

[Back To Part 1](#)

[Back To Index](#)

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Forty Days to Bepin Part 2

by [Leela Starsky](#)

Chewbacca settled his unconscious friend on the couch then followed the princess to the bunkroom. The door was shut but he could hear her sobbing. Knowing this was something she would have to work through by herself, Chewbacca returned to give Threepio his instructions before going to bed himself.

Solo jerked awake and, for a moment, wondered where the hell he was. He locked down his surroundings and the state of calm on the ship, and then tried to get a fix on what he had been doing before falling asleep on the couch. The flasks on the table jogged his memory and he struggled to sit up, holding his head for fear it would fall off.

He could hear the Wookiee snoring in the starboard hold and glanced at his chrono, wondering how long he'd been asleep. He couldn't be sure, but he suspected it was several hours, and wondered what had woken him. He had a

vague recollection of a beeping sound, but nothing was beeping now so he decided he must have dreamt it.

He took a deep breath, dragged himself to his feet, and staggered to the 'fresher. Leaning one shoulder against the bulkhead, he emptied his bladder, wincing as half of it missed the mark. He'd have to clean *that* up before Leia came in here...

Leia.

Solo moved to the basin and, for several long minutes, simply splashed cold water in his face, trying to get his senses back online. He could remember her laughing...could remember her being upset at the end...but couldn't for the life of him remember fighting with her. Still, he must have; why else would she have been upset?

Wiping his face on a towel, Solo regarded his reflection and sighed. What he'd give for a hot water shower right now... He considered a sonic shower, decided it was better than nothing, and started removing his shirt, then changed his mind. Whatever they'd argued about, he wanted to check on Leia before having a shower.

He stepped out of the 'fresher, opened the bunkroom door and was surprised to find the room empty. The ship was so quiet, he'd felt certain she would be in there. Maybe she was in the cockpit.

He detoured through the galley, getting them both a cup of water and gulping at his own as he carried on to the cockpit. Threepio was sitting in the pilot's seat, but there was no sign of Leia. Perturbed, Solo moved into the cockpit proper and asked Threepio where she was. He scanned the board, but everything appeared nominal, and looked at the droid who seemed slow to answer.

The droid had been shut down.

Frowning and starting to feel seriously alarmed, Solo put down the drinks he was carrying and reached around the droid to hit the switch that turned him back on.

Threepio's receptors flickered and glowed, and he turned and looked at Solo.

"Hello, Captain Solo."

"Who turned you off?" Solo demanded.

"Off, sir?"

The droid had no idea he'd been turned off! Solo didn't like this one bit. "Where's Leia?" he demanded.

"Chewbacca said she went to the bunkroom several hours ago, sir."

Solo surged out of the cockpit and stopped at the ring corridor to consider where he would look next. Last time she had made herself scarce he had found her in the upper turret, but a search of both ends of the gunwell proved fruitless. She wasn't in the holds, he even checked the circuitry bay, and shortly found himself standing helplessly outside the bunkroom. Where the hell could she *be*?

Threepio rounded the corner from the main hold and said, "Sir?"

Solo glared at him. "Did you find her?" He swore, if the droid started blathering about anything *other* than Leia, he would tear him limb from limb himself.

"No, sir," the golden droid admitted. "But while I was doing a systems check I noticed that during the time I was shut down someone activated the port airlock and hatch."

Solo blanched and rushed to the airlock. Surely she wouldn't have gone out? Would she? Would she do something so ludicrously dangerous? He checked in the airlock and his mouth went dry. One EV suit was missing. He immediately yanked his own suit from its hook and started pulling it on.

"Threepio, wake Chewie," he commanded. "Tell him I'm going out."

"But, Captain Solo, what about Princess Leia?"

Solo sealed the body of his suit as he said, "Tell Chewie I think she's gone out – "

"Out, sir? Surely you can't mean – "

"Will you shut up and go tell him?" Solo picked up his helmet and closed the airlock, ignoring the golden droid's cries of dismay as he headed in the direction of the starboard hold.

He sealed his helmet and cycled the airlock, then rode the small platform up through the top hatch, activating his lamp as it opened. He staggered as zero-g took hold and fought down a viscous wave of nausea. There were several very good reasons why alcohol was discouraged among spacers and Solo felt like he'd just had personal reminders of all of them. His eyes felt like they were going to fall out of his head and his head felt like it would explode. If Leia was alive out here, Solo vowed he would kill her. If she wasn't...

Solo refused to follow that line of thought, instead he locked his safety-line into place and felt a small amount of relief to find a second one already there. But the relief was quickly replaced with fury, and then he fell out onto the hull and had to spend a moment on his hands and knees fighting his body's impulse to vomit.

As it lessened, Solo got to his feet and picked up her line. At least she'd had enough sense to put a safety-line on, although what had possessed her to come out in the first place was beyond him.

He yanked on the line, unable to see her, and switched on the helmet comm.

"*Leia?*" He deliberately yelled, knowing it would hurt her ears and ignoring the pain in his own, not to mention his head. When she didn't respond, he yelled again. "*Leia!*"

Finally a low voice murmured from the comlink speaker beside his ear, "I'm here, Han."

Despite the fact that he was following her line, Solo asked, "Where?"

"Over by the guns," came the answer inside his helmet.

Solo pointed his lamp in the direction of the central gun turret and moved towards it as quickly as his heavy, magnetic boots and the zero-g would allow. He found her lying on her back in the shadow of the guns and felt torn between overwhelming relief and total outrage.

"Just what the hell were you trying to do?" he demanded, stepping up beside her as she sat up. "*Kill yourself?*"

"I...I needed to be alone – "

"So alone that you had to deactivate Threepio?"

"He would have told you – "

"Of course he would have told me! *He* at least can remember EV protocols!"

Leia clambered to her feet. "I just wanted to be alone!"

"I don't think so, *Your Worship*," Solo said, deliberately infuriating her and bringing his helmet close enough to hers to be able to see her face. "I think you just might have been planning something a little suicidal."

Leia glared at him. "I would *never* – "

"No?" he challenged. "Then why didn't you wake me?"

Leia stalked angrily in the direction of the hatch. "I told you! I wanted to be alone!"

"Then go hide in the gun turret!" he snapped, following her. "Lock yourself in the 'fresher! Do you have *any* comprehension of the sort of speed we're doing? Or the sort of *crap* that's out here?"

"Don't lecture me, Captain," Leia responded flatly. "I know the drill."

Infuriated, Solo grabbed her arm and swung her to look at him. "Then why the fuck were you *out here?!*" Cross with himself for manhandling her, Solo dropped her arm and stalked ahead of her towards the hatch. "If something had happened to you, you know I'd never forgive myself, don't you?"

Leia watched his back for a moment then muttered, "Oh, great. Just what I need. *More* guilt."

"*You're* the one who came out here!" he yelled.

A hostile silence hung between them as they covered the distance to the top hatch. When their safety-lines were retracted, Solo pointed angrily at the open hatch and snapped, "Get on."

Leia stepped onto the small platform and Solo stepped on beside her, watching the outer and inner hull iris shut over their heads as the platform took them down into the ship.

Gravity hit and the urge to vomit reached a level he knew he wouldn't be able to suppress, and he had his helmet off before the oxygen levels in the airlock were adequate. But, he thought happily as he slumped to his knees and vomited onto the floor, at least he hadn't done it in the helmet.

Then he felt her gloved fingers in his hair, stroking his head, and she said quietly, "I did all my vomiting an hour or so ago."

"Well, good for you," he snapped, and vomited again. Finally finished, he wiped his mouth with the back of his gloved hand. "Do you have any idea what it's like to do zero-g with a hangover?"

"Not unlike concussion, I've heard."

Leia stepped away and started removing her suit. Looking at her, Solo wondered if she was deliberately trying to remind him of her own concussion seven days prior, and set about unsealing his suit.

The hatch to the ring corridor opened abruptly and Chewbacca bellowed fiercely at them.

Solo flinched, holding his head. "Chewie!"

"Oh, thank goodness you're safe, Princess!" Threepio said as he tried to peer around the Wookiee. "When we heard you'd gone out on the hull, we thought you'd fallen off!"

Leia met the Wookiee's accusing gaze and had the good sense to look abashed. "I'm sorry," she murmured.

[What were you *thinking*?] Solo heard his friend demand and quipped in reply, "I think it's safe to say, *thinking* didn't come into it."

Leia glared at him and then stormed out of the airlock, pushing past the Wookiee as she did.

Solo was incensed and not about to let her off lightly. "Don't you go storming off like you didn't do anything wrong, Miss High and Mighty!" he yelled, climbing to his feet.

[What did she think she was doing?] Chewbacca asked as Solo shook the last of his suit off.

"She wanted to be *alone*," Solo growled sarcastically, and moved to follow her, but changed his mind as he passed his friend. "Chewie," he said in a low voice, and grabbed a handful of fur. "What'd I say? What'd we fight about? I can't remember."

[You didn't,] the Wookiee said.

Solo frowned. "Then what was she crying about?"

Chewbacca studied his friend for a moment and Solo suspected he was deciding whether or not he would divulge the information. [The alcohol lowered her defences,] he answered carefully.

Solo started to shake his head, winced and quickly changed his mind. Lowered her defences? What the hell did that mean?

[You need to take something for your head,] Chewbacca fussed, following his friend toward the 'fresher. [You should not have gone out there.]

"Hey! Why am I getting the lecture?" He glanced at the closed bunkroom door as he passed, then stepped into the 'fresher. He took two millerangin tablets, washing them down with a glass of water, and washed his face again.

He caught sight of the mess he had left on and around the lavatory and groaned at the thought of bending down to clean it. And remembered the mess waiting for him in the airlock...

Chewbacca must have followed his thoughts because he growled hurriedly, [I'll clean up! You have to go to the princess.]

Solo looked at his friend and, for a moment, felt undecided about which was the more onerous duty. Then he simply nodded and headed for the bunkroom. Maybe he could convince her to sleep on it, whatever *it* was. And tackle whatever it was with a clear head.

He opened the bunkroom door and was greeted with, "Go away, Han." She was sitting on the edge of her bunk, her face hidden by her hands.

"No," he said, and took up position leaning against the doorframe with his arms folded across his chest.

"What do you want?"

"An explanation."

"You got me drunk. I did a really stupid thing," she said, then added, "Not that it seemed stupid at the time...."

"Oh, I see, it's all *my* fault?"

"Get out," she snapped.

"It's *my* cabin," he reminded her, childishly, "*You* get out."

Leia glared at him and he could see the tears in her eyes. "Fine," she said tightly and made to leave the room, then paused and added scathingly as she started unbuttoning the shirt she was wearing, "Oh, I suppose you'll want your clothes –"

Solo rested his hand on hers to stop her progress but she jerked away from him and continued. "Leia," he said, and forcibly stopped her hands.

"Let me go!" She tried to wrest her hands out of his grip.

"Leia, stop it."

"You stop it! I just want to be left alone!"

"No you don't."

"How do you know what I want? How *dare* you presume – "

"I *do* know you're afraid," he assured her quietly. "Afraid of letting yourself *feel* – "

In the corridor, Chewbacca paused. He had been about to intercede, but Solo's final words had so mirrored his own to the princess that he decided his friend might know what he was doing after all. He halted Threepio's attempt to interfere and ordered him to the cockpit.

In the bunkroom, Leia was feeling more than she could cope with. She had come to the horrible conclusion that Solo's accusation of her suicidal leanings was uncomfortably accurate, and that was making her wonder about all the risk-taking she had done since the Death Star. She was already defensive and angry, but Solo's comment about her fear of feeling was too close to the truth and she lashed out. "You want to know what I'm afraid of, Han?" Her dark eyes met his finally, full of challenge. "*Really* afraid of?" If this didn't scare him off, nothing would. "I'm afraid of falling in love with you!" There! She'd said it! Her rage callously abandoned her and her shoulders slumped. She looked away, terrified of what she might see in his eyes. "Afraid that I already have."

"That makes two of us."

He said it so quietly, and she was so shattered at her own admission, that it took Leia a moment to register what Solo had said. When it did sink in she looked at him with confused disbelief.

"What?" As he opened his mouth to repeat himself, Leia threw her hands up in exasperation and all but shrieked, "Well, that's just *wonderful*!" Solo closed his

mouth and regarded her tightly. "Wonderful!" she repeated and tried to leave the cabin. This was *not* what he was supposed to say.

"Leia." He put a hand out to stop her and she slapped it away.

"You're supposed to laugh at me!" she yelled.

"*Laugh* at you?"

"Tell me to snap out of it! Turn the whole – "

"Who tells *me*?" Solo interrupted, quietly.

"*You*?" Leia stormed at him. "You're a *pirate*!" she shouted. "You're supposed to use people and *never* get involved!"

His words. From Ord Mantell. Words he had flung at her in a final effort to reinforce and secure the crumbling shields between them.

"And you're a *princess*!" he responded hotly, spitting the title at her like it was a curse. "Cold as that planet we just left! You only want people for your cause! For your damned *rebellion*!"

Leia jabbed an accusing finger at him. "All *you* care about is money!"

"All *you* care about is the Empire!"

Irrational with a fury she knew stemmed from a fear of feelings she could no longer control, Leia swung to hit him across the face. Solo caught her wrist, pulled her into his embrace, and clamped his lips on hers.

Her initial reaction was outrage, then all her hope, all her desire, all her longing flooded through her and she threw herself wholeheartedly into the kiss. It seared her soul and Leia suspected she would never recover.

Here was an answer to her pain, an analgesic of such potent and addictive qualities that she had avoided its relief for three years. Han was a drug and, like all drugs, inevitably bad for her. But Leia no longer cared. He had pegged her EV sojourn onto the hull as self-destructive, and it had shocked her to realise he was right. So, for the moment, nothing else mattered. Not the Empire, not the Alliance, not the Cloud City of Bespin. All that mattered was Han and that he could make the unending pain go away.

Maybe not forever, but certainly for now.

He backed up to the hatch, taking her with him, hit the panel and it shut with a definitive *whoosh*. Fully aware of where they were and what he had in mind, Leia knew she should balk. Reconsider, flee. But, in all honesty, she wanted this as much as he did. He paused to look at her and Leia wailed silently, *No! Don't stop! Don't give me time to think!* And pulled his face back down to hers.

One hand was at the small of her back, keeping her close, while the other was releasing her hair from its loose plait. Leia closed her eyes, wallowing in the feel of his fingers in her hair, her scalp tingling, then clung to him, afraid she would collapse as he worked his way up the outer edge of her ear with not just



his lips, but his tongue and teeth as well. He kissed his way down her neck, his mouth lighting small fires of sensation, and she bared her throat to him.

He turned his attention back to her mouth, holding her head firmly with both his hands, his tongue demanding, exploring. Helpless, Leia admitted him, and was shocked at how erotic it felt. Her two previous experiences with this sort of kissing had been nothing short of repulsive and she had seriously wondered what people saw in it. But now, as Han's tongue moved slickly against hers, she found herself responding instinctively.

Han's passion trebled and he deepened the kiss even further. The hands that had been holding her head were now opening her shirt and she sensed a hunger from him that hadn't been there before. Or perhaps it had been too well controlled?

"Han," she encouraged, running her own hands up under his shirt, then gasped softly as she felt his hands encompass her breasts. He brushed her nipples and spikes of pleasure shot through her from her breasts to her groin. "Oh..."

She felt the pants she was wearing, *his* pants, slide down her legs, and wondered when he had managed to untie them.

Goddess! Leia thought. *This is really happening!* His kisses moved along her collarbone and he slipped the shirt from her shoulders. It pooled at her feet. *He's going to make love to me!* A sobering thought occurred to her, crashing through her sensory fog, and she froze. *I could get pregnant.*

"Han," she said thickly, as he divested himself of his shirt and started on his pants. "Han...I think – "

Solo put a finger against her lips, silencing her, and his eyes seemed to pierce her soul.

"Don't think," he said. "For once, Leia, just let it happen."

Leia had never felt so alive, so wonderfully sexual. She wanted this, wanted Han, more than she had wanted anything in her life. She grabbed his face and kissed him ravenously, Solo meeting and matching her ardour. She experienced a whisper of apprehension as she fell back onto the bunk, but forced it down. Yes, the path she was taking was unknown, but when had that stopped her before? How many times had she gone into unknown situations with Han? How many times had he saved her life? Proved his worth, not to mention his devotion? If she could trust him with her life, how could she not trust him with her body? And the truth was, he already had her heart.

He was hovering over her, devouring her with his eyes, and Leia closed her own eyes, feeling vaguely embarrassed by his scrutiny.

"You are so beautiful," he murmured, and shifted to lie beside her on the outer edge of the bunk. *Blocking my retreat*, was her amused thought. He propped his head up on one forearm, his other hand running exquisite trails all over her body, and Leia smiled.

But it was giving her time to think, and thinking would ruin everything. She pulled him toward her, kissing him passionately. Solo's enthusiasm pressed her back against the bedding, and the feel of his chest against hers, and a hot hardness against her hip, elicited responses from her body she had never thought possible. She revelled in the warmth of his body pressing against her own.

For a long time her world narrowed to the movements of his lips, at once passionate and tender, holding her breath as they left her mouth to trail down her throat to her breasts. Moist kisses around her nipples had her arching her back, all but begging him to touch them, then he ran his tongue across one and she gasped. He moved across to her other breast, ran his tongue teasingly around the nipple before finally closing his mouth over it and sucking. Leia moaned silently, felt a rush of moisture between her legs and shifted her hips as the aching need in her groin became almost unbearable.

How does he know? she thought distractedly and entwined her leg with his. *How can he know more about my body than I do?*

Experience, her cynical side answered. *He's done this hundreds of times. You're just one more.*

No, she disagreed, then bit her bottom lip as his mouth moved back to the first breast and sucked delicately on the nipple. *This is different. He loves me.*

Leia trembled as she felt his hand travel up the inside of her thigh, vaguely apprehensive of how he would feel about what he found there.

He hasn't said that, the dark, sensible part of her pointed out. *He hasn't actually said the words. And he's going to leave you! As soon as you get to the rendezvous.* She felt Solo's hand graze the dark curls between her legs and gasped softly. *You're a fool*, the dark, rational one sneered. *He's going to break your heart.*

I don't care, she told herself. *We could be dead tomorrow. At least I'll have this...* She felt his hand slide delicately through the folds of her sex and gasped again; heard Han echo it.

You'll be sorry... drifted through her mind but she ignored it, opened her eyes and found him looking at her. *He's pleased*, she thought, finally identifying the expression on his face while his fingers continued to explore. *Pleased to find everything so...lubricated.*

"Leia..." he whispered.

He began to stroke her, and Leia couldn't stop her hips writhing in response.

"Han!" she gasped, and his mouth enveloped hers. He kissed her hungrily, wantonly, manipulating her relentlessly. Waves of pre-orgasmic pleasure rippled through her, and Leia felt her legs fall apart instinctively, allowing him greater access. Solo accepted her invitation, continuing to fondle her as he moved over her, between her legs. Then he removed his hand to lie against her, and the sensation of his pelvis cradled against hers aroused her even more. For a moment he lay there, kissing her, caressing her, and the sensation of his warm hardness brushing against her opening nearly drove Leia wild. She tried to angle her hips, suddenly desperate to have him inside her and, sensing her need, Solo reached down with one hand to direct himself into her. Their eyes locked in wordless agreement as he pushed, each movement of his hips taking him a little farther in until they were joined.

Leia felt her body stretching to accommodate him, felt him throb inside her as her pelvic muscles contracted in direct response. Smiling at him, Leia squeezed again, deliberately this time, and Solo kissed her, moving his hips until he had all but withdrawn, then he pushed into her again and Leia gasped softly. She closed her eyes, focusing on the feel of him withdrawing again, the aching emptiness it left behind, and the exquisite fulfilment as he pushed into her once more. This rhythm was addictive.

"Han," Leia breathed into his ear.

"Leia," he agreed.

