had attracted the attention of the medic who approached her bed, irritation evident on his face.

"I have sedated the patient, Sir," the 2-1B told him, lowering the bed to a horizontal position as Leia slumped slightly with the forced relaxation of her muscles.

The medic grunted his acknowledgment and leaned over to look hard into the princess' eyes. Leia was aware but unable to do anything sudden with her muscles.

"Please..." she begged. "Don't take my baby..."

The medic frowned then turned to the 2-1B. "What did you give her?"

"Standard dose of nesavarbol, sir."

The medic grunted his approval then told the droid, "We'll do the procedure here. Give her five minutes then put her under."

"Yes, sir," said the droid.

"*Please,*" Leia begged, fighting the sedation to gain the medic's attention once more. "*Please* don't do this."

The medic eyed her warily for a moment, then walked away.

Leia felt an unreality descend over her. Like the one she had experienced after Alderaan's destruction. Totally helpless and powerless. Soon would come the blessed numbness she had longed for after they had taken Han. She closed her eyes and the tears came unbidden. Trickled out from under her eyelids. *I'm sorry,* she told the Han she carried in her heart. *I'm so sorry...*

Vader walked away from the protesting princess feeling no compunction whatsoever. He had to have genetic proof for the claims the Emperor had made, and the fact that his Master wanted the princess' child so badly meant that he had to have the genetic data for that as well.

The idea that the Princess of Alderaan could be *his* child had floored him completely. If it was true, it meant that his wife had been pregnant when she'd left him and he couldn't help wondering if she'd known. Vader had always been irked by the speed with which she'd married Bail Organa, and it didn't take a genius to figure out that the daughter she delivered soon after must have been conceived prior to their bonding. But it had never occurred to him that the child might not be Organa's. That the child was *his*.

And while it explained the young woman's ability to touch the Force, he was concerned about the impact it would have on his plans. Particularly if the Emperor succeeded in his plan to possess and inhabit the infant she was carrying. That could well make his Master invincible.

Vader headed for his private chambers, deciding that a little time outside his suit would help to clear his mind. Then, by the time Luke came out of surgery and the data on the princess was ready for him, he would be able to make whatever decisions the data required of him. Even if it meant terminating his own daughter and the child she carried. With any luck the tests themselves would terminate her pregnancy and then it would no longer be an issue.

When Leia woke she didn't know where she was, and it took a few moments for her memories to make any sort of sense. She ached all over and her mouth tasted terrible. The room she was in was completely foreign: certainly not a cell. She was in a comfortable bed, hell; there was even a viewport! A viewport through which she could see jewel-like Coruscant hanging in the sky, accompanied by its ever-present blaze of traffic.

She started to sit up and felt a rush of moisture between her legs, as well as sharp pain in her lower back and abdomen. Leia automatically reached down to see what it was and felt a resurgence of the heartsick numbness when she saw the blood on her fingers.

It was over. They had taken her child.

Overpowering nausea launched her towards what she hoped was a 'fresher and she spent several minutes vomiting into the sani'. Then she matter-of-factly stepped out of the blood-stained surgical gown she'd found herself in, leaving it where it fell, and stepped into the shower stall.

It was a real water shower and yet she stood beneath its soothing warmth, barely aware of it. Thinking about the child she would never know. Maybe one day, when the Emperor decided to parade his new plaything around... she would look at that boy or girl and *know*... Know it was *hers*. But that child would never know *her*. Would never know Han.

Han.

Leia found herself sobbing suddenly, awash in an insurmountable grief. How would she tell him? And *why* had he lied? Leia felt an intense flash of anger towards Solo and then felt guilty for being angry with him. How could she feel angry with him when she missed him so desperately?

She refused to believe that it had all been an act on his part, an elaborate plan to bed her. Han loved her; she *knew* that, had felt him in her soul. And she had been prepared to risk pregnancy to fulfil her desire to be with him, but he had assured her he was sterile! Why would he do that? Why would he deliberately lie to her?

It suddenly occurred to Leia that perhaps he hadn't. That he had honestly believed himself to be chemically sterile. That perhaps the contraceptive had failed.

A goddess-given child, she thought sadly. On Alderaan all children were considered a gift from the goddess, but unplanned children especially so. And now hers was gone. Ripped from her body almost before she had been aware of it. For a moment, burning hate like nothing she had ever experienced coursed through her. Vader had taken everything from her. Her home, her family, *Han*. And now... this. Her first child. She hated Vader so deeply, so wholly, that it became a palpable force in her belly. A force so strong that she wanted to cherish it, wanted to hold it in store until she had to face him again so that she could hurl it at him and hopefully kill him with it.

The urge to vomit gripped her again and she purged onto the floor of the shower. Watched it spiral down the outlet with the water and her urge to fight for the greater good. Bent over as she was, she could see the blood trickling down the inside of her legs, and the Rebel Alliance became meaningless. For Leia Organa the fight had become completely personal and she would not rest until she had killed Darth Vader or died trying.

While coming to terms with the genetic data he'd received on the princess and her embryo, and waiting for the Imperial data base to tell him what he needed to know about Han Solo, Vader found himself thinking about the Princess of Alderaan. The discovery that Leia was not just Padme's daughter, but his as well,

had left him with a deep sense of loss and betrayal. And he couldn't help feeling that everyone had known except him. Yoda, Kenobi, the Emperor, even Bail Organa must have known! But not one of them had told him. Not even his wife...

The scope of the deception fuelled the Sith Lord's anger and he breathed deeply, focussing it into a dark Force that he could use to enhance his personal comfort out of his life-support suit. It was swiftly followed by a second dark wave and it took Vader a moment to realise that this one had not come from him, but was instead directed *at* him.

He deduced the source immediately.

The princess was awake and angry at him.

Examining the whisper of dark anger from the princess, Vader decided that he would have to train her. He had suspected her of having a natural Force talent, but he wanted that talent bound to him, not wasted on some useless pastime like the Rebellion. But her pregnancy would make training her difficult; would divide her loyalties, and once again Vader found himself mentally cursing the Corellian who had created the problem.

He glared at the file loading onto his screen. His request from the Imperial archives for the most recent data on Han Solo had, of course, produced the Bespin file. Vader had no desire to watch the Corellian bed his daughter again and hurriedly moved to the next file. Nevertheless, the princess' profession of love for Solo as he was being lowered into the carbonite replayed in Vader's personal memories, and he felt a moment of disquiet.

The next file had been recorded on Tarkin's Death Star; it showed the Corellian and his Wookiee friend, with Luke and the princess hurrying down a corridor. Vader moved to the next file.

This recording was of Lieutenant Han Solo's court martial and the expression on the young Solo's face was one of cold, hard anger.

Vader requested genetic data and the image was replaced with text information. A moment later several images appeared. Family records. Biographical details about Perron Solo, Alandra Solo, and their sons, Han and Brennon Solo. Brennon Solo was currently living on Corellia, an active member in Imperial Intelligence, and had a family of his own. Perron's whereabouts were not known, and the mother had died of unknown causes many years prior.

With a shock, Vader realised he recognised their mother. Recognised her as one of the Corellian Jedi who had stood against his Master during the Purge of the Jedi.

Vader remembered killing her himself.

He immediately called up her file, having to go through several security walls to do so. She was Corellian, but had come from nowhere. Her parents were nobody. And she had been trained as a Jedi. Alandra had defied the Jedi Council edict to marry Perron Solo, in much the same way as Anakin Skywalker had defied them to marry Padme Naberrie. The Solo's had then returned to Corellia and produced two sons. Alandra had been working for CorSec during the Purge. Using the Force, Vader recalled the woman's face in his memory. He remembered the taste of her fear as she had fought him, not for herself but for her family. Remembered the depth of his hatred and scorn for her concern at the time. Scorn because, in his mind, the Jedi had just robbed him of his own family. Little did he know that they had not just taken his wife and son from him, but his daughter as well. Vader sighed and wondered what he would have done had he known.

The comm. interrupted his reverie and he answered the call without activating the visual display. He had no intention of displaying his face to anyone.

"Yes, Admiral Piett?"

The voice on the other end displayed only the slightest hint of nervousness. "My Lord, you asked to be notified as soon as Skywalker woke."

"Thank you, Admiral."

Vader switched off the comm. and activated the re-application of his suit.

