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Four Letter Word

by [Birgitt Schuknecht](#)

The air is laden with dust and it's hard to breathe properly, but I refuse to give in to the desire and return into the safe haven the Millennium Falcon represents. There is still the chance some people survived the earthquake. Unlikely, but possible. All my life I fought with nothing else to spur me on but hope. Irrational maybe, but if there's nothing else to rely on it's a good enough reason to go on. So this disaster might be a new challenge but not an unfamiliar one.

Stumbling between the remains of the once beautiful town of Gerath, I follow the tall figure of Han Solo. My eyes sting, and the excuse that it's caused by the dust is a welcome one. But deep inside I know I'm crying. Out of anger. I want to stop and raise my voice against Nature itself. I know, I know, such a reaction would be futile and would get us nowhere. So I swallow the anger and run on, passing the destroyed office buildings of Niniad's capital. There are no people to be found here. Neither dead, nor alive.

We are lucky; today is a public holiday. I doubt it will be in the future.

We reach the area where the residences are located. Screams greet our arrival and I fight the urge to just stop and close my eyes. I've seen death before but not in those numbers and rarely in this form. Fighting against the Empire is different. Most of the time the enemy you face is invisible, hidden in space crafts. And the victims vanish in space, in an eruption of raw energy. Leaving nothing behind but bitter sweet memories and a burning rage in the hearts of the survivors. But this... There are bodies, partly covered by ruins and debris. People still able to walk are bloodied and covered with dirt, their clothes in tatters. And their cries... There are no cries in space.

It's easier to concentrate on the man running in front of me. And to follow him. Suddenly a thought crosses my mind. ___'Damn him, where is he running? Those people here need our help.'___ The second I want to yell at him, to make him stop, he changes direction and runs to a building that is still half erect. I guess I understand. He's looking for survivors inside the residences. And probably goes by his experience and his instincts.

Two men were already trying to get access to said building. Han joins them and finally they seem to make some progress. I restrain myself from getting in their way and look around to find myself another target for my desire to help. A woman sits silently on a pile of rubble, her face pale and full of desperation beneath the dirt. Silent sobs let her body shiver uncontrollably. I unfasten the cloak I'm wearing and wrap it around her. Then I sit down beside her, holding her tightly.

"My baby... he's still inside." Her voice nearly breaks and all I can do is hope. Again.

"He will be all right. They will find him." Diplomatic skills kick in automatically and I know my voice has the right ring to it. Calm and comforting. Replacing despair by confidence.

The three men finally open the door. They have to punch their way through and disappear into the unstable building. I fear for their safety but know that they have to try anyway. Time begins to play games with me and when the two Niniads stumble out of the door, coughing, I cannot tell if it's been a minute or an hour since they went inside.

When I realise that Han is still inside I rise and join the two men, dragging the woman with me. "Where is he?"

"Stupid man. Refused to give up. The way to the sleeping chambers is blocked. We couldn't move the beam one inch. He wriggled under it before we could stop him and a second later the damn thing gave way and the gap closed."

"You left him in there?" My voice is incredibly calm.

"Mylady," the other man continues the report, "we couldn't do anything about it. We have to wait for the rescue teams from Delam. They will bring the equipment." He chokes and coughs again and I realise that the men are beyond their limit. If only the Wookiee were here...

Chewie stayed behind with a nasty cold, much to his chagrin and to Han's even greater amusement, too weak to be up on his feet. Han had a high time with teasing the giant creature by nursing him and feeding him with a broth Corellian style till Chewie gathered the remains of his strength and nearly bellowed him out.

Outside the quarters Han laughed and told me: "It was nice of you to come, your Highnessness, but as you just heard, he isn't too keen on company. Leave him to the medics or..." He made a dramatic pause and goes on, "leave the medics to him." Despite his grin I saw something in his eyes that told me he missed his friend and he readily agreed to come with me to Niniad for a couple of days. If I'd just known about the volatile stability of this planet...

As soon as we - I swallow hard - as soon as we are back I'm going to have a long talk with those incompetent idiots from Rebel Intelligence. Intelligence!

The sudden sound of coughing behind me makes me spin around and I let go of the woman in my arms. I am too stunned to do anything but stand and stare.

Han Solo, dust-covered, his clothes torn. There are cuts and scratches on his face but he grins. This damned, teasing, unnerving grin. I couldn't wish for a more welcome sight at this moment. In his hands he holds the baby, wrapped in a blanket.

The woman gives a shriek and runs to the tall man. She comes to a sudden halt a few paces in front of him, obviously unable to go on. I follow her, fearing she might faint on the spot.

Han's grin turns into a smile and his eyes darken slightly. "Don't you worry. He's a fighter. Bit my hand when I tried to grab him. Impressive, if you take into account he's got only four teeth. I'm lucky. If he had a blaster I'd probably be dead by now."

His words are irrelevant, their meaning totally lost on the woman, but the tone of his voice... The woman takes another step, walking like she is in a dream. Han raises his arms, presenting the boy to his mother.

I stare at the scene. At his hands. How tender and gently he holds the boy. Han's hands are large and strong enough to give the baby a feeling of safety. I have stared at Han's hands before. Working on his beloved Falcon. So dextrous. Killing with a blaster. So dangerous. Squeezing the shoulder of a friend. So comforting. And now... so gentle.

I raise my head and our eyes meet. He winks at me and I feel... caught. As if he could read my thoughts. Every time he gives me that teasing look I am sure he is strong with the Force.

The mother finally manages to close the gap and Han places the child in her outstretched arms. "He is fine. Not a scratch."

The woman only nods and stares at her son. She caresses the little face and the baby laughs in delight.

As if released from a spell I am able to think straight again and - knowing that mother and son are safe now - I make my way to the next building - storing away all my questions about his miracle escape from the ruin and all my anger about Han's ability to push my buttons.

A large, strong hand is placed on my shoulder and turns me around. I want to protest but Han stops me, touching my lips with his index finger.

"No need to yell at me, Leia. I just thought we could go on together." He laughs at my confused expression; for once I am unable to cover my astonishment with diplomatic dignity. His hand takes mine and we run on.

Hope has turned into something... tangible.

Lust I can handle

Love I can fight

Hope I cannot replace

And so he entered my heart

END

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