Goddess! she thought hazily as he slowly increased their rhythm. *I'm really doing this! With Han. Han inside me, making love to me...* She kissed his chin, his throat, larynx. *Han.* She looked at him and found him smiling at her. *Ah, goddess, I've wanted to do this for so long...! Something so right, so perfect.* He gently brushed the hair from her face and Leia smiled at him.

She tried to rock with him, to match his rhythm, but only succeeded in foiling it. When she started to apologise, Solo shushed her instead. "Do whatever feels good for you, sweetheart."

Leia let him set the pace again, caressing his sides and his back, encouraging him while at the same time not entirely certain what she should do.

She was feeling suddenly and absurdly detached. Not because it wasn't pleasant: it was. Surprisingly so. Leia closed her eyes for a moment to focus on the sensations happening in her groin and Solo's lips moved moistly along her jaw to nibble on her earlobe. *Extremely pleasant*, she thought, but knew she was nowhere near climaxing.

She felt his head settle against her shoulder, his movements slow to almost nothing, and opened her eyes to look at him. Unsure what had happened but sensing it wasn't over, Leia kissed his temple, running her hand through his hair, and Solo lifted his head to look at her. She smiled inwardly, focusing on the delicious feel of his body pressed against hers and inside hers, and could see in his eyes what they were each unable to put into words, and wondered if it was as evident in her own eyes.

Solo sighed and said softly, "Why did we take so long to do this?"

Leia touched his face, feather-light across the stubble of his beard, pausing to outline the scar on his chin. "Just stubborn, I guess."

He smiled fondly at her for a long moment then, brushing her lips with his, he agreed, "I guess." He shifted his hips and Leia caught her breath at the sudden stimulation, clutching him to her as Solo steadily resumed their previous rhythm. He kissed her ardently, passionately, desperately, and she returned it in kind, the stubble of his beard grazing her chin.

"Leia!" he groaned, speeding up his thrusts, and she could hear the desperation in his voice.

She looked at his face. Perspiration was beading across his forehead and dampening his hair. She could feel a sheen of it across his chest and down his arms. His eyes were closed; his expression one of intense concentration, almost pain, and Leia wondered why she wasn't feeling what Han was obviously feeling. Was there something wrong with her? Or was it the control thing again? Leia suspected it was the latter and wondered why she couldn't let herself go.

Solo pushed harder and a spike of intense pleasure caught her by surprise. She gasped, arching her back, pushing her hips against his, taking him deeper. "Gods!" he exclaimed and thrust into her again. "Oh, Leia...*Leia!*"

Responding to his need, Leia held him tightly, murmuring his name, kissing his neck. Then suddenly he slumped, exhaled a shuddering breath, and pillowed his head on her shoulder.

That's it? she thought, then berated herself. It wasn't as if she'd never seen an adult holovid; she knew the mechanics. Yet, like a typical virgin, she had

expected her first time to be...special. "A climax to light all of Coruscant," as the saying went.

*Well, it **was** special.* Leia kissed Han's forehead and ran her fingers through his hair, enjoying the feel of his exhausted weight on top of hers. His eyes were shut and she could feel his heart thumping against her ribcage.

"Leia..." he murmured, still breathing hard.

Leia felt him slide out of her, the fluid that followed and, realising what it must be, remembered what had given her pause at the start. *I could get pregnant.* She stiffened a little, uncomfortable at the thought. Without contraception that was a definite possibility; she had just finished menstruating and was very probably fertile. But Leia decided she was going to be selfish for once; they both needed this time together, consequences be damned.

Just until they got to Bespin...

Solo lifted his head and kissed her lips, softly, tenderly and Leia thought, *He really does care for me.*

"I'm sorry," he murmured and Leia felt a stab of fear.

"For what?" she asked, terrified of his answer. He was so experienced and she was anything but. Had she done something wrong?

"For not waiting for you. For not being able to."

Leia frowned at him, not comprehending, and he rolled off her. She straightened her legs, pulling them together, and felt surprisingly grateful to ease the pressure on her hips. Han propped his head up on one forearm and regarded her apologetically, tracing her hairline with one finger. "You didn't come."

Leia blushed and couldn't meet his gaze. "That doesn't mean I didn't enjoy it." She considered for a moment then added, "It was nice."

"Nice?"

He sounded so affronted that Leia mentally berated herself. *Great! Now I've insulted him!* "Wasn't it supposed to be nice?" she asked.

"Well, yeah, but..." Solo ran his fingers up her body, making it tingle. "It should be so much more than 'nice.'" He sighed. "I'm sorry; I swore I'd wait. I wanted it to be perfect for you."

Leia rolled towards him and cupped his face with her hand. "I'm the control freak, remember? If you waited for me..." She gave him an embarrassed smirk. "We'd be here 'til we got to Bespin."

Solo's eyebrows shot up and he grinned suggestively. "We *are* gonna be here 'til we get to Bespin."

"I hope so," Leia said, snuggling into him and he wrapped his arms around her.

Neither of them mentioned *after* Bespin although both thought it, and regarded each other quietly.

Studying him, Leia found herself unwilling to contemplate the end of their journey. She was distracted by a longing to touch him all over, and ran her hand lightly across his chest. Solo sighed languorously, tightening his arms around her, and Leia smiled.

Oh, the joy of being held! She considered what had just transpired between them, and her smile widened. *We did it!* she thought, joyously. *I did it.* Not for power or prestige, which had been the threat over her head in the Senate, nor for information, which she would have been prepared to do for the Rebellion, and the rape she'd expected at the hands of the Imperials had never happened. No, for probably the first time in her life, Leia Organa had fulfilled her one truly selfish desire and done it for *love*. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply, wallowing in a feeling of contentment and drinking in his scent, *their* scent, and reviewing the experience.

"What are you thinking?" he murmured.

Leia smiled and tightened her embrace, "How nice it was."

He chuckled and kissed her forehead, and she opened her eyes and looked at him. Despite Solo's affront at her description, it *had* been nice and, Leia suspected, would get better.

"What about you?" she asked.

"I – " He paused then told her truthfully, "I was wondering about Alderaanian customs."

Leia felt inordinately pleased that he would stop to consider her people's sexual mores, and smiled at him. "As compared to promiscuous Corellians?" she teased.

"We're not promiscuous," he said, nuzzling her temple. "Just matter-of-fact. Sex is just another appetite, like sleeping or eating."

"Is that all this was?" Leia asked warily.

"No," he reassured her tenderly. "No, this was much more."

Leia closed her eyes, enjoying the light caress of his fingers across her skin. "Sex is not something Alderaanians take lightly," she said. "It has..." she paused and looked at him, hunting for the right word, "religious significance." Then added, "The goddess and all..." and hoped she wouldn't have to go into it. "It's usually confined to marriage." Suddenly she felt unable to meet his gaze, could feel herself starting to blush, and was cross with herself and her upbringing as she identified her reaction as shame.

"Hey, Sweetheart," he rumbled softly. "I'm proud of you."

That made her look at him. "*Proud* of me?"

"For letting yourself go. For letting this happen. Don't for one second think I don't appreciate or understand that."

Leia felt tears prickle at the back of her eyes and buried her face against his chest. *I love you, Nerfherder.* Finally, she murmured into his chest, "It feels so right. You. Me. This."

"I know." His hands were drawing lazy patterns on her arms and back.

"What will Chewie say?" she asked quietly.

"Ah, don't worry about the Wook," he assured her. "He's been betting we'd come to this for years."

"Along with the rest of the base?"

Solo smiled, mirroring her reluctant amusement. "I think so, yeah."

Leia reached her arms around him, hugging his neck. "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For being so stubborn – "

"Hey, I was fighting it as much as you, y'know?"

Leia smiled. "I know. But..."

"But?"

"After this... I feel like we've wasted so much time."

"Yeah," he agreed. He ran his fingers through the silken veil of her hair. "No regrets then?"

She shook her head. "Only that we didn't do it sooner."

Solo smiled and tightened his embrace, feeling wonderfully relaxed and an incredibly deep sense of peace.

They were silent for some time, and he was drifting off to sleep when she whispered, "What if I'm pregnant?"

Solo frowned at her, confused and startled all at once. "What?"

Leia's voice quavered, her mind feeding her fears. "I'm fertile, Han... What if _ "

"Relax, Leia," he said gently and ran his hand down her back. "I'm safe."

Leia frowned at him. "Safe?"

"I get an annual shot," he explained, clearing his throat. Leia couldn't hide her look of amazement and Solo chuckled. "Never would have thought me *that* responsible, eh, princess?"

"I..." Leia nodded. "I'll admit I'm surprised."

He smiled. "Had a scare about ten years ago," he explained. "Thought I'd got a girl pregnant. Been getting an annual shot ever since."

"Oh."

"You okay?" He caressed her face, sensing her struggle to come to terms with the risk she had taken.

Leia nodded. "Just feeling naive and irresponsible." She lifted a hand to his face, feeling the week's worth of beard starting to soften on his jaw, and wondered what he would look like if he let it grow.

"Need a shave," he murmured apologetically.

"Actually, it's surprisingly soft."

He ran his hands down her back and teased, "Just like you, hm?"

Leia sighed. "People just don't appreciate the effort and dedication it takes to be a bitch."

Solo chuckled and regarded her fondly. "I always wanted to see this side of you."

Leia chuckled into his chest and teased, "You'll be telling me you fantasize about me next."

"I do," was the serious response.

Leia's breath caught in her throat. How did one respond to a declaration like that? She felt his hand move under her chin, turning her face to his, and a moment later his lips were caressing her own, powder-soft and warm.

He moved his lips down her neck and added in a whisper, "I've been fantasizing about you for years, Leia."

The movements of his lips set her body tingling again and she snaked an arm around his waist. "Me too," she murmured honestly. "Although I swore I wasn't going to let this happen."

"I know." Solo smiled and took her face in his hands, forcing her to look at him. Allowing her to see the emotion in his eyes and how ironic he thought it all was. "Neither of us wanted it. We both fought it. And yet it's happened anyway." He ran a thumb across her lips and his own quirked up on one side. "Who knows? It may not be *all* bad..." He touched her lips softly with his then whispered in her ear, "Tell me what upset you so much."

Leia rolled onto her back and stared at the overhead bulkhead, looking for guidance. Could she tell him? Break her own vow never to tell a soul? Tell him the truth about Alderaan? He deserved to know, the joyless, callous part of her soul opined. Particularly before he committed himself to her in any fashion. But...

"Not now," she said, then assured him, "Later."

Solo nodded. He nuzzled the side of her head and she smiled and snuggled into him. Within minutes Solo's breathing had deepened to a sleep rhythm and Leia pulled back from him a little, taking the opportunity to openly study his body.

He really is magnificent, she thought, letting her hand lightly trace the ebb and flow of body-hair across his chest, stomach and groin, to his now innocuous-looking penis, smiling as he sighed contentedly. She slid her hand between her

own thighs, feeling the sticky residue, and decided to use the 'fresher, reassuring Solo when he sleepily queried her departure.

Too lazy to dress, Leia wrapped the top sheet around herself and stepped out of the bunkroom, only pausing to consider Chewie or Threepio's whereabouts when Chewbacca stuck his head out of the galley to look at her. Leia smiled weakly and averted her eyes, desperately hoping he wouldn't ask questions.

"Mistress Leia," Threepio said, stepping out from behind the Wookiee, and Leia cringed. "Have you seen Captain Solo?"

"Yes, Threepio," she answered hurriedly and palmed open the 'fresher door. "He's tall, dark and rather handsome." She smiled at him and added. "Corellian, I believe."

She stepped in, shut the door behind her, leaned back against it and breathed a sigh of relief. Without a doubt, Chewbacca would know what was going on, and Leia again found herself wondering how the Wookiee would feel about his best friend pairing up with her?

Pairing up? Could she and Han be classified as a couple? A relationship? Leia did not know. Dropping the sheet, Leia relieved herself then washed between her legs. *At least it didn't hurt*, she thought, then stood and looked at herself in the small mirror as she washed her hands. She didn't look any different, just dishevelled.

Smiling, Leia wrapped the sheet around herself once more and opened the door, and found Chewbacca regarding her smugly, arms crossed over his chest. *Waiting* for her. He growled a phrase or two, and Leia knew she should have understood, but, for the life of her, could not understand a word. Fortunately, Threepio translated.

"Chewbacca asks if Captain Solo and yourself have finished fighting, your Highness?"

Leia looked at him, vaguely stunned. How could he think otherwise? "I-I think so, Chewie." She smirked and added, "For the moment, anyway." She could see the amusement in the Wookiee's eyes. "But I can't promise..." she finished, heading back to the bunkroom, and heard him chuckle as she shut and locked the door.

Han was snoring, sprawled across the bunk on his back, totally relaxed. *And totally vulnerable*, she thought, grinning. Indulging herself, Leia started at his feet and trailed her hands leisurely up his body, drinking in every curve. She got distracted at his pelvis and ran her hand across him curiously, surprised at how soft everything felt. Solo took a deep breath and she looked at him. He was still

dozing, but Leia suspected he'd wake soon. She looked back at his genitals, made a conscious decision not to be embarrassed, and gently explored. His penis was wonderfully warm and velvety soft, and the memory of how it had felt inside her flushed her with renewed desire.

Solo's breathing changed and he stretched, pulling slightly away from her. Devilishly, Leia grabbed hold, and was rewarded with a direct response. She looked at him, found him watching her, and had to suppress a giggle.

"Having fun, Princess?" he purred languorously and she nodded, testing the suddenly expanding contours with her fingertips. "It's all yours," he chuckled.

Leia gripped him firmly, possessively and he gasped softly. "My new toy?" she said playfully.

"So long as you play nice," he agreed.

Leia ran her hand the full length, amazed at the heat beneath it, and Solo moaned as she tightened her grip exquisitely.

"But what do I *do* with it?" She pulled her hand sharply down, then slowly up, and Solo's hips moved of their own volition.

He swallowed, and stammered thickly, "Whatever you want..."

A look passed between them then. A deep trust and pledge of commitment, completely unspoken, yet nonetheless binding.

Leia shrugged off the sheet and straddled him, closing her eyes to focus on the delicious feel of him sliding into her, filling her so completely, so perfectly, that she had to feel it again. She raised her pelvis the full length of him, paused for one agonising second, then relaxed down again, gasping at the exquisite sensation of him plunging deep inside her.

She felt his hands encompass her breasts, focus on her nipples, and bit her lower lip as his manipulations sent spikes of pleasure down to mingle with the joy in her groin.

Pull and plunge. Pull and plunge.

Solo moaned and Leia opened her eyes. His head was thrown back, eyes closed, larynx bulging against his throat. A stronger movement of her hips elicited a strangled gasp from him and his hands moved to her waist. It was an amazingly heady experience, realising the power she had over him. And the fact that he trusted her so wholly was equally mind-blowing.

Leia leaned down to kiss his throat and lost her rhythm. Solo grabbed her face, kissing her fiercely, his own hips taking up where she'd left off.

"Look at me, Han," she murmured, suddenly desperate to see his eyes, to swim in their soft, hazel-green depths.

He looked at her and she smiled, sat up again and picked up her tempo. Solo groaned involuntarily and promptly closed his eyes again.

"Look at me," she begged, but he shook his head. "Please?"

He shook his head again, short and sharp. "I can't," he explained, thickly. "You're too much of a turn-on; you'll tip me over the...ah, Leia!"

Leia could not believe the power she was wielding, how much control she had.

"Oh, no, no, no," Solo groaned. "Not yet...." She deliberately sped up. "Leia, no – !"

The desire to give him this, to see and feel him abandon himself to the pleasure she could give him, was overwhelming. "Let it go, Han," she murmured.

"No," he protested distractedly. "I want to wait for you...."

"That's okay--" she started, and then shrieked as he suddenly grabbed her and rolled towards the blind side of the bunk. "What are you *doing*?"

He pulled away from her suddenly, withdrew, and Leia frowned at him, feeling totally confused and a little cheated.

"Han?"

Solo moved back over her, kissed her forehead, her nose, her cheek.

"Han?"

"It's okay, Leia," he whispered, running kisses down her neck. "Trust me."

Leia closed her eyes, enjoying his soft touch. "That's nice," she murmured. He moved from her neck to her collarbone, then down between her breasts. "That's very nice..."

Solo rested his nose against her sternum and sighed, then looked at her. "Do you *ever* stop analysing?" he asked. Leia pouted and he chuckled. "Stupid

question." He kissed his way across her belly, pulling her hips toward the edge of the bunk as he slid off.

She smiled, tickled by the kisses, but still asked, "What're you doing?" Then gasped and sat up as his head moved between her legs and his mouth ran investigation. "*Han!*" she hissed.

"Lie down," he mumbled.

"But – "

He looked up at her and said in words that brooked no argument, "Lie back, close your eyes, and think of...." *Coruscant* was the usual response, but that was hardly appropriate here. Solo grinned at her and finished, "...*Me!*" Looking very pleased with himself, he prodded the princess gently, but firmly in the shoulder, pushing her back into the bunk.

Feeling more embarrassed than she had ever thought possible, Leia lay back and allowed his exploration to continue. It wasn't that it didn't feel nice; it *did*. Very nice. But, it was just so...*personal*. Genitals went together, but it was all still down *there*. But that was Han's *face*, and – .Leia gasped as sensation obliterated thought momentarily. What was he *doing*??

She lifted her head. "Han?"

He paused and looked at her, "No more talking!"

"But – "

"No!" He wagged a finger at her. "No more words unless something I do hurts, got it?" She nodded. "Good!"

Leia put her head down and stared up at the bulkhead. She needed to adjust her thinking; this was the problem. She was bogged down with romantic ideals and, when you got to the facts of the matter, there was nothing romantic about sex. It was animalistic, messy and –

She closed her eyes as a deep fire spread upward from her genitals. *Oh... This feels good... Good? It's unbelievable!* Leia sighed and allowed herself to feel. "Ohhh," she sighed, was rewarded with more vigorous attention from his tongue, and was shocked to hear herself moan. *Did I just moan? Was that me? Oh, goddess! Han. Han is making me feel like this. Han is – "Ohhh...Han..."*

Leia closed her eyes and let the sensations wash over her. Soon, she could feel her climax building and made a conscious decision to let it happen. It was

what Han was aiming for and, anyway, why shouldn't she? Why should she have to feel ashamed by something so –

Leia's eyes flew open. *Goddess! He's putting something inside me! Is that his finger?* With her climax suddenly out of her control, Leia didn't quite know what to do. She pushed against him, felt him suck hard suddenly and gasped at the overwhelming glory of it. *I think...I think...I think I might...*

Leia arched her back, her breath coming in short gasps, and suddenly she was at the edge, waves of pleasure rolling over her. He pushed harder and she bucked reflexively, attempting to pull herself away from an intensity that was too great. Then she felt her entire body shudder, focus on her genitals and convulse.

She moaned as it rippled across her belly, "Oh, Han...."

Solo waited for her trembling to subside then pushed her legs back up onto the bunk, wiped his face on the nearest piece of clothing, and moved over the top of her. She smiled softly at him and Solo beamed.

"You look totally blissed," he said.

Leia managed a halfhearted "Mmm", which broadened to a pleased "Mmm!" as he buried himself inside her. She closed her eyes, revelling in the exquisite push and pull until, abruptly, he plunged hard and deep.

Leia's half-lidded eyes flew open as hitherto unknown sensation exploded in her belly. "Han – !" she squeaked, and again he plunged. And again. And Leia wondered if she would actually pass out from ecstasy. She tried to hang onto him, to his back, but she needed something with which to anchor herself to the bed. She clawed the bedding beneath her, grasping and ungrasping as Solo took her body to a place it had never been. He was not bringing her to gentle climax this time – this time was hard, fast, relentless, and indescribably powerful.

It crashed through her and she cried out at the intensity.

Solo's thrusting became an uncontrollable need. He had held himself back, determined to make this experience a good one for her, and now his own release was so intense it was almost painful. He grimaced while making the final few thrusts, emptying himself completely into her. Then he collapsed on top of her, still shuddering.