Leia stepped out of the shower stall wondering if she would have to rip up her sheets to use as sanitary padding and checked the cupboard beside the sink for toiletries. In complete contrast to her experience on the *Falcon*, it was full of every sanitary device she might need as well as a selection of underwear.

When she returned to the main room, it was obvious that someone had been in there while she was in the 'fresher. Probably a droid. Her bed was freshly made and there was a tray of food on the table.

They were feeding her. Not her usual experience when in Imperial custody.

Curious, she checked the cupboard beside the bed and was almost amused to find it full of clothes. Food, clothing, toiletries... Were they courting her? Yet, despite the comfort and amenities, Leia was very aware that her room was no less a cell.

Pleased to be rid of the hated snowsuit finally, she helped herself to a long navy dress. It was seriously plain and practical, with an almost masculine feel and doubtless the epitome of Imperial fashion. Dressed, she forced herself to do her hair: plaiting then winding it around her head.

Despite the smell of the food aggravating her nausea, Leia sat at the table and forced herself to eat. Who knew when they would change their minds and stop feeding her?

Luke looked up from his new right hand to the dark figure opposite. Vader had spent the afternoon teaching him self-healing techniques to hasten his recovery and, as a result, his new cybernetic hand was interfacing with his arm extremely well. But, until the medics removed the nerve block that was stopping him from feeling the pain of the join, they would not know for sure whether he had full feeling in it or not.

Luke had been inquiring about Leia's well-being since waking up after his surgery, yet Vader had consistently refused to discuss her. Vader, Luke decided, was having as much trouble coming to terms with the revelation that Leia was his daughter as Luke had had with the discovery that the Dark Lord was his father. He also suspected that Vader was as disturbed by the Emperor's plans for the princess, or more particularly the child she carried, as he was.

"Will Palpatine kill her?" Luke asked, and was surprised when Vader replied softly, "Not yet."

So Leia was still pregnant. Whatever tests had been performed on her had not changed that. "Not while she's carrying the child he wants, anyway," Luke muttered sourly.

Vader regarded him for a moment then nodded.

"Is Palpatine a clone?" Luke asked.

"No."

"That's what you've been waiting for," Luke said, with sudden insight. "Waiting for him to move into a clone so you can kill him."

"He will be weakest at the moment of transfer," Vader admitted.

Abruptly, his father's words on Bespin came back to him. *You can destroy the Emperor. He has foreseen this.* And Luke realised with dismay that it could well fall to him to kill the child. Kill Han and Leia's daughter. Could he do that? Could he sacrifice their child for the good of the galaxy?

Together we can rule the galaxy as father and son.

Luke closed his eyes, wishing he could ask Ben or Yoda for guidance. Yet could he trust them if they gave it to him? Luke felt sure that killing the child would take him down the same dark path as his father, yet could the galaxy survive an Emperor reborn and even more powerful?

Could he kill Han and Leia's child?

Luke looked straight into Vader's eyes and said in words that brooked no argument, "We have to get her away from here."

CHAPTER THREE.

Wedge Antilles swallowed his disappointment as he watched the approach of the X-wing onto the flight deck of the Rebel cruiser. Disappointment that the newest arrival wasn't Luke Skywalker. Eighty percent of the squadron had made it to the rendezvous directly after the battle of Hoth, but there were a few who, due to mechanical problems, had needed to take a more circuitous route. Plus, for security reasons, the Rebel fleet had moved from the original rendezvous site, which meant the stragglers had to seek them out.

Barlon Chambers, it seemed, had been forced to hide-out on Negavan for the last two weeks. And, while Antilles was pleased to have one of his fellow pilots back safe, he couldn't help feeling miffed that a prick like Chambers could make it back while Luke and the *Falcon* were still missing.

He sighed as he watched the pilot report in for debriefing, then forced himself to concentrate on his own work. They'd only managed to replace fifteen percent of the supplies lost on Hoth so far, and he'd been put in charge of finding a new avenue of replacement. It was the sort of assignment that would leave any self-respecting fighter pilot wishing he'd gone out with honour in the last firefight. "Wedge, can I show you something?"

Antilles looked up from his datapad, surprised to find Chambers beside him. The thickset pilot glanced around furtively as he pulled a datachip from one of the pockets in his flightsuit and Antilles, knowing the man's penchant for sharing around pornographic holos, rolled his eyes and growled irritably, "Not now, Bar." "Wedge, did the *Falcon* make it back?"

Chambers now had Antilles' full attention and Wedge gave him a hard look that told Chambers he was in no mood for the man's usual bullshit. "Not yet," he said carefully. "Why?"

"I think they've been captured." Chambers waved the chip surreptitiously. "I was offered this on Negavan."

Antilles took the proffered chip and looked at the title. "*The Princess and the Pirate*", he read aloud and fixed Chambers with a steely glare. "Tell me this isn't a porno, Bar." Antilles didn't think he'd ever seen Chambers look so uncomfortable.

"I think it's from an Imperial Surveillance Tape."

Antilles immediately turned to the nearest data display to insert the chip but Chambers stopped him.

"Not here."

Wedge considered the man for a moment. If there was one thing Barlon Chambers' wasn't, it was squeamish about pornography. Antilles picked up the personal reader lying on the bench nearby and inserted the chip. Imperial Surveillance Tape could mean only one thing; someone he knew had been captured. And, knowing Luke had not left Hoth in the *Falcon*, Wedge found himself reconsidering the title. "*The Princess and the Pirate*"... *Please don't let this be what I think it is...*

Looking over his shoulder, Chambers reached around and jumped the recording forward then let it play. It was obviously a couple having sex. Antilles felt a small moment of relief; he'd been expecting torture or something. He was about to berate Chambers for wasting his time with pornography when the larger man moved the image forward again until the faces could be seen. Antilles froze. It *looked* like Solo and the princess. But look-alike stuff was rife in the porn industry. Though why they would want anyone to look like Han and Leia was a little obscure.

He looked askance of Chambers and the pilot said, "You know who it is, don't you?"

"I know who it *looks* like," Antilles admitted. "And you think it's them because...?"

"Because the creep who sold it to me insisted it was a digital recording from a surveillance record. With *all* the surveillance tricks intact. I don't have the sort of equipment to put it to the test...but I could zoom in enough to see the scar on Solo's back."

Antilles looked at him. "You're kidding." If Solo's scar was recognisable... Chambers shook his head. "Those aren't look-alikes, Wedge,"

Antilles looked back at the image on the reader, at the couple in the throes of passionate lovemaking, and groaned, "Oh, gods..." No, *not them*... It just wasn't fair...

"Plus," Chambers added awkwardly. "It's not like your usual porn, if you know what I mean..."

"No." Antilles tore his gaze from the reader to look at the pilot, almost frightened to ask, "What d'you mean?"

"Well, for a start there's only *them*. I don't think I've seen a human porn tape that didn't involve at least 3 people, and..." he winced uncomfortably, "they seem to *care*. About each other. You know?" He paused then added matter-of-factly, "Plus there's no cum-shot; and that's a pre-requisite in the porn industry." Antilles groaned and switched it off. Han and Leia making love... Of all the horrible, shitty, sith-loving... *Imperial Surveillance Tape*. "We're gonna have to show someone."

"I know," Chambers agreed and smiled apologetically. "That's why I came to you."

"Yeah, thanks." Antilles was feeling anything but grateful. He pondered their dilemma for a moment then said, "Rieekan's probably our best bet." The general genuinely *liked* Solo.

"*Rieekan!*" Chambers exclaimed, then hurriedly quietened, glancing around to see if anyone had noticed his outburst. "You can't show him *this*," he hissed. "She's like his *daughter!*"

"I know..." Antilles agreed, getting to his feet. "But he's the only one I trust-" *Not to fly off the handle*, he thought but didn't voice it. *The only one who will look past the content and take this seriously.*

Chambers backed off. "Well don't expect *me* to come-"

Antilles grabbed him by the front of his flightsuit. "He'll want to question you anyway, Bar. You might as well do it now."

He let the man go and headed for the general's office. Chambers readjusted his flightsuit and followed resignedly. "You know," he said, indicating the reader in Antilles' hand, "I thought they hated each other."

Antilles snorted, "Right!"

"No, really," Chambers insisted. "I thought she'd go for Skywalker, if anyone-"

"Shows how much you know, Bar."

"Yeah," Chambers admitted.