He felt her hands snake up around his torso, stroke his back, and he turned his head and nuzzled the side of her face, kissed her ear. And became aware of a new sound, felt her sobbing beneath him. Appalled with himself for not noticing sooner, Solo lifted his head and looked at her, alarmed.

"Have I hurt you?"

Leia shook her head. "I..." she started, but was having trouble finding her voice. She reached up and touched his face. "I never knew," she whispered, and his eyes softened, the concern in them dissipating. "I had no idea it could be like this...." She wiped roughly at her eyes and sniffed inelegantly. "I'm sorry."

"Leia," Solo said, kissing her tenderly on the lips, then touched his nose to hers. He started to move off her, but she tightened her arms around his neck and her legs around his hips, holding him where he was.

"No, don't," she said quietly.

Solo studied her, taking in every nuance of her beautiful face – her high forehead, the sweep of her cheek, her eyelashes, damp from tears of joy, and her soft lips, swollen from passionate kissing.

"Aren't I heavy?" he asked. Leia nodded but didn't let him go. Solo pillowed his head on her shoulder and sighed blissfully as she ran her fingers through his hair.

For a long while they simply lay, wallowing in the feel of being together, so complete, so perfect. When he felt himself falling asleep, Solo started to move off her, and was surprised to realise he was still inside her. *Gods*, he thought. *To fall asleep while still inside was every teenage boy's fantasy!* It was something that had never happened to Han, nor anyone he knew – if they were telling the truth. He had dismissed the whole idea as just that – pure fantasy, but here he was falling asleep on the Princess of Alderaan while still inside. He wanted to push himself back in, but felt her tighten around him, which in effect pushed him the rest of the way out. Resigned, he settled onto his side next to her, and Leia turned to snuggle into his embrace.

"I feel so..." Leia smiled blearily and sighed, "...good."

Solo eyed her critically and smiled, feeling a deep sense of satisfaction that he was responsible for her current bliss.

"Like a drug..." she murmured, then looked at him wistfully. "Did you drug me?"

Solo smiled and caressed her face, ran his hand through her hair. "No," he answered softly. "It's called endorphins."

Leia closed her eyes, drifting pleasantly on her euphoria. "Does it happen every time?"

"To some degree."

"No wonder people want to do it all the time. I've never felt this good in my life."

He kissed her and she responded sleepily. Feeling wonderfully content and unutterably satisfied, Solo let himself drift off to sleep, his princess in his arms.

Day11

Solo's groin sounded the alert that finally woke him up. He was aware of something rubbing against him exquisitely, and, as his consciousness surfaced fully, quickly realised Leia was still in his arms. Her head was cushioned on the arm he had under her, her body spooned against his, but it was the subtle movement of her hips shifting against him that had his lower half standing at attention.

Leia.

The memory of making love with her flooded through him, and Solo could have wept.

What have I done? What have I done?

He tightened the arms he had around her, closed his eyes and pressed his lips against the top of her head. *This changes everything.* Her breathing changed perceptibly and she shifted her hips again.

The sound of Chewie's not-so-subtle footfalls going past the cabin door caused her to stir, and Solo opened his eyes to look at her. But Leia simply rolled over in his arms, buried her nose against his chest, smiled and settled once more in slumber.

Leia.

The sight of her, the feel of her, the sweet smell of her, were all proof of her reality, but part of him felt sure he must be dreaming. How many times had he dreamed scenarios just like this? Dreamed them so hard they almost felt real. Yet this time those dreams were memories.

Memories of making love with Leia.

The look on her face as she had climaxed beneath him, the mixture of shock, surprise and unbridled joy, was like nothing Solo had ever experienced before. And the thought that the experience had reduced her to tears almost brought tears to his eyes.

Han Solo seriously wondered what he had done so right to deserve such happiness. And like a blaster bolt to the heart, he remembered Jabba. *I love her*, he realised. *Love her and I have to leave her. Have to break both our hearts.*

Leia gently became aware of the warmth of another body enveloping her own. A small movement of her hand recognised form and texture and, although she was still semi-conscious, a slight smile touched her lips. She breathed deeply, oxygenating her brain and filling her senses with his scent and more.

Han.

Her smile broadened, memory flooding in, and she tightened her embrace on him, reaching her hand further around his torso. The arms holding her tightened in a direct response and Leia shifted her body sensuously against his, then opened her eyes to look at her lover.

She met his eyes and he smiled apologetically before closing his and crushing her to him, his lips soft and warm against her forehead. But not before she had seen the tears in his eyes.

"Han?" Concern and alarm made her rigid and she gripped him tighter. What would make Han cry?

"It's all right," he assured her thickly.

Leia forced herself out of his embrace to look at him fully and Solo wiped roughly at his eyes with one hand. Heart stopping terror gripped her; what would make Han cry? He pulled her back into his embrace, murmuring assurances. Holding her like he would never let her go.

"Han," Leia said carefully. "Talk to me."

Solo closed his eyes and wondered how he could say the words. He could barely comprehend the feeling, let alone verbalise it.

"Please."

She was scared. He could hear it in her voice. Solo knew he had to say something, or she would assume it was something she'd done.

"I..." he started. "I have to...I mean..."

An unbearable chill lanced through the princess. *He's leaving me!* Leia pushed herself up, out of his embrace and leaned across him to look directly into his eyes.

The view of her naked body leaning across his, one breast hanging softly, almost touching him, the other pressed hard against his abdomen, reprioritised Solo's thoughts. This was Leia! The princess! In all her glory. With *him*. He looked at her beautiful face, dark eyes full of question and worry, and smiled.

"I love you," he said gently.

Leia gasped and her eyes widened slightly. Solo couldn't believe the ludicrousness of it all. Here, he'd been stewing for gods knew how long for the best way and time to tell her that, and now, somehow, his body had launched it without any planning or forethought on his part. It had just fallen out.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I was waiting for the right time to say that, but it – "

"Now was the right time."

Solo met the gaze that was regarding him intently. Maybe. Maybe it was.

"That's...that's why you're...upset?" There was trepidation in her voice. She thought he was upset because he loved her.

Solo shook his head and cupped her face with one hand. "No. That was..." He stopped and her eyes screamed, *What?*

The thought of never making love to you again, his mind answered. The thought of leaving you, and Jabba making it impossible for me to come back.

"I don't want to leave you," he murmured, thickly.

"Then don't."

"I have to – "

She pulled away from him, out of his embrace, out of his bed, and sat on the edge, turned slightly away from him, her back a creamy-white expanse draped with the dishevelled dark silk of her hair.

Solo sat up. "You know I have to." He started to run his fingers through her hair, brushing it back from her face, but she flinched away from him. "Leia, he'll kill me." She was rigid, not giving an inch. "Or you and *then* me," he added pointedly. Some of the stiffness left her back and he persevered. "I couldn't bear it – "

She looked at him sharply. "And you think I can?"

Solo moved to sit behind her, a leg either side of hers, his body enveloping hers. He slid his arms around her waist and held her. "Leia, Fett nearly killed you on Ord Mantell. If I don't pay off Jabba now, sooner or later one of his thugs will get lucky. And I've seen what Jabba does to employees he's no longer happy with."

"I want to come with you," she started to say, and Solo tightened his grip on her.

"It's too dangerous," he said.

"But – "

"No," he said emphatically. "He'll kill you just to get at me."

"I watched everyone I'd ever loved die when Alderaan was destroyed," Leia said wearily. "I thought nothing could make me feel like that again. I hoped..." She sagged a little. "But the thought of losing you..."

Solo held her tightly and kissed the top of her head, then frowned. "You watched?" He felt her stiffen and wondered why he had never considered such a thing before. Of course Vader would have made her watch. "Oh, Leia," he murmured and kissed the back of her neck. "He made you watch, didn't he?"

"Sometimes," she admitted quietly, "on my bad days...he's all I can see. All I can hear."

Her torture. Solo's insides knotted, as they always did whenever he thought about Leia's suffering at the Dark Lord's hands, and he growled, "Vader?"

She shook her head. "Tarkin."

Solo frowned. He knew, as everyone involved in the killing of the Death Star now knew, that Tarkin had been in charge of the monstrosity. But he hadn't known that Tarkin had interrogated her personally. Leaden nausea settled in his stomach at the contemplation of what that particular Imperial might have done to her. Having had the misfortune to serve under the man briefly, Solo was well aware of the Grand Moff's capabilities.

"I didn't know Tarkin was..." Solo paused to consider his words, "involved in your interrogation."

"When they couldn't get me to 'cooperate' by the usual methods, Tarkin had Vader bring me to the observation room."

Son of a bitch, Solo thought angrily.

"He told me that, unless I told them where the Rebel Base was, he would test the Death Star on Alderaan."

Solo held his breath, suddenly comprehending her grief, the depth of her guilt. The level of torture... The woman's strength was overwhelming.

Leia closed her eyes briefly, but did not look up when she opened them. She swallowed then whispered, "I told them Dantooine. Which wasn't exactly current, but they didn't know that..."

"And they blew it up anyway." The full import of the deception Tarkin had played on her was sinking in.

"Tarkin said that Dantooine was too far away for an effective demonstration."

Solo moaned and loosened his grip on her. So this was what Leia had been carrying around for three years: the conviction that it had been her choice, her *fault*. So guilt-ridden she'd been unable to confide in anyone...

He leaned around to look at her and said sharply, "Leia." She wouldn't look at him and he said again, "*Leia*." Finally she focused on his face and he said, "It wasn't your fault." She looked away, refusing to accept what Solo understood would sound like glib words. But he was not going to let her wear the guilt any

longer. "*Leia*. Leia, look at me." After a moment she complied and he said, "Alderaan was in the Death Star's sights before you'd even set foot on that station. It was a huge thorn in the Emperor's side. As far as he was concerned, *Alderaan* was the Rebel base. Manipulating you with it was an added bonus that might have got them the rest of the rebels. Do you understand? They would have destroyed it anyway."

"He did destroy it anyway."

"Exactly. Leia, Tarkin already had the order to destroy Alderaan; he would not have done it otherwise."

"I know..."

"You know in here," he said tapping her head, "but don't believe it in here." He pointed at her heart. "The fact that you've never told anyone is proof of that."

"Oh, by the way General Dodonna," Leia recited sarcastically, "the reason they destroyed Alderaan is because I wouldn't tell them where the Rebel Base was. Or where the Death Star plans were. But I did get to watch!" She turned her head towards him. "How do you think that would have gone down, Han?"

Solo suddenly remembered the look on her face when General Rieekan had told her that her father and the rest of the Senate had been told she'd been killed in an accident over Tatooine. Shock, sadness and grim acceptance, but for one fleeting moment Solo had seen relief. It had disturbed him enough at the time to file it away for future analysis, and now it was painfully understandable; she'd been relieved to find out that none of them suspected her as the cause of their planet's demise.

"Rieekan would have understood," he said gently.

Leia shook her head emphatically. "I couldn't bear the pity every time he looked at me."

"But to keep something like this to yourself -"

"They know I was forced to watch," Leia admitted. "I had to tell them that much. They just don't know it was because of me."

"Oh, Sweetheart," Solo said caressing her. "It wasn't because of you. It was never about you. If the Death Star plans hadn't passed through your hands, they wouldn't have given you a second glance." He ran kisses along her shoulder. "Tarkin just arranged it so he could get his jollies by causing you as much pain as he could while carrying out his orders."

"Sometimes the pain is unbearable," Leia whispered.

"So bad you want to die," Solo murmured and felt her take a shuddering breath.

"Sometimes," she whispered.

He could hear the tears in her voice and tightened his embrace, felt her arms tighten over his. There was nothing he could do or say that would make her grief any less, and where once before he might have changed the subject or attempted to rile her to get her mind off it, Solo knew that would only belittle what she was feeling. So he remained silent and held her close.

A thought occurred to him and he stiffened slightly, and then tried to conceal it by caressing her. But the jolt of excitement he'd felt had put him on edge and Leia sensed it.

"What?" she asked.

Resigned to her perceptiveness, Solo smiled and rested his nose against her head. "I want to show you something," he said.

Leia took a deep breath, sitting up straighter, then pressed into him. "I thought you just did," she teased, subtly rocking her hips.

A broad grin plastered itself across Solo's face and his manhood twitched. He leaned around to look at Leia, delighted with her double entendre, and was even more delighted to find her blushing. She wiped hastily at the tears on her cheeks and returned his smile.

"Something *else*," Solo said.

Leia removed her hands from his arms and ran them up his thighs. "There's more?" she asked, then slid one hand between them to caress his manhood. Solo inhaled sharply through his nose and hollowed his stomach a little to give her better access.

"But I haven't finished looking at this yet," she purred sultrily over her shoulder.

"By all means..." Solo breathed against her cheek, and then closed his eyes to savour the exquisite sensation of her hand caressing him. He shifted his hands to her breasts, kneading gently, and she arched back against him, moaning softly as his attentions forced her nipples erect. "You have no idea how often I've fantasized about this," he murmured.

Leia smiled softly. "This particularly or us in general?" She slid the heel of her hand firmly up and down his erection, as if to punctuate her question, and a low, guttural groan escaped him.

"All of it," he stammered. He slid one hand from her breast to her groin and felt her tremble, and found himself needing to know if the reality had met any of her fantasies.

"What was your favourite part?" he whispered, nuzzling her. When she didn't answer, he paused to look at her.

"The part where you said you loved me," Leia admitted quietly.

A smile touched Solo's lips then vanished as he regarded her passionately. "I love you," he said.

Leia twisted in his arms to face him and kissed him hungrily. She now had both hands between his legs and Solo was seriously wondering if he'd actually died and gone to heaven. He rolled her back into the bed, marvelling as she opened herself to him and he entered her in one swift movement. *Maybe I am dead*, he thought. *We were all killed in the asteroid field and we just don't know it. And we're doomed to spend eternity like this.* Solo opened his eyes and looked at her and decided that eternity wouldn't be long enough.

"I love you," he said, and repeated it over and over as he made love to her. "I love you, Leia."

Afterwards, while he was still lying on top of her and inside her, Leia stroked his head where it lay between her breast and her shoulder, and asked quietly, "What's your favourite part?"

Solo ran soft kisses along her jaw and looked at her. "Watching you come," he said. He smiled as she blushed and glanced away, embarrassed. "Your face gets this incredible, awed, overwhelmed look," he explained. "And knowing it's me doing it to you is the biggest turn-on imaginable."

Her eyes met his and he smiled. For a long moment they simply gazed at each other, awash in the gentle peace that had enveloped them both. Then Han felt himself slide out of her, the gush of warm fluid that followed, and smiled apologetically. "Sorry 'bout the mess."

It seemed to stir the princess from her lethargy. She raised one eyebrow at him and smirked. "No, you're not."

Solo grinned, shifted his hips to one side and rolled, taking her with him, settling them comfortably side-by-side. Leia snuggled into him and he caressed

her lazily. A thought occurred to him and he murmured suggestively into her hair, "Fancy a shower, Princess?"

She turned her face up to look at him. "A real one?"

He nodded. "One hot shower; what can it hurt?" He kissed her forehead. "I think we deserve it, don't you?"

Leia smiled. "Together?"

"Of course," he said huskily, nuzzling her temple.

"Sounds like fun."

As she stepped under the concentrated stream of water, Leia wasn't sure which was more exciting, the sheer physical luxury of a real water shower, or the sheer physical thrill of showering with Han. She closed her eyes and sighed blissfully as the water streamed down through her hair and over her body, taking with it all the aches of muscles learning a new dance, and for a moment decided the shower was the more pleasant of the two. Then Han stepped into the small space with her and she knew she was wrong.

Looking at him, watching the water sluice down his body, Leia thought she'd never seen anything so beautiful. At this proximity, he towered over her and his eyes were the softest green. She watched his chest expand as he filled his lungs, then followed the line to his shoulders and down his arms, then looked up at him, found him watching her.

The small room was filling with steam and taking on an unrealistic feel, and Leia felt vaguely awed and very small all of a sudden.

"You look like a god," she murmured.

A variety of expressions struggled for mastery of Solo's face and she suspected he was fighting an urge to laugh. Leia smiled, looking chagrined at her own foolishness. "I can't believe I said that."

"I can't believe you said that and kept a straight face," he agreed, taking her hands and lacing her fingers with his.

A broad smile broke across the princess' face and was mirrored by the Corellian.

"What sort of god?" he asked huskily.

Leia glanced at his penis then smirked at him. "Fertility god, of course."

Solo grinned, pulling her closer, and Leia found herself wondering what a child of theirs would look like. The thought shocked her. Children of her own had never been a consideration for the young rebel leader, except perhaps as some amorphous possibility in the distant future. And while the thought of falling pregnant to Han had been terrifying, there was a small part of her that found the idea thrilling. Which disturbed her.

"Of course, I'm very glad you're *not* fertile," she added, more to cement her own feelings than to reassure Han that she had no desire to make him a father.

"Of course," he agreed, running his hands over her body, then teased, "Although the scoundrel part of me kinda likes the idea of getting you back to base pregnant."

Leia glared at him for a moment then quipped, "Marking your territory, Han?"

Solo laughed.

"There are...simpler ways," she said.

"But none quite as effective," he replied churlishly.

"Or permanent."

"Or permanent," he agreed.

Leia used the excuse of getting her head directly under the water flow to turn her back to him, disturbed to think that Han might want to get her pregnant. She considered asking him if his contraception was up to date, but dismissed the idea. He had told her he was safe; questioning him about it would imply distrust on her part.

She concentrated on getting the water through her hair and felt his hands in her hair, trailing the water the entire length then back to her scalp without a word. Leia closed her eyes to savour the sensation. It had been years since anyone other than herself had washed her hair. Not since Alderaan... Leia winced, struggling against the feeling of desolation, refused to let it ruin her enjoyment of Han's ministrations. She had been so tempted to cut it all off back then...

She heard a soft click and stepped out from under the water to see him pouring soap into his palm. He smiled and started massaging it into her scalp.

"Are you sore?" he asked quietly.

Leia was so thoroughly enjoying his ministrations on her scalp that it took a moment for her to figure out what he was talking about. She shook her head. "No." Then, unsure, asked, "Should I be?"

"It's... not uncommon."

Leia frowned uncertainly, wondering if she was abnormal and what the fact that she *wasn't* sore suggested. Would Han think that maybe she was more experienced than she was letting on? Almost as soon as she'd thought it, Leia dismissed the notion as unworthy of Han. Of course he believed her, nor would he care if he hadn't been her first. No, it was a testimony to Han that she wasn't sore, testimony to his skill and her desire.

His hands had shifted to spreading the soap all over her body and she leaned into him, running her hands up his thighs. The feel of his wet skin against hers, his fingers sliding deliciously across her muscles, was re-igniting the fires of passion in her and she lifted her hand to his neck.

His lips found her temple, nibbled on the edge of her ear, and Leia encouraged him, sliding her fingers through his wet hair and pulling him closer.

The water was cascading heat over both of them, and Leia watched as it made trails of the soap, washing it from her hair and body, collecting and eddying around his ever-moving hands, now on her breasts, now on her hips and thighs. She gasped as one slid smoothly between her legs, shuddered as his fingers found her most sensitive spot and worried at it. Inflamed with a desire for orgasm, Leia clutched at Han, then abruptly turned to face him.

"Your turn," she said to his look of confusion. "But you'll have to kneel down so I can reach your head properly."

Solo chuckled and knelt before her as she reached behind him to fill her palm with soap. "Is this how you treat all your servants, Princess? Demand them to kneel before you?"

Leia smirked and started massaging the soap into his hair. "Only the ones I sleep with."

"And how many is that?" he asked guilelessly, his hands tracing lazily up and down the backs of her legs.

"Actually," she whispered conspiratorially into his ear, "you're my first, and if my father finds out..."

She could see Solo was focused on the breasts dangling tantalisingly in front of him and waited for her words to sink in.

"What?" he asked distractedly, cupping his hands under them, catching the water as it trickled off her nipples. Leia noticed movement below his waist and glanced down. He was only semi-erect, due, she suspected, to the fact that they'd already done it three times.

"If he catches you, he'll castrate you."

Solo looked up at her sharply and Leia could sense his shock at the thought of such a violent act from a supposedly non-violent world. "Was that Alderaanian custom?"

Leia shook her head and struggled not to laugh. "It got your attention though," she said, pushing the soap away from his face as the water rinsed it out of his hair.

Solo grinned and pulled her hard against him, buried his face between her breasts. "I assure you, Sweetheart, you have my undivided attention."

"I'm not so sure," she said, casting a pointed glance at his penis. "It looks worn out."

Solo's affront was instant. "Worn out?" He lurched to his feet and Leia couldn't help laughing at his outrage. "Worn out?" She backed up against the plasteel wall of the shower cubicle as he pressed himself against her and she gasped at how cold it felt on her back. "I'll show you worn out!" he growled.

Leia laughed, pushing hair and water out of her eyes. Despite his protests to the contrary, she knew the appendage pressed hard against her belly was not as turgid as it could be.

"Worn out," she insisted defiantly, then shrieked as her feet left the floor.

He lifted her until their hips were level, then once again pressed up hard against her, using the weight of his body to hold her in place. Leia's arms automatically went round his neck, to stop herself from falling in case he took it into his head to suddenly let her go.

His hands gripped her buttocks as he pushed himself into her then growled into her ear, "Does that feel worn out to you, Sweetheart?"

Leia closed her eyes and buried her face in his neck, momentarily overwhelmed by the stimulation of him pumping into her, then stammered, "I was teasing..."

"I know," he growled between thrusts. "But you made it a matter of honour."

"Remind me never to question your virility again," Leia groaned. The pleasure was sharp but intermittent; the angle wasn't quite right and the stress of holding herself up too distracting to let herself relax enough to really enjoy it. Fortunately, Han did not seem intent on pursuing things. Point made, he let himself slide out of her and returned her to her feet.

Her legs were like jelly and she clung to him.

"You all right?" he asked.

Leia nodded and met his gaze. "Why did you stop?" She suspected he'd sensed her borderline discomfort but he grinned and said, "Saving myself for later."

Leia smirked, cupped him gently with one hand, and said huskily, "I'll look forward to it."

There was a muffled roar from outside the 'fresher and the door *swooshed* open. Leia shrieked and hid behind Han, while he glared through the transparent shower door at the irate Wookiee who was yelling at him about the amount of water they were using and how much it would stress the recycling unit.

"*Chewie!*" Solo protested, but the Wookiee hadn't finished. He roared at his Corellian friend, gesturing wildly, his language flowing too fast for the princess to follow.

He must have said something unflattering because Solo suddenly looked thoroughly incensed. "Get out!" the Corellian hollered and the Wookiee barked threateningly. "It was *one* shower!" Solo protested loudly but Leia had understood enough to know that the Wookiee was upset about the time they'd spent in there. She reached past Han and turned the shower off.

"There," Solo snapped. "It's off! Happy?" The Wookiee barked an affirmative and shut the door.

Solo turned to her, his expression apologetic. "It's all right," Leia assured him. "I understand." She ran her hands over his chest, watching her fingers trail through the damp hairs on his chest, then smiled up at him. "It was nice."

"Nice," Solo muttered with amused irritation. He chuckled and hit the switch that activated the dryers.

Leia closed her eyes as the warm air swirled around them inside the shower cubicle, buffeting them gently and lifting her hair. She pulled her hair forward, over her shoulder, and twisted it into a containable rope, allowing the warm air to dry her back. Then she lifted it and held it on top of her head, letting the air circulate under her arms and around her neck. She felt Solo's hands drift up her either side of her body, then along the underside of her arms, and opened her eyes. His touch had raised gooseflesh on her skin. Leia let go of her hair and transferred her hands to his neck, rising up on the balls of her feet to meet his lips in a kiss that was sweetly erotic.

The 'fresher door *swooshed* open again and Chewbacca barked at them but this time didn't come in.

Solo rolled his eyes and yelled back, "All right! I'm coming!"

That earned him a smart-mouthed comment from the Wookiee, who shut the door before Solo had time to reply. Leia smiled at him and they stepped out of the shower stall.

There was enough room in the 'fresher, between the shower, the head, and the door, for one human to stand comfortably. Two was a definite squeeze, and it was impossible for them not to bump into each other. Solo waited until Leia had the sheet she'd worn to the 'fresher wrapped around herself, then opened the door.

"Be with you in a minute," he told her and headed off towards the main hold. Leia watched him go, amused at the sight of him walking through his ship completely naked. She suspected it was something he did regularly. When he wasn't carrying passengers. Grinning, Leia turned and made her way to the bunkroom, the sheet sweeping the deck behind her.

She decided to wear her own corset-like undershirt instead of one of Han's. The garment was figure-hugging and would emphasise her breasts in a way that she was sure Han would find irresistible. Teamed with her own underpants and Han's trousers... Leia grinned and looked at herself in the small mirror on the inside of the cupboard door. She had a nice figure, despite her short stature. And, unlike most women on the thin side of slim, her breasts were quite full. In the three years since Alderaan's destruction, she had become a master at dressing herself down, at hiding a figure that might distract the males of her species from listening to her instructions or, in the case of the Alliance hierarchy, ideas and opinions.

Solo had commented more than once about her hiding her figure, had even offered to buy her a dress on Ord Mantell... But she had refused, citing extravagance but actually terrified of the reasons behind his offer. Terrified by the fact that she *liked* his attention and *wanted* to dress like a woman for him, instead of a Rebel Leader.

Now that she knew he loved her, none of those worries were of concern to her any more. Now she could dress like a woman for Han without fear of ridicule or loss of respect.

Leia turned to face the door as it opened, smiling at his state of undress as he entered the room. Solo grinned, his eyes sweeping over her as he took in what she was wearing.

"Nice," he said, moving to a drawer and pulling out some underpants for himself. He pulled them on and Leia found herself appreciating the way they fitted snugly over his hips. The soft material emphasised the smooth roundness of his buttocks, the musculature at the top of his thighs and the bulge in between.

He had stopped dressing and Leia looked at his face to find him grinning at her.

"Like what you see, Princess?"

Leia nodded and admitted, using the word that was swiftly becoming a private joke between them. "Nice."

Solo laughed appreciatively and pulled on his pants.

"Is Chewie very cross?" she asked, separating the wet strands of her hair with her fingers.

Solo shook his head. "Nah. He just needs my expertise."

Leia sat on the bunk to pull on her socks and boots and smirked as she said suggestively, "Don't we all?"

Solo grinned at her then reached into the cupboard and pulled out a shirt. He shrugged it on over his head, and then sauntered over to her as he tucked it into the top of his pants. "Admitting it at last?" he crowed smugly.

Leia settled her foot into her boot and gave him her full attention. Finally she nodded and said softly, "Maybe you need me a little bit too?"

Solo's expression changed dramatically, all humour vanishing from his face. He squatted in front of her, resting his hands on her knees and bringing his eyes to her level.

"So much it terrifies me," he said quietly.

Leia reached out and touched his face, whispered, "I love you." Words she had wanted to say for so long. Too afraid for fear of losing him, even when he had said the words himself. *Everything I touch, everything I love dies*. The fear still gripped her, but her need to say the words, and his need to hear her say them, was greater.

There was a heartfelt look in Solo's eyes as he replied gently, "I know."

His reply struck Leia as funny and she laughed. Solo grinned and asked, "Hungry?"

"Starving!" she said, and they moved together towards the galley.

"What do you fancy?" Solo was standing at an open cupboard in the small galley, studying the choice of breakfast foods before him. He glanced over his shoulder at her and grinned. "Apart from me, of course."

Leia let him have that one and smiled. "Something light," she said. "Fruit?"

Solo frowned at the cupboard then opened the chiller unit and peered in. A moment later he crowed, "Aha!" and pulled out two purple cone-fruit.

"Ooh, yum," Leia agreed, and grabbed two plates.

Conefruit were adored galaxy-wide by humans, but by few other beings, which was why the Wookiee had not yet devoured them. Humans, it seemed, were the only species with the patience (although Chewbacca would have called it stupidity) and dexterity required to get to the sweet flesh hidden beneath sharp prickles and a thick layer of bark-like petals. The petals were a rich purple in colour while the edible flesh inside was a soft pink. They could not be attempted with anything other than fingers, and there was no delicate way to eat them. Among royalty, they were reserved for times of strict privacy. Almost every fertile planet had some sort of industry in the sweet, nutritious fruit, and had done for so long now that the cone-fruit's planet of origin was long forgotten.

Solo placed one on each plate before turning to get them each a glass of water while the princess carried the plates out to the holotable. She sat and studied her fruit for the best point of entry. Avoiding a thorn, Leia wriggled her finger down the inside edge of a petal, then pulled it back with a definitive *crack*. She had just started prying a second one off when Solo joined her. He settled into the acceleration couch beside her and immediately set to work on his own fruit.

Leia snapped off a second petal, then a third. The newly broken inner flesh flooded the space left by the petals with juice and Leia leaned in to suck it out. She broke off another petal and sucked at the inner fruit again, stopping it from running onto her plate. Solo, too, was snapping and slurping and she grinned at him over her fruit.

"Nothing like one of these to pull everyone down to the same level," Solo opined.

Leia couldn't disagree, though it irritated her to think he might be about to have a go at her about her royalty.

"My mother used to say that about childbirth," she said.

Solo snorted into his fruit. "Can't comment about *that* one," he said.

Leia smiled and snapped off another petal. "Neither can I."

"But *one* day, Princess..."

The melodramatic tone of doom in Solo's warning pulled Leia's nose out of her fruit and she frowned at him. For the second time he had made her wonder about the validity of his contraception.

"You *were* telling the truth, weren't you?"

Solo looked up at her, startled. "'bout what?"

Leia looked at her fruit for a moment then back at Han. "About the contraception," she murmured quietly.

Solo wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and nodded seriously. "Why?"

Leia smiled weakly. "Just making sure you're not about to carry out your threat of getting me back to base pregnant."

Solo shook his head, chuckling. "Last thing I want to do is tie either of us down with something of that magnitude!"

Leia forced herself to smile and said, "Good." But she couldn't help wondering how long it would be before Han felt trapped, despite his declarations of loving her. The thought that he could one day leave her almost brought tears to her eyes. How would she ever go on without him?

"Hey," he said, and Leia buried her nose in her fruit so she wouldn't have to look at him. "I remember the first time I saw you eat one of these."

Leia snapped off another two petals and sucked noisily at her fruit before attempting to bite into it.

"One of the most erotic things I ever saw," he said.

Leia paused halfway through her bite, her teeth still in her fruit, and her eyes slid sideways to look at him. Solo smiled and she sensed embarrassment in his admission.

"It wasn't just me, either. Luke looked like he was gonna burst at any minute."

Leia bit into her fruit and barely tasted the sweet pulp as it slid over her tongue and down her throat. The idea of Luke having erotic feelings towards her...*Don't think about it*, she told herself tightly. *You've always known he had feelings for you, just don't think about it!*

She swallowed and looked sadly at her fruit. "I'll never be able to eat one of these in public again."

Solo smirked. "I tried to charge admission last time, but Luke wouldn't let me." Leia looked at him, speechless. "Would've made a small fortune, too."

She shook her head. "I don't want to know."

Chewie stepped into the hold and growled at Solo.

"Just let me finish this and I'll be right with you," the Corellian assured him.

Chewbacca pulled a distasteful face at what they were eating and muttered something derogatory about it.

"Hey!" Solo said. "Do I bitch about your diet?"

[All the time!]

Leia looked at Solo in surprised delight and was about to tell him that she'd understood the Wookiee when Chewbacca took a step closer to them and sniffed disdainfully.

[You both reek!] he barked, then stalked out of the hold.

"Did he just say we smelled?" Leia asked sharply.

"He said we *reeked*," Solo corrected her.

"Because of the fruit?"

Solo smiled. "No, not because of the fruit." He leaned closer to her and said conspiratorially, "Because of the sex."

"But we just got out of the shower!" Leia said defensively.

"He's a Wookiee," Solo reminded her. "Very acute sense of smell." He smiled at her embarrassment and reassured her. "Don't worry, he'll get over it."

Leia decided her safest option was to change the subject. "What do you want me to do while you're helping Chewie?"

Solo bit into his fruit then wiped the pulp from his lips while he chewed and swallowed. "Chewie sorted those boards you were working on while we were..." He grinned. "...busy. You could give those a go?"

Leia nodded and turned her attention back to her fruit.

Solo finished ahead of her and they could both hear Chewie's curses from the crawlspace near the ramp becoming more colourful. Solo threw her an apologetic look.

"I better go," he said.

Leia nodded and hastily wiped her mouth. "Go." She waved a negative at him as he started to pick up his plate. "Leave that; I'll take care of it."

"You sure?"

"Go," she insisted.

Solo leaned in and kissed her and she could taste the cone-fruit on his lips and tongue. They both lingered, enjoying the kiss, then Chewie swore again and Solo reluctantly pulled away.

"More later," was Solo's husky promise, and Leia smiled.

She watched him head down the starboard corridor, enjoying the play of muscles under the fabric of his clothes and reviewing the recent view she'd had

of him walking down the corridor naked. *He really is magnificent*, she thought smugly, and busied herself finishing her fruit.

Her time in the aft hold seemed to go agonisingly slowly. It was a blessing that Leia really didn't have to think too hard about what she was doing, just find the broken microthreads and reattach them, because all she could think about was Han. Han naked, his body entwined with hers. Inside hers. Who'd have thought it would feel so good?

Her body ached to hold him, to be held by him. Just the sound of his voice as he bantered with the Wookiee filled her with desire. How had she denied this for so long? *Why* had she denied this for so long? When giving in to what they both wanted was such exquisite bliss? She felt like they had to make up for lost time. *Squandered* time. And working on the *Falcon* was just squandering more.

Forty days had seemed like forever. Like a prison sentence with her very soul at risk. Now there were only twenty-eight days left and Leia felt as if they were already on borrowed time.

Anything could happen to them before they got to Bespin. Stuck in sub-space as they were, they were sitting ducks for any opportunistic pirates who might stumble across them, not to mention Imperials. And, as for after Bespin... the Rebellion hung like a sword over her head. The thought of going back to her life as a Rebel leader and carrying on as though nothing had changed... of saying goodbye to Han as he left to face Jabba the Hutt alone and pretending she wasn't affected – thoughts like those were crippling.

Leia sighed and corrected another break, wishing the rest of the galaxy would just go away and leave them alone.

Solo stepped into the aft hold and was struck by the similarity of the scene before him to that of just over a week ago. The brilliant light of the microfuser throwing the shape of the princess into sharp relief. The difference this time being that he was allowed to act on his desire to touch her.

He waited until she had finished with the 'fuser and was leaning over the board examining her work, then stepped up behind her and ran his hands sensually around her waist. Leia caught her breath, removed the goggles she was wearing and leaned into him.

"Hey," he murmured, feasting on the soft flesh of her neck, dimly noting that she had plaited her hair.

"Hey," she agreed huskily.

"Miss me?"

"You have no idea."

Solo smiled and Leia turned to face him. There was a brief moment of mutual joy and anticipation, and then they were kissing hungrily.

"Chewie's fixing lunch..." Solo mumbled.

"Mm hm," Leia acknowledged and ran her hand firmly across the front of his trousers.

Solo sighed, revelling in her touch, then took her hand and retreated with her to the bunkroom. They were undressing each other before the door had closed.

"Tell me what you're thinking," he mumbled into her neck.

"I stopped thinking as soon as you touched me," she stammered.

That made him smile. "Liar," he assured her, "you never stop."

"You've left me incapable of rational thought," she croaked, and then gasped as his hands encompassed her breasts and he took his mouth to her nipples.

The hours apart had intensified their lust for each other to the point where neither could wait, and their bodies joined in frenzied passion. Solo knew for certain that he had never felt anything like it. Lovemaking with Leia, so intricately woven with emotion, was something he knew he would never be able to describe to anyone. He could barely comprehend it himself.

He heard her whimper and looked at her, sensing she was about to climax. Her eyes were shut tight and her bottom lip was caught between her teeth. Her hair was spilling across the pillows and Solo felt a sense of unreality settle over him. *Leia*, he thought, unable to arrange his thoughts into anything resembling cohesive order, let alone put words together. *Leia*.

As if she had heard him, Leia opened her eyes and gazed wordlessly into his. A gaze that seemed to draw him in even deeper. A gaze that spoke nothing but love and complete trust. Overwhelmed by the depth of feeling between them, Solo felt his body fall into rhythm with hers without any conscious direction on his part. Spiralling towards culmination until orgasm gripped him, casting him helplessly into her body as she climaxed beneath him, drawing him in even further. Drawing him in until he seemed to fuse with her, body and soul.



For a long moment he seemed to wallow within her, unable to define where she ended and he began. Then the feeling faded, diffusing gently while each of them caught their breath.

Solo regarded the girl beneath him with awe, and

found her looking just as stunned. He tried to speak but the words wouldn't come. Finally he cleared his throat and stammered, "Did...did you feel – ?"

Leia nodded.

"What was – ?"

"I could feel you." Leia's eyes searched his. "Like I was you... Like we were – "

"One."

Leia nodded and Solo tried to wrap his brain around a concept he had always considered mythical. Was that what he had just experienced? The edges had definitely blurred there for a moment. For more than a moment. Several heartbeats at least. Several heartbeats in which he had been unable to distinguish his own being from hers. Several heartbeats in which he had seemed to swim in her consciousness, had felt her being as his own, seen her desires, her dreams, and knew she had seen and felt as much of him.

It should have terrified him, but the only emotion he could honestly identify was joy. Unbridled, unparalleled joy. Solo gazed at her for a long moment, unable to put into words what he was feeling.

Leia found them for him. "I love you," she whispered.

Overcome, he kissed her, letting himself drown in sensations and feelings he had denied for too long. And wondered how he could have ever contemplated not loving her.

Chewbacca gave them a knowing look as they joined him at the holotable for lunch. Leia did her best to ignore him, but Solo grinned broadly and smugly.

After lunch Solo took her to the lower gun turret, promising to show her something. Leia suspected that "something" would culminate in sex but humoured him, more than happy to play along while they both had the freedom to do so.

Solo settled into the seat while Leia squeezed in beside it, keeping one hand on Solo until she became acclimated to the change in gravity. He activated the board and concentrated on bringing something in particular online, answering her questions with a smug "wait and see."

"Got this about eight years ago," he said finally. "A 'client' I did a job for ended up being unable to pay...fobbed this off on me instead. I didn't want it – was ready to shoot him I was so angry, but Chewie took a fancy to it. I couldn't think of anything more useless at the time and refused to help him connect it up. But Chewie did it and spent hours playing with it. I've used it a few times since and it's actually quite interesting."

The small tactical screen came to life and Leia leaned closer to see it properly. "What is it?"

A maelstrom of stars came into focus as Solo adjusted it and he said, "A telescope."

Leia frowned. "A what?"

"A telescope. An old-fashioned, electronically enhanced telescope."

Leia was amazed. "Sub-light?"

"Uh huh." Solo fine-tuned the focus and a single sun filled the screen. It was a standard yellow sun, like millions of others in the galaxy. He shifted the focus slightly and zoomed in on a blue-green planet orbiting the yellow sun. The atmosphere was awash with white clouds, and artificial satellites and space traffic could be seen as tiny specks moving around it.

Leia gave a choked gasp as she recognised the planet and gripped his arm hard. Solo pulled her, trembling, into his lap and whispered apologetically, "That's the biggest magnification I can get."

"Oh, goddess," Leia stammered. She reached out and touched the small screen. "Alderaan...."

"Looking back almost a thousand years," Solo said quietly.

"Start of the Republic," Leia murmured, tracing the outline of a major landmass with her finger. She understood that it was their distance from the planet that allowed her to see it thus, that the light reflected from Alderaan a thousand years ago was only reaching the Anoat system now. But it looked so close, as if she could fly there herself. If only she could warn them somehow... But a subspace message to Alderaan would take a thousand years to get there, and a standard hyperspace message would find nothing but asteroids, the remains of a destroyed planet.