Sighing deeply, General Carlist Rieekan switched off his personal screen and hung his head in his hands. He had been studying the data Antilles had delivered to him for over twelve hours now. Looking for anything that might tell him where it

had been recorded. Anything to give them some clue as to the *Falcon's* whereabouts at the time. Anything that might help him find the princess...

The content of the data had saddened him greatly. Not because of what the princess was doing with Solo, although that had been very difficult to watch, but because of the invasion of privacy the datachip represented. The fact that Barlon Chambers had *bought* the datachip on Negavan meant that it was likely available galaxy-wide, or soon would be, and nothing he or anyone else did could stop that. And he could imagine how Leia would feel about it.

If the princess had still been part of galactic politics, this would have ruined her career. As it was, Rieekan suspected her standing in the Alliance would suffer because of it. Only the fact that she was the last Princess of Alderaan, and the Alliance didn't have the luxury of being picky, would stop her from being dismissed completely. It wasn't fair, he knew, but it was the way things were. Then he considered the possibility that she might not even be alive to care.

Sighing again, Rieekan got to his feet and moved into his private 'fresher, hoping a break and a sonic shower would refresh his mind enough to allow him to see something he hadn't thought of. He knew he should take the information to the other generals, if only for the breach in security the capture of the princess could mean. But he was hoping to be able to at least give them confirmation of capture and a place where it had happened before alerting them to it.

The chime from his cabin door stopped his progress and he walked back to see who might want to talk to him in the middle of the ship sleep shift.

Wedge Antilles smiled apologetically at him as Rieekan opened the hatch, then slipped past him into the cabin. Rieekan let the hatch shut, sensing a level of excitement from the current leader of Rogue Squadron that suggested he had found something.

Antilles held up his own reader and said, "I was going over the data." Rieekan guessed he must have looked affronted because Antilles explained hastily, "It was still in the memory."

Rieekan nodded. "And?"

"Cloud City," Antilles said. He showed Rieekan the screen on his reader, image frozen, then zoomed in on the bedside table in the picture. Moved in so close they could clearly see the reader and stylus beside the glass of water on the table. He zoomed in still further until the writing on the side of the stylus could be read. *Cloud City*.

"Never heard of it," Rieekan admitted.

"Neither had I, General," Antilles said. "So I ran a check. Turns out it's a small Tibanna gas mining operation on Bospin. In the Anoat system."

"Anoat?" Rieekan growled. "Why the hell would Solo take her *there*?"

Antilles shrugged. "Who knows? It's close to the Hoth system; maybe there was a problem with the *Falcon*?"

Or maybe he just wanted some time alone with her, Rieekan thought sourly. Still, the likelihood of something going wrong with the *Falcon* was high...

"I could take an X-wing," Antilles suggested hopefully. "See what I can find out."

Rieekan nodded. "Do it. Before the trail gets too cold." Then added, "Though you might be better off in something other than an X-wing. That might draw unwelcome attention."

"Leave it to me," Antilles said.

The small transport with its cargo of thirty prisoners was headed for Kessel, and the Imperials in charge were taking great delight in tormenting their captives with tales of life in the Spice mines. The prisoners were a mixed bunch, mostly non-human, and included several Wookiees. But the biggest mistake the Imperials made was putting Calrissian and Chewbacca together on the same transport.

The moment Calrissian had realised that he was being shipped out with Chewbacca, he knew the odds of their escape had risen dramatically. Playing on the sadistic nature of the Imperials, he had made a good show of protesting loudly and fearfully at being on the same transport with the Wookiees. The Imperials' response was to shackle him to the strongest looking Wookiee there. Chewbacca had played his part by bellowing fiercely and violently shaking the arm Calrissian was shackled to him by. This had resulted in Lando being tossed around like a rag doll, much to the amusement of the Imperials.

Chewbacca was by far the strongest and healthiest looking Wookiee of the group, and Calrissian surmised the other Wookiees had been slaves for some time. They all looked underfed and dangerous, and a couple of them looked insane, but the Imperials had pegged Chewbacca as the one most likely to cause trouble on the trip.

All of the prisoners, except the Wookiees, had been stripped of their clothes, forced into yellow slave-labour uniforms and shackled to the bulkheads. Talking was forbidden, of course, but as none of the Imperials thought Wookiees had a language, Chewbacca and the other Wookiees were trading information openly.

One of the Wookiees whom Calrissian had decided was insane kept roaring at the Imperials, telling them that the others were talking. But the Imperials considered him an animal and simply ignored his constant howling.

Listening to the Wookiees' low level rumble of communication, Calrissian found it interesting that Chewbacca didn't tell the others that the human he was shackled to could understand what they were saying. It suggested an element of trust in him. Or perhaps it was simply that Chewbacca thought Calrissian might be useful later.

While disdainful of his life-debt to a human, the other Wookiees were fascinated and envious of the life Chewbacca had been leading until recently. Most of them had been slaves for over ten years. The psycho one, they revealed, was the youngest of them but had been enslaved the longest – almost twenty years.

So while the Imperials ignored them, gambling to pass the time, the Wookiees planned their escape. Calrissian made comments and suggestions about their plan from time to time, using the sign language he, Solo and Chewbacca had perfected between themselves all those years ago, and Chewbacca played his part by giving him threatening looks at regular intervals.

As soon as a plan was agreed upon, the Wookiees stopped talking, and the sudden silence inside the prisoner section of the transport was profound. Uneasy, the Imperials stopped gambling and the other prisoners shifted nervously.

"Maybe they *were* talking?" one of the officers suggested, and was promptly laughed at by his peers.

Then Calrissian watched, dumbfounded, as one of the officers approached the insane Wookiee and proceeded to taunt and tease it by barking at it. The insane Wookiee cowered; backing as far away as its shackles would let it, and whimpered pathetically. Empowered, the Imperial moved even closer to it, growling and barking threateningly, openly mocking the creature.

Quick as a flash and without warning the Wookiee struck. Having coaxed the Imperial to well within its reach, the insane Wookiee tore out the tormentor's throat with its teeth. Before the Imperial's body had fallen to the deck, a blaster bolt hit the insane Wookiee in the head, splattering everyone nearby with blood and matter.

Now the entire transport was in an uproar. All the prisoners were screaming, especially the ones shackled to a Wookiee, and the Wookiees were roaring and throwing all their formidable strength into tearing their shackles from the bulkheads. The prisoner sitting closest to the fallen Imperial, a Devaronian, saw the mayhem as his chance for freedom and grabbed the dead man's blaster, but

was felled by a blaster bolt before he could fire it. Another prisoner picked up the fallen firearm, blasted the bulkhead holding his shackles to free himself then succeeded in shooting two of the Imperials before he too was blasted.

One of the Imperials had kept his head, because the blue bolts of a stun beam lanced out and downed three prisoners. At the same time, one of the bulkheads gave way and the shackles slid from the binders on those prisoners' wrists and ankles. It freed three of the Wookiees, one of whom was felled by another stun blast.

Struggling to keep low and out of range of any blaster fire, Calrissian found himself staring at the body of the Imperial who's throat had been ripped out. There, just out of reach on the man's belt, was the command key that would release all their binders.

Calrissian tugged on the shackles that bound him to Chewbacca, trying to get the Wookiee's attention. Chewbacca was crouched low behind the seat in front to avoid being shot, but was intently trying to pry apart the bulkhead holding his shackles.

"Chewie!" Calrissian hissed, and then again, "Chewie!" But Chewbacca either didn't hear him over the noise or was choosing to ignore him. "*Chewie!*"

Calrissian yelled and finally succeeded in getting the Wookiee's attention as well as several of the other Wookiees'. He indicated the fallen Imperial and Chewbacca leaned as far from the bulkhead as he could, enabling Calrissian to reach the Imperial and drag the corpse close enough to be able to relieve it of the command key.

He immediately turned and used it on Chewbacca's binders, then gave it to the Wookiee who used it in turn on his own binders.

[Give it to him,] Chewbacca said, handing him the key and indicating the grey and black Wookiee across from them. Calrissian turned to comply and found the other Wookiee glaring at Chewbacca contemptuously.

"Hey!" he said, attracting the angry Wookiee's attention and offering him the command key. "You want this or not?"

The grey Wookiee snarled at him but reached for the key and Calrissian hastily handed it across, hoping he wouldn't get his hand blasted off in the process. The grey Wookiee freed himself and passed the key on.

Their plan had changed a little, but with the Wookiees now free of binders, had a much greater likelihood of success.

The other Wookiee whose sanity Calrissian had doubted had got through to the Imperials and was making a horrible mess. Calrissian tried not to look, but found himself having to duck the odd uniformed limb as it was flung in his direction. Soon the screaming stopped and blasters were passed around. The hatch to the cockpit was blasted open and, although the Imperial pilot and co-pilot put up a fight, they nevertheless shortly followed their companions to a bloody death. Calrissian started to climb into the pilot's seat and received a howl of abuse from the grey Wookiee. He paused and asked sarcastically, "You want to pilot?" He melodramatically stepped aside as his assailant made a show of pushing his way forward, then added, "I think you may have a little trouble fitting in the seat." The comment earned him a blaster muzzle in his face but he glared resolutely up at the grey Wookiee. Chewbacca slapped the blaster away and an argument ensued between all the Wookiees. Ignoring them, Calrissian climbed into the pilot seat and started reprogramming the navicomputer.

A Sullustan slid into the co-pilot's seat beside him and asked in heavily accented Basic, "Where are you taking us?"

"Tatooine," Calrissian replied matter-of-factly.

One of the Wookiees obviously heard and was far from impressed because it howled, [*Tatooine?*]

"Yes!" Calrissian yelled back loudly. "Me and Chewbacca are going to Tatooine! After that the ship is yours!" He looked at Chewbacca to see if he would find any argument there, and the Wookiee nodded his approval.

CHAPTER FOUR.

Leia watched as the door to her prison slid aside but she didn't move. She knew she should get out of bed at least; for all she knew it could be Vader walking in, but she simply didn't care. Feeling completely wretched, Leia was indulging herself while she couldn't do anything else and wallowing in an uncharacteristic level of self-pity. She couldn't remember ever feeling so ill, so continuously *nauseous*. She'd felt nauseous many times before but usually, as soon as she vomited, the nausea passed. She had already vomited twice since waking yet still the nausea besieged her.

At first she'd explained it away as a nervous reaction to the trauma of the last few days, but the horribly consistent and unrelenting nature of the nausea suggested otherwise. The idea that they might be slowly poisoning her had crossed her mind, but the fact that she hadn't been able to keep down any of the food they'd given her helped her dismiss it. When she really thought about it, Leia suspected the nausea was hormonal; her body's reaction to having been pregnant but, as that was no longer an issue, she wondered how long it would take to pass.

She recognised the medic who stepped into her room as the same one she'd seen in the medcentre, just before they'd knocked her out to perform 'the procedure' on her - the procedure that had taken her child - and surmised that he had performed it. The thought fanned the embers of anger still glowing in the depths of her self-pity, but as it was quickly overwhelmed by profound sadness. Leia closed her eyes and took a deep breath in an attempt to force down the tears that seemed so ready to flow at the slightest provocation. Instead she summoned her control from the place to which it had retreated, opened her eyes and watched coldly as the medic closed the door behind him.

He was accompanied by a 2-1B med-droid, and she wasn't sure whether she should be alarmed by its presence or not. Droids of that series housed a sentient brain, usually human, and usually from a lifeform that had suffered a physical catastrophe that had left only their brains functioning. With a choice of either death or life in a droid body, many chose the artificial support. Unfortunately, the enormous cost of the transfer tended to leave them deeply indebted to the government. A cost they were forced to work off in a sly form of slavery.

The Rebel Alliance had two such droid-people working within its ranks, both doctors and both exceedingly grateful to be free of the Empire. And while Leia knew such people to be quite brilliant, she was still very conscious that this droid-person was Imperial and therefore not to be trusted.

"I have been sent to examine you," the medic told her as he approached the bed.

Why? Leia wondered, but couldn't summon the energy to voice it. They had what they wanted, why were they even keeping her alive?

Public execution, the cynical part of her brain told her. *They want to make an example of you.*

Leia closed her eyes as the medic uncovered her and the 2-1B droid-person started to scan her. She was still lying on her side, curled into a vaguely foetal position, and wondered if they would even notice if she ignored them.

"She is seriously dehydrated," she heard the 2-1B say, and thought bitterly, *Happens when you spend your days vomiting*. Leia knew she was under surveillance; they had to be aware how ill she'd been.

"I recommend a fluid drip," the 2-1B said.

"Standard infuser," the medic agreed, then added, "Give it your arm, Princess."

Leia opened her eyes, surprised to be directly addressed and that he seemed to know who she was. She considered not cooperating. There would be an element of satisfaction in making this difficult for them but, as they would simply sedate her and do it anyway, Leia offered them her left arm and watched as the 2-1B proceeded to attach the infuser.

"Why am I vomiting?" she ventured to ask, aware that the dryness of her throat was making her voice croak.

"Hormonal," was the flat answer from the medic.

Leia held her temper in check and tried to sound reasonable as she asked, "Well, how long before it stops?"

"The standard is ten weeks," he replied, frowning at the scanner in his hand.

"Ten *weeks*?" Leia was horrified. Ten weeks with this level of nausea would kill her.

The 2-1B had finished attaching the infuser and she moved her arm, accustoming herself to the weight. She started to sit up and the medic said flatly, "Remove your underwear. I need to examine you."

"Why?" Leia pulled away from him, revulsion colouring her words. "Think you might have botched the job?"

"You're still bleeding," the medic said, and did not sound pleased with the fact. "Complete genetic testing poses a risk for the embryo."

"Well that's hardly *my* concern any more, is it?" Leia spat. "Tell me, is the Emperor enjoying his new plaything?"

The medic frowned at her and Leia turned away from him.

"Go away," she said sadly.

"I need to examine you," he repeated.

"Or what?" she said sharply. "Vader'll strangle you?"

"Perhaps," the medic admitted.

"Why should I care?" she demanded. "You don't care about me."

"Lord Vader charged me with your well being, Princess. He will be displeased if my inattention results in the loss of your pregnancy."

"He *has* the pregnancy!" Leia shrieked, leaping off the bed. "Safe in a tank for the Emperor!" she sobbed. The imagery in her head brought her nausea to the fore once again and she muttered, "Goddess, I'm going to be sick..."

She fled to the 'fresher and was dimly aware of the medic following her, watching her as she retched helplessly over the sani. But, as there was nothing in her stomach, she barely managed to bring up a spit of bile.

When the spasms finally stopped, Leia washed her face and rinsed her mouth, catching her reflection in the mirror over the basin. A shadow of herself looked back at her. Ignoring the obviously ill woman in the mirror, Leia turned to face the medic.

He held up the small scanner and indicated a screen and readout far too small for her to see at this distance.

"You are still pregnant, Princess."

Leia felt the blood drain from her face and had to hold on to the basin beside her. "What?" she said.

"You are carrying a perfectly formed, five- week-old, female embryo."

"What?" Leia couldn't begin to sort out the mess her thoughts had become. "But there is still a chance you could lose the pregnancy," the medic said. "The bleeding should have stopped by now."

Leia dimly felt her legs give way and braced herself against the wall, sliding down it to sit in an ungainly heap on the floor. *Pregnant?*

The medic approached her and started to help her up, but Leia slapped him away.

"Get away from me!"

"Princess, please let me examine you-"

Leia fought off the rising bile in her throat as she lurched to her feet. "Don't touch me!" she spat.

"I need to check that your cervix is properly sealed," the medic responded. "Or you may well miscarry the embryo this afternoon. Please remove your underwear then come to the bed." He walked out of the 'fresher and closed the door behind him.

Leia stared at the door for a long moment, then proceeded to do as he had requested. There was only a little blood, which she took as a good sign. Numbly, she returned to the main room and, without looking at the medic or the 2-1B, lay on the bed.

The medic proceeded to examine her and she closed her eyes.

Pregnant. She had barely come to terms with losing the child and now she was pregnant again. And it was *female*.

Han's daughter.

"How effective is chemical sterilisation?" Leia asked quietly.

"Depends how long it's been taken for," the medic answered.

"After ten years?"

"One hundred percent."

Then how? Leia wondered. *He lied*, the horrible voice told her. But Leia couldn't believe that of Han, despite the evidence to the contrary. Somehow she and Han had made a little girl. A little girl that the Emperor wanted.

The medic finished his examination and Leia sighed and sat up, rearranging her nightdress to cover herself.