She couldn't stop the tears, didn't even try. Just wept softly while Solo simply held her.

She was very subdued for the rest of the day and, when they finally went to bed, there was a poignancy to their lovemaking. Leia, for her part, found herself considering their past. The friends and relatives to whom she would never be able to introduce Han – the people he would never meet. Would he be proud or ashamed of her? She suspected Solo would ask the same question of her.

Leia had to admit to a level of awkwardness when it came to considering the general reaction to two so socially different people trying to make a match. But that was only in the real universe. Here, where there was only Han and herself,

none of that false imagery mattered and Leia found herself wishing they didn't have to go back. For a moment she span a little fantasy in which they deliberately lost themselves somewhere on the Rim. Let both the Alliance and Empire think they had been killed. Hadn't she suffered enough already? Given enough for her cause? Her childhood, her youth, her family, her entire planet...Would she have to sacrifice Han too?

Leia tightened her grip on his sleeping form and vowed she would never give him up.

She was in her cell on the Death Star and that confused her. Vader had tortured her here, but Luke and Han had rescued her, had destroyed the Death Star... Why was she here?

The door opened and Vader stepped down into her cell. Leia cringed. *I'm dreaming*, she told herself. *This happened a long time ago. I can wake up.* Vader grabbed her by the upper arm and dragged her from the cell. Taking her to watch Tarkin destroy her homeworld.

She could hear someone screaming as she traversed the corridor to the observation room. Screaming under torture. A man. *That's different*, she thought, wincing as his wails became desperate. *He wasn't there last time.*

Tarkin turned towards her as she entered, obscuring her view of Alderaan, and with a shock she realised her father was standing beside him. Bargaining for her release? He looked far from happy. She opened her mouth to call to him, but he turned away to look at the screaming man. Leia followed his gaze and felt her heart lodge in her throat.

It was Han.

Han screaming in agony on a scan grid. Beside him stood the bounty hunter from Ord Mantell and, as she watched, Han's scream faded as he lapsed into unconsciousness. Unconsciousness or death. The bounty hunter turned to Vader, affront evident in his body language despite the Mandelorian armour he wore.

Vader waved his hand dismissively and said, "The Empire will compensate you if he dies."

Leia took a step towards Han and was immediately jerked back. She turned angrily, shocked to find not the Dark Lord but her father pulling her away from Han.

"Wasn't Alderaan enough for you?" he asked accusingly.

"Proceed with the operation," she heard Tarkin say.

"No," she murmured. She had lived through this scenario too many times now. Fighting was useless. Alderaan was doomed, and nothing she said or did would make any difference. Her father was regarding her with a mixture of pity and condemnation while, behind him, Alderaan blossomed into a cataclysm of fire and rubble.

Leia moved to Han, slumped against the straps of the scan grid. Intimately acquainted with the sort of pain the device could provide, Leia gently lifted his head, her fingers lovingly caressing the features she had come to know so well.

Han opened his eyes and she was surprised to see that they were blue, not green. Leia frowned and looked at his face again, realising with shock that it was Luke, not Han.

"Where's Han?" she demanded. She looked around the room at the Imperials, her father, and lastly at the bounty hunter. "What did you do to Han?"

"Leia," Luke croaked and she frowned at him. There were abrasions on his face that hadn't been there a moment ago. "Do you think your mother would have approved?" he asked in Bail Organa's voice.

Leia took a step back. Approved of what? Han? She looked convulsively at her father and found him muttering conspiratorially with Vader. They both looked at her and shook their heads.

"Silly girl," Tarkin said vindictively. "Don't you remember? You killed him." Leia started to shake her head and Tarkin twisted the knife. "Just like Alderaan." Leia gasped and backed away. Tarkin smiled cruelly. "I really must speak to the Emperor about you. You have a higher kill count than me."

Leia was whimpering. Writhing against him and whimpering. *Bad dream*, Solo thought and pulled her into his arms. He murmured reassurances into her ear and for a moment it seemed to help. She quietened and relaxed.

He had dozed off again when she started screaming. Confused and sleep befuddled, he tried to hold her but she threw herself from him and fell out of the bunk. He looked over the edge of the bed at her. Leia was sobbing inconsolably.

"Leia?" Solo threw back the covers and swung his legs out of the bed, and then leaned down to help her as she sat up. She seemed to be awake finally. "Sweetheart?" Leia looked at him and sobbed as he drew her towards him. "Oh, Leia," he soothed, lying down with her in his arms and caressing her head. "It was a dream. Just a dream."

"Han." It was almost a primal grunt.

"Shhh," he insisted. "Shhh."

"I thought I'd killed you," she whispered.

Solo ran a series of kisses around her face. "Was a dream, Sweetheart."

"They were torturing you – "

A fresh wave of sobbing overtook her and Solo rocked her gently. He had a good idea what demons were haunting her and wished there were some way for him to exorcise them for her.

"I'm here, Leia," he crooned. "I'm safe. You're safe."

"Han..." She clutched convulsively at his chest. "Han."

"I know, I know. Shhh."

She was shivering despite the warmth of his body and the bed. The dream had been bad enough to send her into shock. A ripple of hate washed through him, aimed at the monsters who had reduced her to this.

"Shhh," he murmured reassuringly. "Shhh."

Her shivering lessened slowly and her sobbing ebbed to a gentle weeping while Solo held and caressed her, murmuring words of comfort. Finally she fell asleep, but Solo found himself unable to do likewise, haunted by the depth of Leia's trauma. Carrying the guilt of her planet's demise...and so young....

He wondered if he would have coped as well in her position, at her age. At her age he was being court-martialled and thrown out of the Imperial Navy.... Han sighed. And his response to that had been to run away. Just as he had at fourteen when his father had insisted on moving to Coruscant. Even his avoidance of Jabba for the last three years had been a form of running away. Always running from responsibility.

And now he was being offered the chance to run again. Leave to pay Jabba and run from Jabba and the Rebellion at the same time. Make a life for himself and Chewie out on the Rim. But the thought of a day without Leia...

He fantasized about taking her with him, smiled as he considered the formidable team they would make; the rebel princess, the smuggler and the Wookiee. A life on the Rim was an appealing thought; to take Leia as far away from Vader and the Empire as he possibly could. Leia deserved more than a life of smuggling, but was it really any more pointless or wasteful than a life spent at war? Particularly this war. Solo caressed her sleeping form lightly, and knew that if he voiced such an opinion to her, he'd earn himself a royal battle.

But could she expect him to give up his life with Chewie and the *Falcon* any more than he could expect her to give up the Rebellion? What would he do while she played politics? How could he watch her go on missions he knew she might not return from? As if the debacles on Commenor or Ord Mantell hadn't been bad enough, the thought of losing her, of being unable to keep her safe forever, almost crippled him.

Solo kissed the top of her head and she murmured softly in her sleep, snuggled deeper against his chest.

He would watch her leave the same way she would have to watch him leave to pay Jabba, he answered himself. With his heart in his throat until she was home safe. And he would insist on accompanying her whenever and wherever possible. Even if it meant joining her damned Rebellion.

Day12

The first thing Leia became conscious of was Solo's snoring. She couldn't just hear it; she could feel it rumbling deep in his chest. Her head was resting between his shoulder and breast, rising and falling with each breath he took and, despite feeling stiff from sleeping in one position for so long, she was loath to leave the comfort of his embrace.

She could still feel the echoes of her dream, the despair and desolation, and felt completely wrung out. Why had the nightmares come to haunt her here? The *Falcon* had always been such a haven against them. What had changed?

Seeing 'old' Alderaan probably hadn't helped, but she suspected the change had more to do with her emotional involvement with Han. Granting the Corellian physical entrance to her body was one thing. Easy and desirable. Allowing him emotional entrance was something else entirely. Something she appeared to have completely lost control over. Her inability to curb her tears in front of him had embarrassed her, and was indicative of her loss of control. But, despite spending the last three years employing every tactic she could think of to stop herself from falling in love with him, here she was, in his bed, loving him with every fibre of her being.

And not regretting a minute of it.

Instead, she regretted the three years. Yet, knowing Han and herself, wondered if it could have happened any sooner? She had seen the same look in his eyes during their ill-fated mission to Coruscant over two years ago. Had felt the answering pull toward him in herself. And then there was the fiasco of Ord Mantell, the memory of which brought nothing but pain. With the luxury of hindsight, Leia could see that the viciousness of their arguments at the time had been a last-ditch attempt by both of them to negate their overwhelming attraction to each other. But it had been so hurtful. She had truly hated him for a while...

She shifted away from Solo a little so she could look at his face. He stirred and rolled onto his back, and the volume of his snoring increased dramatically. Leia smiled, affectionately amused. And she'd assumed he couldn't be obnoxious in bed?

She gazed at his profile, memorising every line, every curve. His deliciously full lips, slightly parted in sleep, begged to be touched, and she ran a feather-light caress across them. This was met by a sharp intake of breath from Solo and he turned his head fractionally away from her, licking his lips before settling into a regular snoring pattern once more.

She wondered what her father would have thought of her involvement with Han. Would he have been disappointed in her? Leia hoped not. She suspected Bail Organa would have liked the Corellian once he'd got to know him. Bail would have seen through the 'scoundrel' persona just as Rieekan had. Seen through to the loyal heart the 'scoundrel' tried so hard to hide.

Leia ran her fingers through the hairs on his sternum to settle her hand over his heart, enjoying the reassuringly regular *lub-dub* reverberating through his chest. She laid her head against his breast, listening, and absently circled a

nipple with her finger. It distracted her from her train of thought, and she wondered if Han's nipples were as sensitive as her own. Leia tested the one closest to her mouth with her tongue. It hardened at her caress and she smiled. She allowed her hand to travel down his body, enjoying the soft warmth of his skin and, as she explored further, was surprised to find him turgid. Delighted, she wondered, *Even in his sleep?* She gripped him firmly, sensuously, and again he stopped snoring. He was wonderfully firm, and Leia, unwilling to waste it, wondered how he'd feel about her...jumping on.

His breathing changed and she sensed he would wake soon. She propped herself up on one elbow to look at him, could see his eyes moving behind their lids, and wondered what he was dreaming about.

Looking down his body, Leia could see the tented shape of the bedclothes and the movement underneath that was her hand. Wanting to see what she could feel, she kicked the covers off, ignoring the cooler air against her skin.

The sleep had done him good, obviously, because he was spectacular this morning, and it amazed her to think that it was *her* hand caressing him. A week ago she would no more have considered touching him like this than she would have given Vader the plans to the Death Star. Well, she thought honestly, that wasn't entirely true. She had thought about touching Han or, more to the point, about being touched *by* Han, but had been telling herself for three years what a bad idea it would be.

Solo moaned her name in his sleep and Leia grinned, delighted to realise he was dreaming about her.

This was anything *but* a bad idea, she decided. In fact, this was probably one of the best decisions she had made in her life. Sitting up, Leia stroked him wantonly, caressing his entire genital region with both hands. Solo's hips thrust upward in response and for a moment Leia wondered if she should try going down on him. She had seen it done in the few porn holovids she had managed to watch, despite her father's careful censorship of her viewing. It had always seemed ludicrous to her that her father would allow her to see and even witness all sorts of horror and bloodshed, while shielding her from something as basic as human sexuality. So, alone in her apartment as a new senator on Coruscant, Leia had decided to educate herself. She understood implicitly that there was no love involved. That was not the point of the holos. Their point was erotic titillation and, as such, she couldn't help but regard them as basically harmless.

From what she had heard, oral gratification was something men desired above all else, but would she feel comfortable doing it? *Get a grip, Organa*, she told herself. *This is Han! How terrible can it be?*

Taking her courage in one hand and his penis in the other, she leaned over him and tentatively ran her tongue around the business end. It was smooth, warm, and didn't taste repulsive. Encouraged, Leia took the entire head into her mouth and felt Solo jerk beneath her.

She heard him gasp, "Leia!" and looked up at him but did not stop what she was doing with her mouth.

"What are you doing?" he croaked.

Leia paused and tried not to laugh. "What does it look like I'm doing?" Again she took him into her mouth as far as she could, her tongue working the sensitive skin just under the head.

Solo gripped the sheet beneath him and exclaimed, "Gods!"

"Shhh," she admonished. "Lie back and think of Coruscant."

She shifted around to kneel between his legs, never stopping the ministrations of her lips and tongue, lifted her eyes to watch as he all but swooned. She had thought she had power over him before, but here, right now, he was completely helpless beneath her.

Leia felt a rush of love for the man writhing under her ministrations. Grateful beyond words that he had waited for her, persevered, and been the one to teach her these arts. Had seen through her protests and sith-headedness and loved her despite herself.

She tasted salt and paused to examine the object of her attentions, tested the tacky secretion at its tip with her thumb. Solo's head jerked up and he asked hastily, "What's wrong?"

Leia smiled reassuringly. "Nothing," she said, and attacked him more vigorously. Solo all but cried out. Leia sensed he was very close to the edge and, using something she had learned from the pornographic holos, rolled her knuckles across his perineum. Solo jerked and grabbed her head with both hands, pulled her up his body to kiss her passionately. Leia straddled him, groaning past his tongue as he slid into her. For a moment they paused, noses touching, breath mingling.

"I never want this to end," Leia whispered.

"Me either."

"Never want to get to Bepin."

Solo shook his head minutely and agreed, "No."

"Just us, like this, forever."

"Forever," Solo agreed, breathlessly, and they both submerged themselves in passion.

Leia looked across at the hatch as it opened and Solo hurried in. Despite being as naked as she was, he was carrying a box that he set down beside the bed. Leia sat up, cross-legged, and leaned her elbows on her knees.

"Did Chewie see you?" she asked as he sat on the bed. Solo shook his head and she added, "Where was he?"

"Cockpit, I think." He reached into the box, pulled out a flask and handed it to her. "That's where all the noise was coming from."

"Noise?" Leia asked, watching with anticipation as he produced two prepackaged meals and set them on the bed between them. Judging by the aroma he must have heated them, and her stomach rumbled in anticipation.

Solo grinned. "I think he was yelling at Threepio."

"Poor Threepio," Leia said sympathetically, then opened the flask and sniffed at the contents. "What's this?" she asked.

Solo had unloaded several more packages and he looked up at her and smiled. "Remember that drink you liked the other night? During the drinking game?" Leia nodded. "I took the liberty of marking the flask."

He looked so delighted with himself, Leia couldn't help chuckling. She peered into the box. "And the cups are...?"

Solo looked into the box, scowled then smiled apologetically at her. "I forgot the cups." He waggled his eyebrows suggestively at her and asked, "What's a little spit between friends?"

Leia blushed and sniffed at the flask again. Indeed, compared to the amount of bodily fluids they'd been swapping over the last two days, a little spit was nothing.

"Did you bring water?" she asked.

"I did," Solo said, producing it with a flourish. "And I remembered the forks!" he added pointedly producing those from the box as well.

He shifted to sit facing her while she drank from the water flask, crossing his legs in imitation of her, the food between them. She passed him the flask and he took a deep draught before resealing the flask and resting it on the bed. He covered his crotch with the bed-sheet and Leia suspected he had done it more to protect his delicate body parts from the possibility of falling hot food rather than out of a sense of decency.

Solo tore the cover off her meal and did the same with his own. The aroma of scrambled eggs and cured meat filled the small cabin and Leia's stomach rumbled again. Audibly this time. Solo grinned at her and handed her a fork.

"Hungry, Princess?"

"Must be all the exercise," Leia said dryly and scooped a forkful into her mouth.

Solo grinned. "Exercise is good," he said sagely.

"Can't remember ever enjoying it this much, though." She grinned through her mouthful at him and Solo chuckled.

He swallowed, clearing his mouth, and then said, "I gotta admit...you surprised me this morning."

"It was a spur of the moment thing," Leia admitted. She met his eyes, found herself blushing and looked away again. "Seemed like a good idea at the time...."

"It was amazing," he said in a low voice. "*You were amazing.*"

Leia smiled shyly, feeling a flush of delight that she had pleased him so. "You liked it?"

"*Liked it?*" Solo leaned towards her and said firmly, "You're a goddess."

Leia blushed, smiling as she busied herself with her meal. There was a comfortable silence between them as they ate, each watching the other. Thinking about the last twenty hours, and the careful, caring way Solo had initiated her into the ways of lovers, Leia found herself wondering whether his instruction had been similar.

Curious, she asked, "Tell me about your first time?"

Solo considered her request for a moment, and then answered, "It's not what you think; there was no love involved."

Leia wasn't surprised. "Tell me?"

Solo shrugged. "I was fifteen. It was over in thirty seconds." He managed to look embarrassed and smiled awkwardly then busied himself with his meal.

Leia took a swig from the water flask and concentrated on her own meal, feeling a flush of anger towards the father who had abandoned his son to the Coronet streets. No wonder Han had spent so many years hating him.

"Was she older or younger?" she asked.

"Everyone's old on the streets," was the dark reply.

Leia regarded him steadily but he did not meet her gaze. She took another mouthful of her eggs then looked up at him as he said quietly, "Don't even know what her name was."

He took a swig from the alcoholic flask then added dryly, "Gave me my first trip to the clinic, though."

Leia frowned. "Clinic?"

"STD clinic."

Leia had to put her fork down she was so disturbed. The realisation that Han's first experience had resulted in him catching a *disease*...the girl must have been a whore. But then, she reminded herself grimly, most street children were. She found herself suddenly reconsidering the picture she had built of Han's youth. Had he had to sell himself that way?

Leia took a fortifying swallow from the alcoholic flask, looked at him and forced herself to smile. "Should I be worried?" she asked, deliberately trying to lighten the mood.

Solo snorted, taking her comment in the spirit in which it was meant, and said, "Only one thing they couldn't cure."

"What was that?" she asked carefully.

He leaned towards her and rumbled seductively, "Terminal lust."

"Oh," she said, wallowing in his eyes. "Contagious?"

"Very," he assured her.

"So there's a good chance I have it?"

"fraid so."

Leia found herself imagining all sorts of sexual acrobatics with him and couldn't help smiling.

"What?" Han wanted to know.

Leia summoned her gumption and asked, "So, where's the strangest place you've ever done it?"

Solo paused with his fork halfway to his mouth and grinned. "Why?"

"Just wondering."

Solo's fork finished its journey to his mouth and he considered her question while chewing. "Dunno," he said finally. "Can't think of any." He grinned sheepishly and suggested, "Maybe you should ask Chewie; the weirdest ones are probably the ones I was too drunk to remember."

Leia smiled tolerantly and asked, "Have you ever done it in zero-G?"

Solo regarded her with open-mouthed delight. "I've created a monster."

Leia raised an eyebrow and regarded him arrogantly. "Created?" She shook her head. "No." Then smirked. "Unleashed? Maybe.... Or maybe it's that STD you gave me...." She switched back to her original topic. "Have you?"

"No," he admitted. "That's one I never quite managed."

"Let's!" Leia encouraged enthusiastically. She was excited, not just by the prospect of doing it in zero-gravity, but of doing something sexual with Han that would be as much a first for him as it would be for her.

"Bit hard to manage that without Chewie knowing."

"Chewie already knows," she reasoned, then added, "I've always wanted to try it in zero-G."

This time it was Solo's eyebrow that shot up. "Really?"

Leia noticed movement under the bedclothes across his lap and grinned. "Longtime fantasy," she crooned seductively.

She took a swig from the alcoholic flask, watching Solo's face and sensing he was hastily searching for a way to fulfill her desire.

"Turret guns have autonomous G," he said, "but there's not a lot of room."

"Who says we need a lot of room?"

One side of his mouth slid into a smile. "I could warn Chewie."

"And turn Threepio off."

"And turn Threepio off," he agreed.

Leia took another swig from the flask, enjoying the pleasant taste across her tongue and the warm trail it made to her stomach. "When?"

Solo tossed his fork and empty meal container into the box beside the bed and removed the bedclothes from his lap. His manhood looked *more* than eager.

"Finish your eggs; we're going now."

A thrill of excitement shot through Leia and she bolted down the last of her meal while Solo got off the bed and rummaged in a compartment in the bulkhead under the bed. Finding what he was looking for, he waved the small packet triumphantly at her and opened the hatch.

"What is it?" she asked, but he'd already stepped out of the cabin. Leia hastily wrapped the top sheet around herself and followed him into the corridor.

They hurried to the turret well and Solo shooed her up the ladder to the upper guns, fondling her buttocks as he followed her up. Leia squeezed herself to one side of the chair while Solo sat in it and furiously reprogrammed the instrumentation before him.

There was a blip from the internal comlink and Solo held the headset against his ear. Chewie wanting to know what they were up to, Leia guessed.

"Yeah, it's me," Solo replied to the muffled growls she could hear. "Never mind, just leave us alone. Oh, and turn off Threepio, would you?"

Chewie's reply sounded terse, Leia thought, and Solo's expression darkened.

"Fine," he snapped. "But if he so much as shows his head in the gunwell I'll space him!"

Chewbacca barked a response and Solo scowled irritably.

"Get over it," he snapped and switched off the comm. He secured the headset to the side of the chair then turned to Leia and she smiled softly, still holding the sheet closed around her body.

"Not impressed?" she asked.

"Jealous," he said succinctly.

Leia chuckled. "I had no idea Chewie felt that way," she teased.

Solo smiled and the lights dimmed as he shut the turret down. "He's been stuck with Threepio's company for the last two days and he's pissed."

Leia nodded. "Understandable." She felt the gravity lessen, the sensation of blood rushing to her head, and closed her eyes until her body had acclimated. Tightened her hold on the chair as her body started to lift. Weightlessness was a sensation Leia honestly enjoyed, and she had not been exaggerating when she'd described it as one of her fantasies.

She opened her eyes and found Solo watching her, his eyes dark with desire for her. He had locked down the instrumentation board, disconnecting the frame that held it to the chair and securing them both to the bulkhead. He then adjusted the chair to its maximum distance from the canopy, giving them as much space as possible and effectively blocking the view into the turret from the ladder.

Leia looked at him lying in the chair, weightlessness lifting him slightly and released her hold on it as well, smiling self-consciously and suppressing a shiver as she cast aside the sheet. It drifted between them and Solo pulled it from the air and shoved it behind the seat where it fell through the line of autonomous gravity and into the ladder space. There, the ship's gravity grabbed it and dropped it into the opposite turret.

Solo took her hands and drew her down to him, running his hands up her arms and into her hair, which swirled around them like a shadowy cloud.

Leia closed her eyes, focusing on the exquisite information being transmitted to her from her skin. Without the usual clutter of tactile sensations against her body to distract her, the feel of his body brushing against hers, his warmth, was intense.

"Han," she whispered. She found he had drifted far enough off the seat for her to be able to stroke his back, and she traced the shifting pattern of muscles down his spine then up his flank. He twisted, wrapping her body around his and setting them into a slow spin.

The turret was dark but for a few lights on the panel and the glow from the ladder cast ghostly reflections of them onto the transparisteel canopy. Leia could dimly see stars through the reflections and it promoted the illusion of being outside. Of floating in space.

"So, Princess," he asked sultrily. "What now?"

"I don't know." She smiled, tracing the shifting shadows on his face with her finger. "What do you suggest?"

"This is *your* fantasy, Sweetheart. Tell me what you want me to do."

Leia felt an intense rush of desire and, despite the accompanying embarrassment, whispered, "Touch me?"

Solo ran a feather-light caress up her body and Leia closed her eyes. It was just as she imagined it might be: no feeling squashed, no hair getting caught under an elbow, and complete freedom of movement, while Solo's fingertips ignited the nerve endings in her skin. But not just his fingers. His hands, his lips, his tongue, all combined to leave her writhing under his touch.

She stretched her arms out over her head, baring the sensitive undersides to him, and shuddered helplessly as he dragged his nails down them in an exquisite torture.

Her hands bumped against the canopy, and she flinched, opening her eyes and breaking the mood. Smiling, Solo turned so she was underneath him and Leia suddenly found herself very aware of how tiny the space they were in was. *Maybe we should've tried this in the aft hold*, she thought. But then they'd have had to shut off the gravity in the entire ship and, knowing their luck and the unpredictability of the *Falcon*, they'd probably not have been able to get it going again.

She returned his smile, watched his attention shift to her breasts, looked at them herself and laughed out loud. Her breasts were floating. Without gravity to press them against her chest, they had lifted, appearing to almost double in size and Solo was entranced. He shunted her upward a fraction, placing her breasts level with his face, and proceeded to nuzzle and knead them covetously.

"You have the softest breasts I have ever felt," he growled.

"Really?" she asked.

Leia was surprised by his claim, but breast augmentation was so common she realised she probably shouldn't be. Most of the women who'd frequented the Alderaanian Court had had some sort of enhancement done. On Coruscant it was almost a prerequisite. Could it be that, despite his extensive experience, Han had never slept with a woman whose breasts had *not* been enhanced? Breast augmentation was not something Leia had ever considered for herself despite its easy availability. She had spent the latter part of her teen years trying

to downplay her breasts, not accentuate them. Princess Leia had wanted men to look at her face, not her chest. To listen to what she was saying.

Leia smiled mentally and wondered if that meant she was more egotistical than the women augmenting their breasts? Maybe.

Solo nodded, softly mouthing her nipples and Leia felt a moment of smugness at chalking up another first. She dismissed it immediately. She wasn't here to compete with Solo's past lovers.

He nuzzled the lower edge of one breast, his cheek brushing her nipple and Leia gasped. Solo paused, concerned, but didn't stop entirely.

"What?" he asked.

"Your beard," Leia explained.

"Too scratchy?"

Leia shook her head. "I like it," she said, then smiled at him as he grinned at her. "Across my nipples..."

Delighted, Solo rubbed his jaw lightly across her nipples and Leia giggled. Solo wrapped one arm around her hips so she couldn't escape and spent a few moments teasing her nipples with his beard. "Tell me everything you like," he said huskily, and circled a nipple with his tongue.

"Everything?" Leia murmured, closing her eyes as he gave in to desire and suckled her.

"Everything," he insisted, sliding the hand he didn't have around her hips down the outside of her thigh and up the inside. "Where you want be touched," he whispered seductively into her ear. "How you want to be touched." Leia opened her legs as he delved between them. "I wanna know all your secrets, Princess."

"I..." she stammered, her concentration broken by the stimulation he was providing between her legs. "I don't know..."

"Is this good?" he asked.

"Oh, yes..."

"And this?" He took his mouth to her nipples again and Leia filled her lungs, expanding her chest to give him more room to explore.

"Yes."

"Which is better?"

Leia answered, "Both," without hesitating, and Solo chuckled. He shifted her and Leia found her head pointing down towards the chair. It was disconcerting so she closed her eyes once more. Closed her mind to everything except what she could feel. His hands and mouth moving over her body.

His mouth worked its way up her inner thigh and Leia groaned with anticipation. Then she felt Han's tongue between her legs and, with a sharp intake of breath, shivered ecstatically.

"This is amazing," she told Solo after a while, running her hands dreamily through her hair. "I can't feel anything but your hands and your tongue..."

Solo lifted his eyes from the task at hand and looked along the body of the girl falling at right angles from him. He sensed she was close to climaxing and intensified his ministrations, effectively rendering her speechless. *All those times I wanted to shut her up*, he thought with wry amusement. *And all I had to do was this*. He slid two fingers inside her and she whimpered, shuddered as he slid them in and out. Then he found the spot on her inner wall and felt her tense. Felt her pelvic muscles clamp down around his fingers and his manhood throb in response, aching to be similarly gripped. The thought of sliding into and being surrounded by her silken warmth was almost irresistible.

Leia threw her arms out suddenly, looking for something to hang on to, and Solo held her hips tightly.

"I've got you," he mumbled against her, and worked his tongue even harder. One of her hands flailed nearby and he wanted to grab it, to help her anchor herself. But he couldn't let go of her hips and there was no way he was going to stop what his right hand was doing. He eased the pressure of his tongue without stopping and felt her hand lock onto his head. Felt her fingers clench and unclench in unconscious imitation of her abdominal muscles. Heard her start panting.

Fall, he willed her. *Let go, sweetheart*. He increased the pressure from his tongue abruptly and Leia gasped. Keening, she fell, and Solo felt her spasm around his fingers. *Yes!* he thought with satisfaction and once again eased the pressure without stopping, bringing her down gently.

They heard music coming from the hold suddenly and Leia lifted her head to look quizzically at Solo.

He had a foolish look on his face as he said, "Chewie."

He watched as understanding struck her suddenly and her expression became one of horror.

"You don't suppose he *heard*?"

Solo started to smile and Leia groaned and covered her face with her hands. Unabashed, he pulled her pelvis down to his and pushed into her, shuddering with sheer bliss as her tight warmth enveloped him.

"Gods, you feel good!" he groaned, suddenly unable to move lest he lose it before they'd even started.

"You too," she agreed, wrapping her legs around his hips and pulling herself up to face him. She kissed along his jaw to nibble on his earlobe.

"*Too good*," Solo added. He was paralysed by the threat of his impending orgasm, and Leia's caresses weren't helping. She wriggled in his lap, blatantly wanting him to start moving inside her. Solo spent a frantic moment trying to focus his brain on hyperspace logarithms and was relieved to feel the impending eruption subside. The moment of clear-headedness helped him remember the small packet he had brought with them to the turret and jammed into the side of the chair. Tumbling them over, he reached down and retrieved it.

"What's that for?" Leia wanted to know.

Solo grinned at her and tore the packet open. "Ever spill a drink in zero-G, sweetheart?" He pulled the condom out of the packet and withdrew from her long enough to slide the sheath over his erection. When he looked back at her she was grinning.

"Oh," she said.

"*Oh* is right," he said and slid back inside her.

"Ohhhh," Leia sighed blissfully and closed her eyes. Buried her face against his neck.

"Imagine trying to catch it all," he growled seductively against her ear and she snickered. "Getting it out of all the nooks and crannies," he added, running his tongue through the inner curls of her ear. "Getting hit in the eye-"

"You're disgusting!" Leia chided him, laughing despite her words.

"Sex is disgusting," he responded sagely, then grinned and added, "But so much fun."

"Mmm!" she agreed then tightened her grip on his shoulders as he started thrusting slowly. "Feels...so...good," she purred.

"Good," Solo agreed passionately. "Every part of you." He shifted his hands from her hips to fondle her breasts momentarily, but quickly moved them back as the lack of traction foiled his thrusting. "Feel good," he said, gripping her hips and thrusting faster. "Smell good, taste good." He kissed her hungrily, thrilled as her tongue moved slickly against his own. "Can't believe how much I want you," he groaned. "I'm *in* you and I want you, can't get enough of you. Can't get close enough."

Leia whimpered and clutched him hard. Opened her mouth in a soundless scream then pressed her teeth against his shoulder in a bite that was primal yet controlled.

"Coming?" he asked softly, feeling the point of no return swiftly approaching in himself.

Leia nodded and begged, "Faster."

Solo was loathe to comply; knowing that would finish him, yet he did. Thrust himself into her hard and fast. Her response was instantaneous and was swiftly followed by his own.

They clung desperately to each other as they spiralled down from their orgasmic high. Breathing heavily, muscles twitching and shuddering as they sought to regain control.

Solo glanced at the fading impression of her teeth on his shoulder then looked at her face. She felt his scrutiny and smiled languorously at him.

"Hey," she said.

"Hey," he responded. "Good?" he asked. Leia nodded and tightened her embrace. Solo smirked and said, "You bit me."



Unrepentant, Leia traced the mark on his shoulder with her finger then leaned over and kissed it. Her movement started him sliding out of her and, remembering the condom, Solo swore as he hastily caught it before it could slide off and create exactly the sort of mess he'd been trying to prevent.

Leia pushed away from him a little, resting a hand on the bulkhead to stop herself from bumping into it, and smiled as she watched him secure the contents inside the thin sheath. He tucked it safely between the cushions of the seat and smiled at her. Leia gleefully launched herself at him and he caught her, laughing joyously as they tumbled together into the opposite bulkhead and bounced off.

Solo put out a hand to stop them before they hit the transparisteel canopy and stilled their momentum, hung with her in the starlight. He cupped her face with both hands, caressed her cheeks with his thumbs, while their eyes communicated the depth of feeling they had for each other. Then he kissed her. Softly, sweetly, savouring the gentleness and pleasant afterglow of the moment.

Day22

Over the next ten days work on the *Falcon* continued, but much of it was done without the supervision of its captain. For Han and Leia, the unscheduled break from the Rebellion, the intense time together, had become precious, as though both sensed their time was short.

Chewbacca, who had been very tolerant about the intermittent help from his partner, was actually very pleased with the development in their relationship. In his mind it was the first normal, *healthy* step either of them had taken in far too long. So he stayed out of their way as much as possible and, where appropriate, grumbled and teased.

He was impressed at the rate Leia was learning his language and wasn't quite sure who was more delighted with her sudden comprehension, himself or the princess. It was almost with chagrin that Chewbacca curbed the more colourful phrases in his vocabulary, yet he could tell that Solo, even as he was translating said colourful phrases, was proud of her.

Personally, he was proud of both of them. The loss of Alderaan and the trauma of dealing with war everyday, of sending soldiers out to die, had emotionally crippled the princess. And the loss of his mother and abandonment by his father at the age of fourteen, not to mention his humiliation and court martial from the Empire, had left the Corellian similarly crippled. Unable to let

anyone close for fear of further rejection or abandonment. Undeterred by the Corellian's constant refusal to accept his life debt, Chewbacca had worked his way in by sheer, unrelenting determination. Somehow Leia had got in by doing just the opposite; yet Chewbacca suspected there had been an attraction between them from the start. Nevertheless, the fact that they had found surcease in each other's arms was nothing short of astonishing.

A shriek of laughter forced its way through the closed hatch of Solo's cabin and a flicker of irritation swept across the Wookiee's face as he glanced in their direction. Yes, he was pleased for them, but this constant mating was getting a little tiresome. Sighing, he thought about his own mate, Mallatobuck, and decided that if all went well with Jabba, he would insist on visiting her afterwards. It had been almost a standard year since his last visit and he felt sure his son had probably grown a good half a meter in that time.

There was more laughter from the cabin and Chewbacca moved over to the tape player and turned up the volume.

Inside the cabin, Han and Leia grinned at each other as they heard the music volume rise. They had been playing for some time now; teasing one another relentlessly, and the Wookiee turning up the volume was like a cue for things to move to the next level.

Leaning over her, Solo whispered into her ear, "Bend over, Sweetheart, we're gonna do this Bothan-style."

Leia's eyes widened momentarily, then she grinned and got onto the bed on her hands and knees. She heard Solo step up behind her, felt him take hold of her hips, then gasped as he plunged into her and pleasure exploded inside her.

Lying on the bed, recuperating, Leia said, "Who'd've thought Bothans could do anything right?"

Solo laughed appreciatively. "That good, huh?"

Leia looked at him and said in a low and serious voice, "It was fucking fantastic."

Solo laughed again then caressed her face as he said, "I'm a bad influence. Taken your purity and given you a foul mouth."

"Not guilty," she assured him. "I knew the words; I just chose not to use them."

"Like I said: bad influence."

"As for taking my *purity*...I remember that being given. Freely. Willingly." Leia grinned and added one more. "Eagerly." She ran her finger across his generous lower lip and teased, "Maybe I'd better stop wearing white."

Solo looked melodramatically shocked. "That'd be a dead giveaway!" he said.

Leia laughed. "And you moving into my cabin won't be?"

"Moving in? Who said anything about moving in?"

Leia immediately recognised the arrogance of her assumption and hastily tried to take back her words.

"Nobody. It was just – I assumed – "

Solo propped his head up on one forearm and gave her a cocky smile. "You want me to move in?"

But Leia was doing a mental panic. *Of all the ridiculous things to say to him, she berated herself. Why don't I just suggest marriage and scare him off good and proper?* And how could she forget Jabba?

"I'm sorry," she said, sitting up and getting out of the bed. "I forgot you were leaving." She couldn't look at him, afraid of the resignation she would see in his eyes. But if she had looked, she would have seen confusion.

Solo sat up. "Leia?"

"I'm sorry," she repeated as she threw on a shirt and hurriedly left the cabin.

"Leia!" she heard him call out after her.

She hurried through the main hold, feeling Chewie's unabashed scrutiny as she passed, and took refuge in the cockpit. Leia wondered whether Solo would follow her and wasn't sure if she wanted him to or not. She was feeling very emotional all of a sudden, and didn't want to start crying in front of him. But the thought of him *leaving*...

Sitting in Chewbacca's large chair, Leia stared at the steadily approaching gas giant, mentally berated herself and hugged her knees to her chest.

In the main hold, Chewbacca considered the princess' flight towards the cockpit and came to the vaguely amused conclusion that she and Han had had a fight. He had no doubts that they would make up, probably in the most tiresomely passionate way possible. But the thought that they could still manage to disagree delighted him for some reason. It bespoke of a healthy relationship.

Solo entered the hold wearing just his trousers and asked, "Where'd she go?"

Chewbacca indicated the cockpit with his head then asked, [You fighting again?] Solo shot him a dagger look and he grinned. [This mean the honeymoon's over?]

Scowling, Solo headed for the cockpit.

Chewbacca chuckled to himself then yelled at the Corellian as an afterthought, [Cause there's still a lot of work to be done here!]

Leia looked up as Solo entered the cockpit. His expression was one of deep concern.

"Hey," he said, a thousand unspoken questions in the word.

"Hey," she returned. She tried to give him a reassuring smile but feared it had turned out a little wan.

Solo slid into the pilot's seat and faced her. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"You didn't," she replied automatically.

That earned her a wry look from Solo and he said sarcastically, "You left 'cause you weren't upset?"

"I left because I made a fool of myself," Leia admitted. "I should never have assumed you'd want to share my cabin."

"Well, it's customary to discuss it first."

"I know, I know." Leia ran a hand through her hair. "Forget I said it."

"Can't," he told her, and Leia couldn't help feeling as though her one moment of carelessness had done their relationship irreparable damage.

"I think I kind of assumed it myself," he continued. "I just hadn't thought about it." He smiled at her. "Maybe I assumed you'd move in with me?"

"On the *Falcon*?" Leia smiled. "A tempting offer, but I'm pretty sure I can get a bigger bed."

Solo looked away and muttered, "'Til they find out who you wanna share it with."

Leia frowned. Did he mean what she thought he meant? That the Rebellion hierarchy would go out of their way to thwart her relationship with Solo?

Solo sensed her disquiet and, seeking to cheer her a little, said, "I could have a bigger bed put in. Have the bunkroom remodelled." He grinned. "At Alliance expense of course."

Leia smiled. "And where do I sleep while you're off freighting?"

"You'll come with me," Solo said. He sounded surprised that she could have thought otherwise.

Leia struggled not to laugh as she said, "Princess Leia, the freighter bum?" And for the second time in half an hour wished she'd never opened her mouth.

Solo's expression was stony as he nodded and said, "You're right."

"Han, I didn't mean – "

"You're right," he assured her. "It's not gonna happen." Leia opened her mouth to disagree but he cut her off. "They're never gonna let you go, and they've got you too well trained to ever *want* to leave."

Leia regarded him with confused shock. "*Leave*?"

"I don't mean leave the Rebellion," he said irritably. "I mean..." He paused for a moment as he searched for the right words to express just what he did mean, then finished lamely, "Leave the leadership." He only missed a beat before he hastily added, "But you can't. It's your life."

"That doesn't mean we can't – "

"Think about it, Leia. How well do you think this'll be received?"

Haughtily Leia opined, "It's not really any of their business."

"It is when it affects the leadership. They've been trying to stop this from happening for years." Leia regarded him with shock and he added, "You have no idea how often I've been warned off you."