"There is some cervical erosion," he told her. "But it should settle down. Your cervix seems perfectly healthy." He stood and added, "Stress is a major factor in spontaneous abortion."

Leia regarded the man arrogantly and said, "Being imprisoned and thinking a baby has been ripped out of your body against your will is very stressful."

The medic eyed her for a moment then told her, "Rest as much as you can." He returned his tools to the 2-1B. "The two-one-bee will be back in two hours to change the infuser."

"Wait," Leia said, and started to follow them as they headed for the door. "What about the nausea?"

"Ten weeks is usual," the medic repeated, opening the door. "I estimate you have another five weeks."

"But-"

The door closed and Leia was alone again. Left standing impotently in the middle of the small room, her head a mess of questions. Unconsciously she rested her hands over her belly then, as she realised what she was doing, looked at them. Five weeks.

Five weeks ago she'd been menstruating, struggling to deny the cascade of emotions Han Solo awoke in her. Five weeks ago she had been a rebel leader. Strong, efficient, a respected commander. A *virgin* princess. Confident in her abilities and her standing among her peers.

Now she was none of those. Princess Leia had changed irrevocably and she did not know how to be the person she had become. The addition of 'lover' to her list of qualifications had been an easy and welcome one, but *mother* was not one she was prepared for. She knew nothing about pregnancy or babies.

Five weeks.

A wave of nausea washed through her and she sat on the edge of her bed. For the embryo to be that old... Leia swallowed. She would have ovulated a few days after they started sleeping together; and, taking into consideration the time it would have taken for Han's genetic material to meet and bond with hers... Leia sighed and wiped a hand across her face. They could well have set off the biological chain of events that created the child almost the first time they'd made love.

The memory of their first time was so clear... as was her decision at the time to ignore the possibility of pregnancy. Leia had been fully aware of the

ramifications, yet had decided lovemaking with Han was worth the risk. The fact that he'd assured her he was chemically sterile afterwards was beside the point. *She* had known the possible consequences before they'd started, but had decided to play anyway. Now, as far as she was concerned, the pregnancy was *her* responsibility and she no longer felt any resentment towards Han for it. The *Emperor* wanting the child was a bizarre development; one that terrified her completely. And while she had thought they were taking the child from her, Leia had felt fiercely protective of it. Now she found herself seriously considering finding a way to terminate it. But could she throw away a Goddess given child? *Han's* child? When Han could well be dead...

Leia groaned and lay back on the bed.

Would Vader come for her? Or Palpatine himself?

Luke emerged from a deep healing trance and took a moment to orient himself. Vader had moved him from the medcentre and into private quarters a week ago. Private quarters that were a vast improvement on the cell he'd started his time on the *Executor* in, but which were no less a cell.

His new cybernetic hand was interfacing with his own body remarkably well and surprisingly quickly. He already had full use of it and, despite an occasional deep ache at the interface site and some itching where his own skin was learning to live with the synthflesh, had suffered no pain. The techniques his father had taught him were a revelation too. In the respect that not everything Vader did was Dark. Yet Luke sensed there was a limit to Vader's healing abilities, probably due to the Dark Side of the Force. Vader himself had seemed surprised at how quickly his son was recovering: particularly that most of the damage Luke had suffered on Bespin was healed.

The physical damage anyway.

Luke wasn't sure how to judge the emotional damage. Something of this magnitude was never really 'gotten over'. It was simply something you learned to live with. Like Leia had with Alderaan.

But the lies, the betrayal... Why Yoda and Kenobi had perpetrated such a thing was quite beyond Luke's ability to comprehend and to some extent he could understand Vader's deep-seated bitterness towards them; Yoda and Kenobi had robbed Vader of his family.

For a moment Luke wondered what it would have been like to grow up with his mother and father and little sister, and felt a deep sense of loss. Of what might

have been. And was further saddened by the understanding that it had been taken away by Vader, not the Jedi. It had been his father's choice.

Whether it was because of his recent trance state or his general sense of calm, Luke found himself experiencing what he thought at first was a vision, then quickly realised was in fact a Force enhanced memory. Felt a deep, overwhelming terror as the child he had been was held forcefully under the water in his own bath. Felt himself struggle and drown.

Removed from his two-year-old body, Luke recognised his mother as she rushed into the room; felt her overwhelming distress. And the unreasoning fear and hatred towards him from the perpetrator: a female whom he felt certain was not a Jedi.

Then, as if from a long way away, he sensed a blast of dark energy, which he instinctively knew had killed the perpetrator. It called to him, that dark energy, but was far too terrifying to approach. Luke felt it search for him, *hunt*, and felt himself flee. Then a soft, familiar warmth called to him and he ran towards it. Felt himself ablaze with healing Force energy.

His mother.

Luke took a gasping breath as his two-year-old self did, felt the small child's fright and confusion, yet was able to remain slightly detached. The terrifying darkness he had felt had taken form and was looming over him. Vader. Luke opened his eyes and the memory faded. The *Jedi* had done this? It just didn't make sense. And if they had, why had his mother trusted them afterwards?

Vader was remembering the feel of that warm, healing energy too. The last intimate touch he'd felt from his wife. The one that had saved his life. Kenobi had left him for dead; had not seen the figure that had once been his apprentice crawl out of the fiery pit into which he had fallen. Had assumed his misguided padawan to be dead.

Maimed and mortally wounded by his Master, Anakin Skywalker had used the seemingly limitless power of the Dark Side of the Force to shield himself from the heat and lava. Had pushed it away from him as he fell and changed the angle of his fall so that he would land on the side of the pit rather than in its molten heart. But the combination of noxious gas, a lightsabre wound to the head that had literally scalped him, and a lung ruined in Kenobi's attempt to pierce his heart with his lightsabre had caused Skywalker to lose consciousness briefly, and his mere proximity to the lava had threatened to immolate him. His clothes had ignited immediately, and Vader remembered feeling his skin blister and blacken as he struggled to pull himself far enough away from the horrendous

temperatures, his almost useless remaining lung hopelessly trying to wring what little oxygen it could from the sulphurous air.

A baptism of fire. And the man who had come out was not the same man who had fallen in. But his wife hadn't known that. Hadn't realised that her husband had died and that what was left of the man she had found in the Emperor's personal medcentre was something dark and terrible.

Directly disobeying the Jedi, Padme had attempted to heal what was left of her husband with the Force. Had risked her own life to save his. Taking his pain into herself. Healing the mortal wound in his chest, saving his eyes. Vader could still hear her screams... Screams that had intensified when she was discovered by the Jedi and dragged away from her purpose.

Vader had heard later that it had taken her weeks to recover, and it shocked him to realise that she must have been pregnant through all of that. Pregnant from an intimacy, which had occurred only days prior, that he remembered as being purely selfish on his part. An intimacy he had taken for granted and, as that form of physical release was now denied to him, a selfishness he had lived to regret.

Memories of loving Padme were something Vader had pushed to the darkest depths of what was left of his soul. Funny that they should come flooding out now. And irritating.

He could look back and see that the crack in the dam against his memories had started during his interrogation of the princess on the Death Star and had culminated as he felt her Force-bonding with her Corellian lover on Bespin. The look of fear and uncertainty on Leia Organa's face when he had told her that Force-bonding was a form of coercion had left the dark side of his nature rejoicing. But it was the discovery that Leia Organa was his daughter that had ruptured the breach completely, and now the memories were cascading through his brain in a relentless torrent.

Thinking about the many Force-bondings he had shared with Padme filled him with a mixture of guilt and longing. Guilt because, despite his arrogant belief to the contrary at the time, Vader was quite sure that the young Anakin Skywalker had coerced the woman of his dreams.

He had been infatuated by her since the day she had walked into Watto's repair shop on Tatooine, but a genuine respect and deep friendship had developed between them over the years as they each pursued their careers.

Then she was betrothed to Supreme Chancellor Palpatine. A political marriage of sovereignty to secure the safety of Naboo. It had saddened Anakin but, as a Jedi, it was not like he could offer her any other option. They were close enough

friends that Padme could confide in him and he had felt secure enough to tease her. Until he had realised how much she was dreading the marriage.

Then the attempts on her life had started and, knowing of their long friendship and claiming that Anakin was the only man he could trust with his wife-to-be, the head of the Republic had insisted upon Skywalker as her Jedi protector. The Jedi council had encouraged him to take someone older; a full Jedi knight rather than a padawan, anyone *other* than Anakin, but Palpatine had been adamant. He wanted his wife-to-be to feel comfortable with her protector.

So charged, Anakin had travelled with Padme to her homeworld of Naboo, had met her family, and had spent several carefree days on her special island retreat. A secluded dream world in which their long friendship had flourished into something more. Something forbidden for both of them.

When Padme had come to him that night, it was out of concern for his distress over the recurrent nightmares about his mother. She had not intended to stay, he knew. But his need for comfort had kept her by his side, and making love had seemed such a simple and natural progression.

It was his first time; he did not know if it was hers. And insecurity about his own performance had triggered the Force-bonding. He had loved her so strongly, so deeply, it was something he could not have prevented if he'd wanted to and, after that, she had loved him just as deeply. Something that would have him thrown out of the Order. Something that could well mean the ruination of her world if Palpatine reneged on his deal to protect her resource rich world from the greedy Trade Federation.

It was Padme who had suggested the next morning that the dreams of his mother were visions rather than nightmares. Padme who had insisted they go to Tatooine. But they had both agreed that what had happened between them could never happen again, and had stayed true to their vow all the way to Anakin's former home. And, even though the thought of Padme becoming Palpatine's wife was eating him up inside, Anakin had remained resolute.

Then he had found his mother beaten and tortured, almost to death, in a Tusken Raider camp. She had died in his arms and the savagery and the senselessness of her death had filled him with pure, cold hatred. Hatred that he poured out upon the Tusken in a Dark Side wrath. The power he had felt was glorious. Glorious and terrible. And while he had later felt remorse for his actions, it did not diminish the hatred. Or his anger towards Kenobi for insisting his visions had been nothing more than bad dreams.

Whether he and Padme slept together or not no longer seemed to matter. It was a surcease she offered and he took. Even after they had returned to Coruscant. Looking back, Vader suspected Palpatine had been well aware of what was going on between his two favourites; had quite possibly orchestrated the whole

thing. Without Anakin's devotion to Padme, Palpatine would not have been able to turn the young padawan against the Jedi. And having him remain close to Padme had kept him close to Palpatine as well. All the better for manipulating...

Anakin Skywalker had been so arrogantly confident in using his Force ability to mask his relationship with Padme, it had never occurred to him that there might have been someone assisting him. Of course, with the clarity of hindsight, Vader could see his arrogance at the time for what it was.

It was Palpatine himself who had broken the subterfuge by setting a date for his marriage to the senator from Naboo. Unable to bare the thought of Padme trapped in a loveless marriage, Anakin had begged her to marry him. Duty-bound to the safety of her people, Padme had refused.

So, with all the selfishness and lack of forethought typical for a man barely out of his teens, Anakin had used the Force to nullify Padme's contraception and within a month had her pregnant.

Devastated, as well as terrified by the ramifications, the young woman had fruitlessly tried to find out how such a failure could have happened, but the medics were unable to help her. Anakin, confident in the knowledge that her upbringing and personal reverence for life would not allow her to terminate the pregnancy, was nothing but supportive. He loved Padme desperately. He wanted her to marry him and have their child.

How Kenobi had found out, Vader didn't know, but he could still feel his former master's fury as well as his own immediate response of shame, swiftly followed by righteous outrage. Then had come his dressing-down from the Jedi Council. The Jedi hadn't known quite what to do with their unpredictable star pupil who had done something so dreadfully bad. And then the Emperor had found out. Palpatine had feigned insult and outrage and used both as an excuse to lash out at the Jedi. Believing her lover's life to be in danger, Padme had forced Anakin to flee Coruscant, taking him with her back to Naboo. But word had reached there before they did, and it was only the intervention of the current Queen that saved them from being lynched by an understandably angry populace on arrival. A world that envisaged Palpatine withdrawing his promises of security from the ravages of the Trade Federation; their hopes and dreams turned to ashes at the whim of boy.

Once again they fled, and Padme had finally agreed to marry him. The Jedi were not happy, but soon they were all too busy dealing with the swiftly degenerating galactic political situation to care. Something Vader could see in hindsight as being orchestrated by his new Master.

Palpatine had stepped up from the chaos of the foundering Republic and declared himself the head of a new Empire. And, to the horror of his wife and the

Jedi, Anakin Skywalker had been an avid supporter. Tired of politicians and the time and resource wasting bureaucracy, Anakin saw in Palpatine's new order a way of getting things done. Of seeing achievement.

The birth of his son had fortified Anakin's need for order and a safe environment. If some civil freedoms had to be sacrificed to reach that order, so be it. He had genuinely loved his son and his wife.

But Palpatine was prepared to feed Anakin's thirst for knowledge in a way that the Jedi weren't, and had subtly replaced Kenobi as his guide and mentor. Through Palpatine's eyes Anakin saw the Jedi as little more than an interfering, old-fashioned cult who seemed hell-bent on stopping him from reaching his full potential.

Potential that was realised when Kenobi had tried to kill him. On Tatooine, full of grief after his mother's murder, Anakin had sworn to Padme that he would become strong enough to defeat death. And he had. Despite the pain, despite the cybernetic body parts needed to replace those he had lost and the life-support suit required for the simple act of breathing, Anakin Skywalker had defeated death.

Filled with the Dark Side, Darth Vader had emerged from what was left of Skywalker, great and terrible. Then, when the Jedi had tried to take the life of his son for fear he would walk the same dark path as his father, they had created the method of their own destruction. No longer constrained by emotional ties after his wife and son had left, Vader had become even more powerful as a result. Certainly powerful enough to hunt down and destroy what was left of the Jedi. Yet never quite powerful enough to free himself of the respirator.

Now his Master was intending a more refined version of Vader's feat. Planning to cheat death by shifting his consciousness into the body of another sentient being. He had prepared several clones for this purpose but the forced growth of clones had always made them unstable. A solution to this problem had now presented in the form of an embryonic being who contained not only the genes of the extremely powerful Skywalker line, but the solid strength and stability of the Corellian Jedi as well.

Destined to be extraordinarily powerful, as far as Palpatine was concerned the child was a gift from the gods. Not that the Emperor believed in any. Vader on the other hand saw Palpatine's plan as a distinct threat. He was also surprised by how protective he was feeling of his own offspring. He did not want Luke or Leia killed, and he most certainly did not want his granddaughter possessed.

Watching the princess now on the screen in front of him, from the security and helmetless comfort of his private quarters, Vader found himself looking at the young woman with new eyes. A new perspective. He had respected her as a

senator, perhaps because she reminded him so much of her mother, but now he felt a desire to get to know his daughter. Although he knew that any such approach would be met with dark rage. A trait she had inherited from *him*. Rage that would alert the Emperor to the distinct threat she implied. Rage that would see her terminated.

No, much as it sickened him to admit, Vader knew he would have to let them go. There was too much at risk to do otherwise. The repercussions for himself could be dire; Palpatine would *not* be happy. But, with some subtle training, Luke could be given the skills to walk himself and the princess off the *Executor*. Vader would make sure the *Millennium Falcon* was within reach...

With little to occupy her but regular visits to the sani to either pee or vomit, Leia was ready to rip Vader's head off and almost hoping for execution. She had heard that human women suffered nausea in the early part of pregnancy – *morning sickness* – but this was an all day and night form of suffering. So relentless and debilitating that Leia was starting to consider death a viable option.

Unable to keep food down at all, she was still on a drip, and spent her time taking out her boredom and frustration on her only visitors – the 2-1B and, occasionally, the medic. The 2-1B had surprised her a week ago by directly disobeying the medic in charge and furnishing her with a notebook loaded with information about human pregnancy. Information Leia had accepted with trepidation but devoured voraciously. Information that assured her that, at six weeks gestation, having to pee every fifteen minutes was *normal*. That her enlarged and aching breasts were *normal*. That nausea and vomiting were *normal*.

Leia couldn't help wondering if her desire to hit Han in the groin with the notepad was *normal*?

But boredom and depression soon took their toll. Were they going to keep her here for the entire pregnancy? The prospect was enough to make her consider trying to damage the seal around the transparisteel window. Nothing like a little hull breach to stir things up.

No one would tell her what had happened to Luke, and the thought of him teaming up with Vader and the Emperor chilled her to the bone. It would bring the Rebellion to a swift and messy end, she felt sure.