Leia opened her mouth to voice her opinion of that claim when she remembered being taken aside at different times by both Mon Mothma and General Dodonna. Each had gone to great pains to delicately point out Solo's unsuitability as a suitor for her. She had been highly affronted each time, claiming to have no regard for Solo in that way. But it seemed that, like the rest of the base, the hierarchy had been able to see what she had refused to acknowledge. That she was in love with the lowborn Corellian.

Solo read the revelation in her face and said quietly, "You too, huh?" He shifted uncomfortably then looked at her sadly. "A princess and a guy like me..." He aimlessly adjusted a reading on the control panel and muttered, "Right."

Without a word, Leia got out of her seat and moved across to him. She swung one leg over his knees and sat straddling him; rested her hands on his bare chest.

"I'm sorry about my royal background," she said. "But I can't change that accident of birth any more than you can change yours. The fact is I love you. And I don't give a damn what *any* of them think." She caressed his face tenderly, leaned in and kissed him softly, then rested her forehead against his and whispered, "And I'm terrified that you won't come back from Jabba." Solo smiled wanly and she sensed in him an inability to lie to her, to promise he'd return. Leia didn't mention her real fear that, after being exposed to the familiarity of his old lifestyle, he wouldn't *want* to come back to her.

She could feel the oppressive presence of the gas giant looming behind her despite its distance, representing the end of her happiness, and voiced her fairy-tale desire. "I wish we never had to go back. Wish we could run away."

Solo smiled softly and caressed her face. "Funny, I was going to suggest the same thing, but thought you'd go ballistic."

Leia looked at him and was about to ask why, but it was self-evident why he would think that. She smiled and asked, "Run away?"

His smile turned awkward. "Hey, I've done it so many times now I'm a professional."

Fear lanced through Leia as she heard the unspoken threat behind his words. He could do it again. Had obviously been considering it. But hadn't suggested it to her because he knew she'd refuse. Did that mean he had decided to stay or go?

"Where would you go?" she asked.

"Depends whether you're with me or not," was the immediate reply.

Leia smiled indulgently. "Full fantasy," she purred. "We run away together."

"The Rim," he said.

"Corporate Sector?"

Solo shook his head and his mouth slid sideways into the smile that Leia had always found irresistible. "Nah, I'd be arrested," he admitted. "Kathol Sector would be good," he said. "It's not far from here, has a lot of Corellian trade, and it's a good healthy distance from Hutt space."

"You've really thought about this, haven't you?" she teased.

"Fantasized," Solo confessed. "You said you wanted the full fantasy."

"I did," she agreed, and then added, "I do."

"You wouldn't be a princess out there," he reminded her.

Leia got off his lap briefly then made herself comfortable on it again, sideways. She leaned into him and he wrapped his arms comfortably around her.

"You have no idea how liberating that would be," she murmured. "To just be *me*..."

"We'd make one hell of a team," he encouraged.

"Yes, we would," she agreed.

"With your diplomatic skills, you'd be able to talk us out of anything."

Leia smiled. "And when those failed, there'd always be your blaster."

"Or Chewie," he reminded her and she chuckled. "We'd be legendary," he said.

Leia sighed and idly caressed his chest, curling the hairs around her fingers.

"What?" he asked, sensing her unspoken inner turmoil.

"...So tempting," she whispered.

"Yeah," he agreed.

Leia turned her head slightly to look at the distant speck of light that was Bespin. Why did she feel such a sense of foreboding about it? It was just another planet. And one on which there was too little natural product for the Empire to take an interest in. They would land, hopefully get help from Han's friend in fixing the ship, and be away. Two days, maximum, and back with the Rebellion a day or two after that.

And then what? Han was right about the Alliance hierarchy; most of them would not approve of her involvement with the Corellian captain and Leia couldn't help wondering how that would affect their relationship. She realised it would make her diplomatic work very difficult as at least half of the Alliance members hated smugglers, while the other half only tolerated them because of their usefulness in the war effort. In their eyes her judgment would be in question, and they would therefore be less likely to consider any of her proposals or ideas.

But was that worth giving up her one chance at happiness for? None of them really cared about her, except as a martyr to forward their cause. And Han *did* make her happy. Despite their constant bickering over the last three years, he had always managed to know how far he could push her. Had always been able to make her laugh despite herself. And the thought of what she might become without him scared her – hard, cold, jaded, married off for political reasons. It seemed ironic that her unrelenting fight for galactic freedom could very well force her to relinquish her personal freedom.

Leia tightened her hold on him and decided that the Alliance would have to accept her relationship with Solo or accept her departure from the official Rebellion. Unable to give up the fight entirely, she would carry on her own personal war against the Empire with the guerrilla-style tactics she had learnt so well. But to the rest of the Galaxy she would be just another freighter bum.

It was an image that was becoming more seductive each time she considered it. No more forced airs, no more holding her tongue when face to face with idiots. The level of freedom astounded her and for the first time she truly understood why Han had never joined the Rebellion.

Leia made the decision then that, despite Solo's protests, she would accompany him to Tatooine. Would in fact increase their odds of survival by bringing Luke along. Assuming Luke was alive of course. He was no Jedi but, despite Solo's lack of faith, Luke definitely possessed some power.

Mind made up and feeling a little better because of it, Leia kissed his cheek and said quietly, "It's my turn to cook dinner."

"Well then!" Solo said with mock gravity. "Get thee to the kitchen, woman!" He pushed her off his lap to press home his point and patted her bottom condescendingly.

Leia shot him a dark look, and then snickered at the expression on his face as he realised she had no pants on and proceeded to grope her. She backed out of reach, grinning. Held up a warning finger and said, "Later."

"I could help," Solo suggested hopefully and Leia laughed. They had attempted cooking together two nights ago, and things had rapidly degenerated to a point where dinner had been abandoned. When they'd finally emerged from their cabin an hour and a half later to continue making the meal, they'd found a very disgruntled Wookiee cooking for himself.

"I don't think Chewie would appreciate it," she reminded him. Unable to resist his intimate smile, she moved back to his side and gave him a lingering kiss on the lips.

As they parted, Solo said, "Did I ever tell you what a turn on it is to see you wearing my clothes?"

Leia smirked, straightened the shirt she was wearing, and sashayed out of the cockpit.

Solo opened his eyes to the sleep shift ambience from the glow panels in the bunkroom and wondered what had woken him. Leia was sound asleep beside him and he couldn't hear any sort of noise from outside the cabin that might have disturbed him. He took a deep breath and rolled onto his back, as much as the space in the bunk would allow, and contemplated getting up to relieve himself. Sleep was not reclaiming him, so he decided it would probably help him settle and worked his way out past the princess, trying to disturb her as little as possible.

"Shh," he assured her sleep-laden query. "Just going to the 'fresher."

He tucked the blankets around her and she settled once more as he opened the cabin door and stepped into the ring corridor. The light seemed bright after the soft lighting in the cabin and he squinted, waiting for his eyes to adjust as he padded silently to the 'fresher, the cold of the deck plates against his feet waking him further.

He emptied his bladder and, while washing his hands, found himself staring at his reflection in the small mirror. The face in the mirror seemed foreign to him. Solo ran his hand thoughtfully across his jaw. His beard was over two weeks old now, a simple testimony to his own laziness, and, despite Leia liking it, he decided it was time for it to go. In his mind, it was adding to the unreality of their situation. That was new Han in the reflection, bearded Han, the one who could tell Leia he loved her. Solo needed to make certain that old Han could do the same.

Half an hour later, and clean-shaven, Solo got himself a drink then walked to the cockpit to reassure himself that all was well before taking himself back to bed.

Threepio greeted him politely, "Hello, Captain Solo."

"Hi Threepio. Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good," he said and retreated before the droid could engage him in conversation.

He opened the bunkroom hatch and was immediately aware of the strong smell of sex in the room. Solo grinned. Chewie was right; they reeked.

In his absence, Leia had stretched out to sprawl across the bunk, arms akimbo and her hair a tangled shadow across the pillows. He smiled fondly and sat beside her, studying her sleeping form. She had the look of a deeply relaxed woman and it occurred to him that no one else had ever seen Leia looking like this. No one. And Solo found himself feeling very privileged. Privileged and honoured that she trusted him so. And unworthy.

Solo found himself thinking about their earlier conversation. About her assumption that he would move in with her on their return. Did he want that kind of commitment?

It was the sort of threat that in the past would have had him racing for the opposite side of the galaxy. But with Leia...

He picked up a swath of her hair and leaned closer to hold it to his nose, enjoying the smell and the soft, cool feel of it against his lips.

The truth was, he couldn't imagine living without her. The threat of being without her was in fact far scarier than the supposed feeling of entrapment. And, he realised, the ludicrous part was he had already been committed to her for the

best part of three years. All this time she had been trying to get him to commit to the Rebellion, and he had done so in everything but name. Because it was *her* he was committed to, not her Rebellion.

He brushed his lips across her temple and whispered, "I love you, Leia." Pleased to find that old Han was as able to say the words as new Han.

There was a soft murmur of reply from the princess, and Solo smiled. He moved in beside her, gently shunting her over, and she rolled over to make room for him without waking.

He snaked an arm around her waist, spooning up behind her, and whispered once more, "Love you, Leia."

Day23

Leia woke to the delicious feeling of Han against her back and smiled, savouring the moment. This, she decided, was what she liked best. The waking up in his arms. It was in these quiet moments where, despite the unconsciousness of sleep, he still held her. How could she not feel cherished? This was where she felt safe, warm, and loved. His knees were behind her knees and an arm was around her waist. She could feel his breath across her cheek and in her hair.

She shifted fractionally, pressing herself even closer, and the arm around her waist tightened in response. She could feel his semi-erect manhood against her back and, knowing he was close to waking, sent up a silent prayer of thanks to the goddess who had blessed human males with morning erections. Solo had explained the phenomenon to her, and Leia had immediately come to the delighted conclusion that her benefactor could only be female.

Smiling, she sighed, enjoying his warmth and tried to quell her anticipation of what was to come. Soon enough he would be inside her, thrusting, pleasuring...no, not soon enough. Leia licked her lips and struggled to stop herself from waking him. She wanted him well rested, *needed* him well rested, and wondered if it was perverse to want to do it all day.

Solo took a deep breath and Leia pressed her buttocks even harder against his groin, writhed against him. The hand around her waist slid up to encompass her breast and she tilted her head back, revelling in the feel of his lips on her ears and in her hair.

"Morning, beautiful," came the warm, sleep-laden rumble of his voice, rolling around inside her, making her tremble.

"Mmm," she concurred, and reached a hand back to caress his face.

She was shocked to find him clean-shaven and turned to look at him over her shoulder.

"Who are you and what'd you do with my nerfherder?" she demanded.

"Nerfherder sent me for the day," he said smugly, then nuzzled her temple. "Said you'd worn him out."

Leia smiled. "Really?" She rolled to face him. "Think you can go the distance?"

"Depends how far you wanna go."

He gazed intently into her eyes and, Leia felt, into her soul.

"All the way," she whispered.

Slowly, obviously savouring the moment as much as she was, Solo brought his lips down on hers and Leia decided that she wanted to spend all day in the cabin. All day in bed with Han. Could there be anything more perfect?

She caressed him as their kisses deepened, pressed her body to his and felt it tingle as his hands ranged across it. She felt wanton beneath his touch. Feral. Han had managed to wake desires in her that she hadn't even known existed, let alone realised dwelled within her.

She tensed as he moved down her body, shuddered ecstatically as he began loving her with his mouth.

Was there a more perfect way to wake up?

Han played her body like a fine instrument. Tuned it until it sang exquisitely under his touch. While she hung, helplessly captive to the music he composed. And, as the symphony reached its crescendo, he was there to gently guide her through the final phrases.

Leia regarded him wordlessly as he moved back up her body, echoes of the theme still rippling through her body. Felt the delicious *pop* as he slid in past her pelvic floor muscle and moaned into his mouth as he started moving within her.

She could taste herself on his tongue, and thoughts of what he had just been doing with that tongue sent flares of the symphony arcing through her body once more. She wanted to tell him she loved him, but the words seemed so

inadequate for what she was feeling. This was so much more than love. This was...

Love. Life. Forever. The words seemed echo in her mind.

Leia opened her eyes and looked into Han's.

Leia.

Orgasm overtook her and she clung to him with her hands and with her mind. Feeling him helpless inside her body as well as her soul was too erotic for words. The first time had been vaguely frightening, which was understandable for two such strong and highly independent personalities. But this time Leia allowed herself to revel in it. Awash in his pleasure and feeling him wallow in hers.

He smiled at her as the sensation slowly faded, cherishing the moment.

"Whatever that is..." he murmured.

"...I never want it to stop," Leia finished, saying the words she had felt in his mind.

He rolled off her and onto his back, breathing heavily. "What a way to wake up," he said, closing his eyes. "Now I just wanna go back to sleep."

Leia smiled and rolled to face him, ran the backs of her fingers along his hairless jaw. "Then sleep," she said.

He opened his eyes to look at her. "Are you okay?" he asked and Leia smiled. It had become a habit for him to make sure she had climaxed.

"You *know* I'm okay," she said.

Solo smiled and pulled her towards him to kiss her forehead. As she settled in beside him, Leia said, "I love you, Han."

"Love you too, Sweetheart," he murmured sleepily.

Can it get any better than this? Leia wondered dreamily. What could be more wonderful than sleeping and making love all day? Leia honestly couldn't remember ever feeling so relaxed or well rested.

He was above her and within her for the third time that day, thrusting harder and faster until speech was no longer possible. Leia held him tightly, sensing his climax and, in his post-orgasmic slump, kissed the top of his head, running her fingers through his hair and enjoying the feel of his exhausted weight on top of hers. *I love you, nerfherder.*

He rolled off her and stared at the overhead bulkhead while he caught his breath. Grinning, Leia moved to lean on his chest and ran her finger affectionately along the scar on his chin. Solo eyed her warily.

"You're feeling...enervated," he said, unable to keep a small level of dread from his voice.

Leia grinned and nodded. It was something they had discovered together; a sexual high without orgasm left Leia hyperactive. .

"Ah – " he started but she *shh*ed him.

"It's all right," she said. "I'm fine. Sleep if you want."

"But what about –?"

"I'm fine," she assured him and kissed his chin. "I'm fine."

Solo closed his eyes, lazily caressing her back as she kissed her way around his face then smiled and looked at her. "Sure you are," he said, not believing a word of it.

"Shh," she said. "Sleep." She grinned. "Sleep and then we can do it again."

Day30

"Do you remember your mother, Han?"

Solo paused, considering his answer. His immediate reaction was to close her out, but he squashed it. Leia wasn't gathering information to use against him; she was genuinely interested. She had spent the morning with Chewie and Threepio, much of the afternoon by herself in the gunwell looking through the telescope at Alderaan, and now sat beside him, handing him tools. Obviously the time spent gazing at Alderaan had left her feeling nostalgic, hence the question.

His reply was noncommittal. "A little."

"Do you remember what she looked like?"

Solo paused at what he was doing to consider her question. "She was tall," he said. "And she had red hair."

"Red?"

He could hear her smile and teased, "You got something against red hair, princess?"

"Gizela's red?" Leia asked, summoning an image of their medic friend in his memory.

Solo smiled and tightened the electronic transfer relay he was working on. "Darker," he said. "Like yours, but redder."

"I got the impression your father loved her a lot," she observed.

Thinking about his father still got Solo's back up, despite the fact that they had parted on better terms following their last meeting. But the thought that the bastard had deigned to discuss his late wife with the Alderaanian princess when they'd met two years ago, yet still wouldn't talk to his sons about her...well, that was just fucking typical.

Solo nodded. "Yeah," he replied, then added bitterly, "Just not enough to save her."

"How did she die?"

Solo stilled. "She...she just didn't come home one day. I don't know what happened to her; Dad wouldn't tell us. She worked for CorSec, so I guess some punk got lucky or something...There was no body. Or if there was Dad wasn't going to let us see it. I got the impression there wasn't one."

"How old were you?"

Solo tried to ignore the pain that always accompanied those memories. "Twelve."

"I was five," she said quietly.

Solo pulled himself out from under the machinery and looked at her. He was aware that her mother, Bail Organa's first wife, had died when Leia was quite young.

"Do you remember her?" he asked.

"Not really. Most of what I remember is from holos I've seen of her since."

"How'd she die?"

"She was doing aide work on Naboo when the Empire annexed it. Father said she was mistaken for a dissident and executed."

"But you don't believe that?"

Leia looked at her hands. "I used to. But when I read up on that conflict...it just didn't ring true. I don't know. It's possible, I guess. But I find it hard to believe she wasn't recognised."

"I remember the night Mom didn't come home," Solo said quietly. "Bren cried all night."

Solo was aware of her intense gaze and studied silence. He could sense her intrigue at the mention of the brother who was four years his junior and had always been a taboo subject. Nor, it seemed, was she about to break the taboo. For fear, he suspected, of a dam in the flow of hitherto unavailable information. Solo met her gaze and managed a half smile.

"I don't think Dad ever got over it," he said.

"Was that why he moved to Coruscant?" she asked.

Solo took a deep breath and admitted, "Dad never had a choice about Coruscant."

"They threatened him?"

"They threatened *us*. Bren and me. That's why I couldn't go. They'd have killed us."

"Just like your mother," Leia said quietly.

Solo held her gaze and nodded. "I think so, yeah. I really thought Dad refused to see it. But now...I think he knew. And the day before we were supposed to leave I took off."

"Your Dad had Imperial connections," Leia pointed out. "He could have found you."

Solo nodded, hearing her unspoken *if he'd wanted to*. "Imperial connections" was an understatement when you were on the staff of the Emperor's personal geneticist. "I know," he said. "I also know he didn't try."

Any other woman might have regarded him with pity and lamented about how much that must have hurt him, but Leia instead quantum leaped to the next supposition. "You think he was protecting you?"

It was a suspicion typical of her character, and Solo couldn't help smiling. "I do now," he said. A distance of almost twenty years had enabled him to see his father's actions from a completely different point of view. "It was one less item of leverage they could use against him. But at the time..." Painful memories of his time on the streets of Coronet rushed back at him and he had to struggle to push them aside. "It was a little different," he muttered.

Leia nodded and he sensed empathy and understanding from her, but no pity, and for that he was grateful. He slipped back under the console and continued working.

"I always wanted a brother," he heard her say. "Never a sister, just a brother."

Solo couldn't help smiling and asked, "Older or younger?"

"Older. I've always seen you and Luke like brothers – "

"What?" Solo pulled his head out from under the console and regarded her with serious consternation. "You see me like a *brother*?"

Leia chuckled and poked his arm as she said, "Not you and *me*, you and *Luke*!"

"Oh..." Relieved, Solo nodded, then smiled sheepishly. "Oh." He considered her appraisal of his relationship with Skywalker and had to admit she was probably right. He did care for the younger man like a brother. He briefly wondered if he saw in Luke the brother he'd lost, but squashed the thought.

"I've always been jealous, I think," she was saying and Solo was incredulous.

"Of me and Luke?" Leia nodded and Solo chuckled. "And Luke's always been jealous of me and you."

Leia smiled, vaguely abashed, and looked at her hands where they rested in her lap.

"Has he *ever* made a move on you?" Solo asked, voicing a curiosity he'd had for a long time.

"No," Leia said, and shook her head. "Luke's not like that. Plus," she added, "I never gave him the opportunity."

Solo chuckled and wondered if she even remembered kissing the young man in the sickbay on Hoth. "What does that say about all the times I made moves on you, Princess?"

"You made moves whether the opportunity was there or not!" Leia said, regarding him fondly.

"And you loved every minute of it," he assured her smugly.

"I did," she admitted. "I did. Well, maybe not *all* of them...but most..."

They smiled knowingly at each other and, thinking about their past history and what it had led to on this trip, Solo's gaze started to smoulder.

Leia chuckled. "Keep looking at me like that and I'm going to insist we go back to bed," she chided.

For a moment, Solo was seriously tempted. Then he growled irritably, "Ah, Chewie'll kill me if I don't get this fixed." He lay down and slid under the console again.

"Tell me about Lando," Leia said, deliberately changing the subject.

"Nothing to tell."

"I'll ask Chewie," she threatened. "*He'll* tell me."

Solo smiled. "You'll ask Chewie anyway." He sensed her frustration and added, "Probably already have."

There was no response from her and he grinned. Then found himself wondering exactly what Chewie *had* told her.

Day35

The gas giant that was Bespin had resolved from a speck of light in the distance into a distinguishable planet and, as he made the calculations for landfall, Solo realised he would be cutting their trip short by almost two days. And wasn't sure how to tell her.

There had been a subtle change in Leia's demeanour over the last week, almost as though she were withdrawing from him. Their imminent arrival at Bespin was haunting her, he could tell, and he suspected she would be anything but pleased about getting there sooner.

She was picking at her food a lot too. Leaving much of it uneaten. A sure sign she was worrying about something.

For Solo, Bespin was an inevitability. Much as he didn't want to go there, they didn't have a choice and, in his mind, it was therefore not worth worrying about. But, he realised with sudden insight, she wasn't just worrying about Bespin, she was doubtless worrying about Jabba as well.

Paying off the Hutt was far more than just a question of honour for Solo. If it had been only his honour at stake, Solo would have been more than happy to forego it. But, Leia's *life* was at stake and he was not prepared to risk that for anything.

Thinking about Leia and all that had transpired between them, Solo found himself wondering just what her view on their relationship was. Did she see them as a couple in the romantic sense of the word? Did *he*? Couple was just one step away from husband and wife. Was that what he wanted? Would Leia? Just because she wanted him to move into her cabin didn't mean she expected him or even *wanted* him to marry her.

Marriage, Solo thought and ran a hand through his hair. *The word should terrify me.* What did terrify him was that it *didn't*. In fact, the thought of spending the rest of his life with Leia, of waking up with her every morning, was...comforting. There was no other way of describing it.

Solo frowned and wondered if he was entirely sane. Was this really *him* thinking like this? For a moment he wondered if he wasn't simply suffering some sort of post-coital insanity, a response to getting laid after not getting any for so long. He tried to remember the last time he'd been with a woman and was shocked to realise it was almost a year ago. The prostitute on Beren 5. And that had been a direct response to a fight he'd had with Leia.

That was when he'd finally realised that what he felt for the stubborn princess wasn't just a passing infatuation or lust. That he was actually falling in love with her. And it had infuriated him to be so emotionally trapped. Yet he hadn't had sex with anyone since.

Solo chuckled, laughing at himself. No wonder the rest of the base had been able to see it.

He sighed and shut down the navicomp screen then headed out of the cockpit to tell Chewbacca about the ETA change.

Sitting alone in the cockpit, staring at Bespin, Leia could just make out the swirling colours of the oxygen-rich atmosphere that made up the top layer of that world. Browns, pinks, deep gold, and large stretches of blue that bled into purples of every description. It was very beautiful – a veritable rainbow planet, and she could imagine that living on it, floating in the clouds as the mining colony they were en route to apparently did, could be quite inspiring. She wondered if the planet's primary product, Tibanna gas, affected the atmospheric colour somehow.

She wished Solo had more data on the colony. For someone who liked to prepare to the nth degree, it felt to Leia as though they were going in blind. Which, in effect, they were. And that left her verging on panic.

She forced herself not to think about it, which was difficult when it was hanging in space in front of her. Tried to think about the Rebellion.

The rendezvous point would be old by now. Gone. She would have to seek out contacts somewhere else to find the Rebel fleet. A time-consuming task in the least, and one she should probably start now. She eyed the navigation display terminal in front of her for a moment then sighed and activated it.

The blue glow reflected off her face as she studied the charts, enlarging the span of their current coordinates to encompass neighbouring systems. Looking at star charts always fascinated her; the galaxy was such a big place. Why the Emperor would want to control *all* of it was beyond her.

Sullust was not too far away, and probably her best bet for contacting a Rebel agent. But it also had a strong Imperial presence, and the *Falcon* was far too hot a property at the moment to go near a planet with Imperial leanings.

For a moment, Leia found herself thinking about the *Falcon* and the number of scrapes it had got them out of. And knew without a doubt that it wouldn't be half the ship it currently was with a different captain or first mate.

Han.

Her thoughts always came back to Han. The lovemaking, the passion of the last twenty-five days, had an almost unreal quality to it. Particularly when she was alone. Just thinking about Han brought out all the chemical responses in her body.

Forcing down the sexual desire those thoughts inspired, Leia concentrated on the star charts again, looking for somewhere with little or loose Imperial control.

She widened her range, and Hutt space leapt out at her. Nal Hutta – there were definitely Rebel operatives there. Or Tatooine.

Leia smiled. The perfect excuse to accompany Solo to Tatooine.

The hatch *whooshed* open and she looked back to find the object of her thoughts and desires leaning against the hatchway. Shirtless. He smiled, moving towards her, and the hatch slid shut behind him.

"Whatcha doin', Sweetheart?"

"Pretending to fly the ship," she teased.

"Uh huh." Solo leaned over her shoulder and peered at the star charts she had displayed. "Where are you taking us?"

"To the stars," she whispered, tantalisingly kissing his throat and successfully distracting him. He was freshly showered and shaven, his throat and jaw deliciously smooth, and he smelled warm and clean. Leia stretched an arm out and switched off the navigation display terminal without taking her attention from Han.

"You smell good," she murmured, trailing kisses along his collarbone and running one hand up his thigh.

Solo smiled then regarded her fondly. "You trying to seduce me, Princess?"

"Mm hm," she mumbled into his neck and ran her hand between his legs. "Is it working?" She slid her hand inside the leg of the loose shorts he was wearing and caressed his erection.

"What d'you think?"

Leia grinned. "I think you'd better do us both a favour and make love to me right now."

"Here?" He sounded surprised.

"Have to erase the memory of all the other girls you've had in here somehow," she teased.

"Actually," Solo said, and sounded surprised himself, "I don't think I've ever had sex in here." Leia regarded him sceptically and he shrugged. "Not that I can remember, anyway...." Leia was struggling not to laugh and he asked defensively, "What?"

"A *virginal* cockpit?" She chuckled wickedly. "Your image is shattered!"

"Does jerking off count?" he asked, half seriously, and Leia laughed.

"No!" she said. He guided her out of the seat and she asked bluntly, "Is that what you were doing the night you spent in here by yourself?"

Solo grinned. "Is that what you *imagined* I was doing?"

"Absolutely," Leia admitted.

"Is that what *you* were doing?" he teased. "Alone in my cabin..." he grinned. "Thinking about *me*."

Leia blushed but responded, "Is that what you imagined I was doing?"

"It crossed my mind," he said, pulling her hard against his body. "Once or twice..."

Leia snickered and tugged at his shorts. "Lock the door," she said.

Solo released her to turn and lock the hatch and, when he turned back to her, Leia was dropping her shirt, *his* shirt, to the deck.

She was standing in the middle of the cockpit, *his* cockpit, naked.

In the dim light, the dark hair hanging loose down her back and the hair between her legs seemed to meld with the sea of stars floating behind her. She was like a dream come to life, the Corellian goddess of the stars come to bless him in his very own ship. She took a step towards him and Solo found himself holding his breath, loathe to shatter the illusion. Her eyes were deep pools, the small lights reflected in them glimmering like distant suns.

"Goddess," he whispered, unthinkingly invoking Alderaan's deity in Leia's mind.

A frown skittered across her face but she chased it away with a smile, moved closer to him and circled his face delicately with one finger.

"Have I told you I love you today?" she asked softly.

"Not in words," he replied, smiling.

"I love you."

"Love you too," he said, still amazed to hear the words from his own lips. He drew her body against his. The top of Leia's head barely reached his shoulder and he smiled as she went up on the balls of her feet to kiss him, then bent a little to meet her halfway.

Sitting astride Han in the pilot's seat, basking in the post-orgasmic glow that was becoming so familiar to her, Leia relaxed onto his chest and rested her forehead against his neck.

It had been an energetic session. They had tried it in every position and place possible in the cockpit. On the console between the pilots' seats, on the seats behind, on the floor, but had finished, finally, with Han sitting in his own seat and Leia straddling him.

Nice. It had been *very* nice.

But, for Leia, this was the most pleasant part. There was a level of selfishness in the quest for orgasm that just wasn't there afterwards, when they could relish the quiet union of their spirits and the peaceful ebb of passion.

Solo was caressing her lightly and she closed her eyes, enjoying it.

Her breasts were aching, a sure sign that her menstrual cycle was due, and part of her wished it would come and be done with it. But that would put a definite cramp in their lovemaking, and she did not want to stop that any sooner than she had to.

For a moment she wondered if she should warn Han that she was premenstrual again but dismissed it. He would realise soon enough and besides, they hadn't fought for nearly three weeks, why should they start now?

Thinking back to the person she'd been three weeks ago, Leia could barely recognise herself. She could never have imagined finding herself *here* when Solo had dragged her onto the *Falcon* on Hoth. Well, maybe imagined, but not for

long. It was a desire she had vowed never to give in to. She winced at the memory of the hurt look on Han's face when she'd told him she did not want to get involved with him, and found herself holding him a little tighter in response, as though that would wipe the hurtful words away.

"What'ya thinking about, Princess?"

He had sensed her unease.

"I'm a different person," she said quietly.

Solo remained silent, waiting for her to explain

"When I think about the person I was when I boarded this ship on Hoth...I can barely recognise myself. I feel like a different person."

He seemed to consider for a while before responding, "I guess, in a way, we both are."

"Does that scare you?" Leia asked.

He was quiet for a long time. Leia was beginning to wonder if he'd thought her question was rhetorical when he finally said, "The whole thing terrifies me." He was running a hand through her hair.

Leia swallowed and voiced her greatest fear, "Do you wish it hadn't happened?"

The question seemed to catch him by surprise and he leaned away from her a little to look at her face. "Do you?" he asked.

Leia sat up, widening the gap between them and feeling vaguely cross that he hadn't answered her question. "No," she answered quietly.

He must have sensed his faux pas because he drew her back into his embrace and held her close.

"I never told anyone I loved them before," he said. "Never *loved* anyone before." He brushed her forehead with his lips. "But I can't *not* say it to you." His voice was low and the expression heartfelt as he said, "I love you, Leia. If the love of a Corellian scoundrel is worth anything to an Alderaanian princess..."

Leia squeezed her eyes shut against the tears that suddenly prickled behind them, and then forced herself to sit up and look him in the eye, letting him see the emotion in hers.

"It's worth more to me than anything, Han," she said, holding his face in both her hands. "*Anything*."

Day37

"No," Solo said carefully, trying not to get angry. "It's too dangerous."

They were in the cockpit again, but this time they were both fully dressed. He had just told her about the adjustment to their estimated time of arrival on Bespin and Leia had responded by telling him of her plan to look for a Rebel operative on Tatooine. Solo knew she was looking for a way to accompany him to Jabba and it infuriated him that she refused to see the danger involved. No, that wasn't true. Leia knew the danger. Particularly the danger he would be in. That was why she wanted to go with him.

"But I have to go there anyway – "

"No, you don't," he said sharply and held up his forefinger to emphasise the point. "You'd have a much better chance of making contact with someone on Sullust."

"We can't take the *Falcon* into Sullust!" she protested, peeved that he would even consider it. "The ship would be impounded and we'd be in Imperial detention centres before we even completed our landing. Not to mention the fact that we'd endanger any operatives the Rebellion has there."

"Leia, I am *not* taking you to Tatooine."

"But – "

Solo's patience broke and he snapped, "Why are you being so sith-headed about this?"

"Because I care!"

"I care, too!" Leia looked away, and Solo got the impression that she didn't believe him. Frustrated, he tried to reason with her. "I know what Jabba's capable of, Leia. I've *seen* what he does with female slaves." Leia opened her mouth to interject but he cut her off, anger and frustration making him voice his greatest

fear. "You want to be stripped naked and paraded around Jabba's court? Handed out as a sex payment to any scum who vaguely pleases Jabba? Because that's what'll happen!"

"If we get caught."

"We'll be walking in the front door!" he exclaimed. Leia stared at the hands in her lap and Solo sighed loudly. He ran a hand through his hair, struggling to control his temper. "I don't want to fight with you, Leia. We haven't fought for nearly three weeks, and – "

"And then what happens?" she snapped suddenly. "You walk in the front door and then what? You give yourself up like some stupid sacrifice?"

"Jabba's a businessman," Solo reasoned. "I've got the money...."

"Yet you still think he's going to kill you!"

"Well, hopefully I'll be able to bargain."

"With what?" An evasive look flickered across Solo's face and realisation struck Leia. She regarded him sadly. "You're going to offer to work for him."

Solo regarded her tightly for a moment, and then looked away. "Maybe."

I've lost him, Leia thought. He'll go back to his old way of life.

"He'll never let you go," she said quietly. "And if you try to leave he'll send the bounty hunters after you again...."

"I can only take this one day at a time, Leia. I *have* to get the bounty hunters off my back. I won't have you at risk – "

"Han, I'm at war with the *Empire*. Every time I go on a mission I wonder if I'll make it back."

"That's your choice."

"Those weren't bounty hunter ships over Hoth, Han. It wasn't bounty hunters that chased us into the asteroid field. How many times have you put your life on the line for me? For the Rebellion?"

"That was different," he growled.

"No it wasn't. Can't I, just once, do the same for you?"

"No!" he replied irrationally and Leia rolled her eyes. He adjusted his voice to a conciliatory tone and promised, "I'll be back, Leia. Have I failed you yet?"

"No," she admitted. "Never."

"Then trust me," he begged her. "I'll be back."

Leia regarded him, feeling sadly resigned, and Solo reached out a hand to her. She hesitated for a moment, then gave him her hand and watched him twine his fingers with hers.

Everything I touch, everything I love dies.

Night 37

Leia couldn't sleep. They had made love of course, but that hadn't helped, and now Solo was snoring beside her and she was stewing alone. All she could think about was their imminent separation. It consumed and depressed her. She had felt nauseated with worry all evening, couldn't even contemplate eating dinner, but Solo had sat there and forced her to eat. It was true she hadn't been eating as much as she usually did, but then she never could when she was worried. And Solo knew that. So why he'd had to pick on her this evening, she didn't know. Maybe he was making sure that she ate a decent meal before they got to Bespin, knowing she would probably eat very little while they were there.

Solo snuffled and rolled onto his other side, turning his back to her, and Leia couldn't help feeling bereft all of a sudden. She rolled over and spooned herself up behind him, slipping her arm around his waist, but it wasn't as satisfying as being cuddled by him. She realised that was a selfish outlook, but she couldn't help being selfish where he was concerned.

She stared at the back of his head, absorbing the different colours in his hair and the tousled way it rested on his pillow. She followed the hairline around his ear to where it tapered down his neck. Traced his spine with her eyes and tried to ignore the fine scar lines across his back, moved to the smooth expanse of his shoulder. Smooth except for the ugly scar left by the removal of his Imperial service tattoo. Ugly because the bastards had refused him bacta treatment after flaying it off him. Her heart ached at the thought of Han being branded like every other Imperial officer. Like an animal. Or slave. And she suspected that Han would have had the tattoo removed had they not insisted on doing it for him.

Leia gingerly touched the scar. Reverently. Her eyes dropped to the fine scars left by his flogging and welled up with tears. *So much pain...and for what?* What was any of it for? What was Alderaan for? What was the Rebellion for?

Leia shut her eyes in attempt to stem the sudden flow of tears, but they squeezed out from under her lids and dripped onto her pillow.

Struggling to suppress her sobs, Leia held him tightly and wondered how she would ever let him go.

Day38

There was no lovemaking the next morning. Solo was out of bed early and on alert with Chewie in the cockpit. They were close enough to Bespin now to be of possible interest to the small amount of traffic it appeared to have, and the last thing they needed was to be attacked.

When he returned to the bunkroom to dress after his shower, Leia sat up and was struck by a wave of nausea from the night before. Cross with herself for being so damned emotional, she forced it down and headed for the 'fresher.

She had a piece of fruit for breakfast, hoping the sugar and simple food value would quell her upset stomach, then joined Solo and Chewie in the cockpit, surprised to find Threepio there as well.

Solo turned and smiled at her as she entered. "Hi, sweetheart."

Leia smiled. He was genuinely pleased to see her. *He* at least wasn't moping around ruining their last few hours together.

"Anything interesting happening out there?" she asked.

"Nope," Solo assured her happily. "It's as boring as the Emperor's sex life out there."

Leia chuckled. "Good to hear." She wished he hadn't mentioned sex because now she couldn't get the image of him in that same chair, orgasming beneath her, out of her head. "How long before we get there?" she asked.

"About five hours," Solo estimated, then added with a smirk, "Long enough to hide all the good stuff and any incriminating evidence."

[Not long enough to get rid of the smell in that bunkroom,] Chewie muttered under his breath, and Leia blushed.

Solo grinned and waggled his eyebrows at her, then turned to face the console again.

The five hours went surprisingly quickly, and with it went Leia's sense of humour. Her mood had steadily worsened through out the day, putting Solo on edge and making it difficult for him to refrain from snapping back at her. He understood that her lack of tolerance was largely due to the fact that he had somehow managed to cut two days off their original ETA, thereby losing them precious time together, but it still didn't make her any easier to live with.

She was wearing her snowsuit and had rebraided her hair into the tight coronet of plaits that she had been wearing at the start of this trip. And it suddenly hit home to Solo that he hadn't seen her looking like that since Hoth. She looked like *Princess* Leia again. Solo managed a wan smile, which she did not return as she followed him wordlessly to the cockpit for their final approach. Threepio and Chewie were already seated and they settled in beside them.

The *Falcon* soared past several of Bespin's many moons and soon the gas giant all but filled the viewport. They watched the planet's terminator pass below them then Solo took them into the atmosphere on the night side of the planet. He followed the curve of the planet at high altitude, killing his ship's speed as they descended slowly. Nevertheless, the shields glowed. Their destination was a point just below the equator and, as they passed the opposite terminator to the one they'd entered over, daylight seemed to blossom all around them. The clouds were glowing pink and orange in a spectacular display.

Solo started trying to contact the city as they passed several mines floating in the clouds and suddenly two, twin-pod cloud cars drew along side. As one hovered beside the cockpit, they could all make out the helmeted human figures seated inside.

Abruptly the *Falcon* bucked as one of the ships opened fire on it and Solo and Chewie both swore. Neither had expected this sort of greeting.

A demand crackled over the intercom and Solo replied sourly, "No, I don't have a landing permit. I'm trying to reach *Lando Calrissian*."

The pod cars fired on the *Falcon* again and Solo barked angrily, "Woah! Wait a minute! Let me explain – " Solo couldn't believe they had survived their long sub-space journey to be picked off or refused landing by Lando.

"You will not deviate from your present course," crackled out at them from the intercom.

"Rather touchy, aren't they?" Threepio observed.

"I thought you said you knew this person?" Leia accused Solo tightly.

Chewbacca growled his opinion and Solo threw him an awkward glance. "Well, that was a long time ago. I'm sure he's forgotten about that..."

Solo couldn't see Leia's look of irritated disdain, but he could feel it. He wanted to tell her everything would be all right, but he wasn't sure of that himself. He certainly hadn't expected Lando's ships to open fire on them.

"Permission granted to land on Platform 327," the voice on the intercom told them, and Solo couldn't hide the tinge of relief in his voice as he replied sarcastically, "*Thank you.*"

Chewie voiced his opinion and that only served to irritate Solo further. Defensively, he turned and told Leia, "There's nothing to worry about." The look on her face told him there was no way she was going to believe that claim and he turned back to concentrate on something he could do right – flying.

"We go way back, Lando and me," he muttered, uncertain whether he was trying to convince Leia or himself.

"Who's worried?" Leia said, sounding every bit as worried as he felt. And then Cloud City itself hove into view.

To be continued in "One Night on Bespin".....☺

end

[Back To Index](#)