And what about Han? Her every waking moment was consumed with worry for him. She had to assume that Fett had delivered him to the Hutt by now, but what was the Hutt doing to him? Had he been revived? Was he brain-damaged? What if he couldn't even remember her?

A thick, almost familiar blanket of depression enveloped Leia and she curled into a foetal ball. Her soul wanted to weep; her whole body *ached* with the need to grieve, but she would not let it. The grief was too great, and Leia knew that once she started it would be a long time before she would be able to stop.

She heard the door to her room hiss open and didn't bother to open her eyes, expecting it to be the medic or 2-1B. But the all too familiar rasping sound of Vader's respirator sent a surge of adrenaline through her system that almost had her leaping out of the bed. Leia clutched the bedclothes to her chest, scavenging what dignity she could, and hoped she wouldn't throw up in front of him.

"I am not here to harm you," Vader said as the door closed behind him.

Vader's new introductory mantra, Leia thought sarcastically and snapped, "I don't think you could hurt me more than you already have."

He seemed to regard her for a moment then, with his hands clasped casually behind his back, the Dark Lord moved to stand in front of the narrow viewport and gazed out.

Leia couldn't help thinking facetiously, *Surely the view is better from his own cabin?* Then a wave of nausea swept over her, tempering her quick wit and leaving her wishing he would simply hurry up and get on with whatever he had come to do.

"How well do you remember your mother, Leia Organa?"

His question triggered emotional needs and responses that had been exacerbated by her pregnancy; a longing for her mother that she hadn't felt in years. Deeply disturbed, Leia scowled defensively.

"Not well enough," she replied, her tone implying that she believed her mother's death was Vader's fault and challenging him to dispute it.

"Do you love the Corellian?" the deep voice asked.

Leia frowned at the black figure, wondering what the hell his agenda might be. She refused to dignify his question with an answer. Vader knew exactly how she felt about Solo. He'd been there at the carbonite pit...

Tears welled in her eyes and she bit her bottom lip to stop it from trembling. Then he turned and looked at her.

"He has made it impossible for me to train you at this time," Vader said.
"Nevertheless, Princess, I will come for you."

Without another word, he left the room, leaving Leia staring at the closed door trying to translate the meaning behind his words.

Train her? Train her as what? Then suddenly it came to her: *a Sith Lord*. Vader was planning to make her his apprentice. A deep-seated fear blossomed within Leia. Fear for herself and for her unborn daughter. All this time she had been worried for Luke when she should have been worrying for herself...

He has made it impossible for me to train you.

He who? The Emperor? Because she was pregnant and he wanted the child? Or because-

Do you love the Corellian?

Han...

He has made it impossible for me to train you.

Leia hugged herself as comprehension sunk in. Solo had got her pregnant and because of that Vader could not teach her. And, because of his desire to have the child, the Emperor would not hurt her. Solo had taken on the role of her protector almost from the moment they had met. And now, despite the fact that he was locked in a solid block of carbonite somewhere, Solo was still protecting her.

Once again Leia curled into a ball, wrapping herself around the seed of protection that Solo had planted in her; loving the growing child with fierce passion and missing Han desperately.

When Luke stepped into her room unannounced, Leia didn't think she could feel more shocked or devastated. He was dressed all in black, washed and clean-shaven, and she knew without a doubt that he had not just stepped out of a cell. Which could only mean...

He had *turned*.

He even looked like Vader, all in black, and there was a new lightsabre hanging from his belt.

"Leia?" Luke was shocked to find the princess huddled in her bed. Shock that was swiftly replaced by fear for her health. "Are you alright?" He reached for her and she flinched away. He held his hands up, palms open towards her in what he hoped was a reassuring gesture. "Leia, it's *me*."

She was staring at his hand. His *new* hand. And suddenly Luke realised how he must look to her. The last time she'd seen him was with the Emperor. Now she thought he'd turned and he didn't have time to explain.

"Leia, come on, we're leaving." He manhandled her out of the bed, disturbed when she didn't fight him. Grabbing a dress out of the cupboard next to the bed, Luke handed it to her. Defeat was rolling off her in waves. She thought he'd turned. Well, good. Maybe she'd do what he said and not ask questions. It was going to take all his concentration to get them out alive.

"Are you taking me to Vader or the Emperor?" she asked as he grabbed her boots and hustled her towards the 'fresher. There was a small tremor in her voice, but he could hear a hint of her usual defiance.

Luke took her face in his hands and whispered earnestly, "Neither. Trust me. Please." He ushered her into the 'fresher and handed her the boots. "Hurry," he said.

She emerged a moment later, dressed, with her hair roughly plaited down her back.

Luke led her out of the room, one hand on her upper arm, and walked her through Vader's ship, concentrating on clouding the minds of the stormtroopers and Imperial officers present. Just as Vader had taught him.

By the time they reached a massive docking bay, Leia was certain her suspicions were correct. Nobody stopped them. That in itself was abnormal; even officers had to report to someone, but Luke walked through the Imperial ship as though he owned it. It was not until he led her towards a ship that she started to doubt that certainty. A ship she knew had been impounded...

The *Falcon* rested on the deck in front of her, looking battered and innocuous. And *so* seductive. Leia held her breath as Luke led her up the ramp, unable to circumvent the flood of memories and emotions the ship evoked.
Hanhanhanhan....

He shut the hatch and said matter-of-factly as he moved swiftly for the cockpit, "I need you to co-pilot."

Leia followed him, slid into Chewie's seat as he settled into Han's, and started pre-flight. Luke was hastily programming the navicomputer and Leia wondered where he was taking her.

Then they raised ship, without even a question, let alone clearance from the docking authority, and Leia's suspicions took hold again. She glanced at Luke as he wove the *Falcon* through the mass of traffic around Coruscant, wondering cynically if he thought she was stupid enough to take him back to wherever the Rebellion now was.

She checked her instruments, making sure the ship's shielding and hyperdrive were functional. Someone had fixed the ship apparently. *Tampering. Han'll have a fit...* The thought caught her unprepared. Like he was in the next room... Leia took a shuddering breath, which was more a stifled sob, and struggled fiercely to suppress it. She had to concentrate on the task at hand; not think about...

"I've programmed three jumps," Luke said. "Should be enough to shake any tails." He glanced at her. "We'll decide where we're going then."

Leia nodded, but did not look at him, and a moment later he threw the ship into hyperspace. The shift from realspace into hyperspace had always given Leia the sensation of butterflies in her stomach. This time it exacerbated her nausea. She swallowed several times in an attempt to quell it a little and tried to take her mind off it by watching Luke. He was studying the navicomputer intently, waiting for the exact moment to revert to realspace.

He'd obviously programmed a short jump; probably just to the edge of the Coruscant system. And from there? Leia opened her mouth to ask him where he was taking her but closed it as he brought them out of hyperspace and her stomach rolled unpleasantly.

The stars had barely settled into points of light when they were stretching once more, and again the ship was swallowed into the maelstrom of hyperspace. Leia took a deep breath and concentrated on forcing the nausea down. Looking at the swirling madness outside the canopy was making it worse and she closed her eyes.

"Are you alright?" she heard Luke ask, and looked at him. She couldn't help wondering if he had any comprehension of how inane his question sounded to her. All right? With Han gone, herself pregnant, and Luke teaming up with Vader? How could he even ask such a stupid question?

She swallowed again and said flatly, "I'm pregnant, Luke."

"I know."

His words catapulted her back to Bespin and Leia looked at him fearfully, almost gasping at the pain that memory invoked.

Luke sensed her distress but assumed it was because he seemingly knew something he shouldn't, and not wanting to exacerbate her understandable if sudden terror of 'Force' users, he told her, "I was in the medcentre when Vader had you scanned."

"You were there?"

Luke nodded and looked at her. "I tried to protect you and the Emperor zapped me too. Vader took us both to the medcentre."

"Did you know? That the Emperor was a..." She couldn't say the word Jedi.

"A Sith? No, but it explains a lot."

"Yes," Leia agreed, remembering her time in the Imperial Senate. "Yes it does." Her gaze drifted down to the hands in her lap, one of which was lying protectively over her belly. "I thought they'd taken it," she murmured. "For the Emperor..."

"He wants your child," Luke admitted carefully.

Leia looked at him sharply and asked, "*Why?*"

For the first time in their relationship, Luke lied to her. "I don't know," he said, then hurriedly added, "Vader thinks it's because she's so strong in the Force."

The revelation that Luke knew the sex of her child was not lost on Leia but she dismissed it for the moment to infer, "He wants to make a Dark Jedi of her? Another Sith?" *Like you?*

Luke looked at her for a long moment then said firmly, "I haven't turned, Leia."

He watched her eyes widen slightly as she realised he had heard her thought, then felt her personal shields raise against him, blocking him from her mind. Like Vader, Luke couldn't help wondering who had taught her such a defence.

"Then explain our escape," Leia said, regarding him coolly.

"Vader doesn't want the Emperor getting his hands on your child any more than you do," Luke told her. "He let us go."

"Why didn't he just terminate it?" Leia asked callously. "Terminate *me?*" She looked away and glared at the instrumentation in front of her, muttering, "Solve all his problems at once."

"He's not evil, Leia."

Luke regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth. He doubted he could ever say anything more inflammatory to the princess. Her head snapped round to glare at him and he could feel her rage like a palpable force.

Fear, not just for Leia but for her unborn child, gripped Luke and he determined to set course for Dagobah as soon as these jumps were out of the way. He couldn't risk her falling to the Dark Side, and while he no longer trusted Yoda as he had, Luke couldn't see that he had any other choice. Leia needed to learn how to control her use of the Force *now*.

"*Not evil?*"

"Leia-" Luke could see she was trembling with rage and reached out to put a calming hand on her arm, but she jerked it out of his reach.

"Don't touch me," she snapped. "Don't *ever* touch me."

Luke felt a surge of anger in response to her irrational hatred and forced it down. Nevertheless he said hotly, "You have to get past this, Leia! Just because Vader is my father-"

Leia all but leapt out of her seat at him. "*Past...?*" she yelled. "Past the fact that he tortured me and made me watch while Tarkin destroyed my entire planet?! Past the fact that he made me watch while he tortured Han for *no reason*, then tested a carbonite freezing meant for you on him?! Past the fact that he just did tests on my baby that could have killed it?!" Leia surged out of her seat then turned and finished savagely, "*Fuck you, Skywalker! And fuck your father!*"

She stormed from the cockpit and Luke took a deep breath to try and calm himself. Vader had made her watch the destruction of Alderaan? Had tortured Han on Bespin? Was that what he had felt on Dagobah? Han's pain and Leia's anguish? With sudden understanding, Luke realised that this was how Vader had got him to go to Bespin. He wiped his hands across his face. Leia was right. She was right about everything. Vader had systematically taken everything and everyone Leia had ever loved from her, including her friendship with Luke. And now he was going to take her father from her too. Luke had no idea how he could ever break that to her, then wondered for a moment whether it would be kinder to leave her ignorant of the fact?

Just like Kenobi and Yoda had done with him?

The thought of Leia finding out from Vader or the Emperor decided him. He would tell her now and she would have to deal with it as best she could. Luke checked the navicom - forty minutes before the next reversion - and followed the princess back into the ship.

He found her in the 'fresher, could hear her vomiting through the closed hatch.

"Leia?" he called. There was no reply and he asked, "Are you alright?"

Inside the 'fresher Leia was kneeling over the head, sobbing, and wishing desperately that Luke would just go away and leave her alone to wallow in the mess of her life.

"Leia?"

He opened the hatch and Leia hastily tried to wipe the evidence of her tears from her face.

"Get out!" she yelled into the bowl. "Can't I even go to the 'fresher without somebody *watching* me?!"

Luke frowned then said, "I could hear you vomiting."

"That's all I've been doing for the past three weeks!" she said. "Now will you leave me alone?"

"There's more I have to tell you," Luke said.

"I don't want to hear it," she snapped.

"You have to, Leia," Luke told her. "For your child's sake."

Leia glared at him over her arm then got to her feet and turned to the basin. She washed her face and rinsed her mouth out, then turned to face him.

"Bail Organa was not your father, Leia," Luke said, and was surprised to see not shock or surprise on Leia's face, but defensiveness.

She folded her arms across her chest and said, "Vader told you this? And you *believed* him?"

"I saw the data myself," Luke assured her, then surmised aloud, "But you already knew, didn't you?"

"Bail is on my birth record as my father, but he told me before I moved to Coruscant that he was not my genetic father," Leia admitted. "Nevertheless, I have always considered Bail my father and will continue to do so. He loved me as much as any father would have."

"Do you know what happened to your real father?"

Leia shook her head. "I was told he died before I was born. During the Clone Wars."

"Same thing I was told," Luke muttered. He looked at Leia and sensed she knew what he was going to say before he said it; could feel the fear and denial rapidly building within her. "You're my sister, Leia."

"That's ludicrous and you know it," she said flatly.

"Anakin Skywalker and Padme Naberrie were married for almost three years, Leia. I was two years old when Anakin turned to the Dark Side, and the Jedi tried to have me killed."

"*What?*" The implication that the Jedi were not the perfect knights she had been brought up to believe in seemed to disturb her greatly.

"They were afraid I would be as dangerous and unstable as my father. My mother revived me and made a pact with Yoda, the head of the Jedi Council at the time. As it was no longer safe to train me to be a Jedi thanks to the Emperor, and because they knew my father would train me as a dark Jedi, she gave me to Kenobi to hide.

"My guess is she was just pregnant with you when all this happened and, not wanting to lose another child to the Jedi she married Organa and pretended you were his."

Leia's lip trembled, and the grip she had on her elbows was turning her knuckles white, but she said nothing and continued to glare at him.

"Do you remember her?" Luke asked, hoping to deflect the horror of his revelation.

Leia's lips became a thin line and she nodded sharply, but switched her glare to the floor. He watched her swallow hard and wanted to put his arms around her and comfort her.

"My Aunt Beru gave me a small holo of her when I was seven," Luke continued. "Told me she'd died." He paused for a moment then continued, "I thought the woman in that holo was the most beautiful woman in the galaxy. I used to pretend..." he paused and almost smiled as he admitted, "*believe...* that she and my father were still alive, and that they'd come back for me one day."

He took a step closer to Leia, the hard light in the 'fresher reflecting off the tears on her cheeks, and gently wiped her cheek with his thumb.

"You look so much like her, Leia," he said softly.

Leia started to turn away from him, but he pulled her into an embrace. She allowed him to hold her for a moment then shook her head and disengaged. Luke backed away a little, giving her space, and the lightsabre hanging from his belt bounced against the bulkhead beside him. He took it off and held it out to her.

"This is for you," he said.

Leia looked deeply troubled by it and shook her head.

"For your daughter," Luke clarified. "It belonged to Han's mother."

This time Leia couldn't disguise her shock. "Han's mother was a *Jedi*?"

Luke nodded. "Killed during the purge," he said, and felt a surge of relief as Leia accepted the lightsabre from his hand.

"How do you know all this?" she asked.

"Vader gave me access to the data files," Luke said.

"But... all that stuff about your mother," she argued. "Vader couldn't have known that..."

"No," Luke admitted. "That was a Force enhanced memory. Vader showed me how to do it."

Leia swallowed again. "You *remembered*?"

Luke nodded and said, "Adults will say anything in front of a two year old."

He watched Leia look at the lightsabre in her hand. Unlike the lightsabre he had lost on Bespin, the hilt of this one was beautiful. Ornately and intricately engraved with distinctively Corellian patterns, it bespoke of an owner who was proud of her heritage. Despite the fact that she would have begun her Jedi training at a very young age and therefore spent very little time on her homeworld. Maybe that was why having a family of her own had been so important to her. Because she had resented being taken from hers.

"How-" Leia started to ask and Luke replied flatly, "Vader had it." Then admitted to Leia's unspoken conclusion, "He killed her, yes."

Leia's face screwed into an unsightly visage of grief and fury. "And you think he's not evil?!" She pushed past him to storm out of the 'resher then turned and waved the lightsabre hilt at him. "He ruined Han's life as well as mine!"

"He ruined a lot of people's lives, Leia. Including his own," Luke said calmly.

Enraged, Leia spat, "He *chose* that life! He chose that life over *you*, over your *mother*-"

"*Our* mother," Luke corrected, and felt a spike of concern as a dark calm descended over the princess suddenly.

"I will *never* accept that man as my father," she said coldly. "*Never*."

She stalked into the bunkroom and shut the hatch.

Sighing, Luke returned to the cockpit.

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