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## **Hanni We Hardly Knew Ya**

by [Lisa Adolf](#)

"CHEWIE! Get to the ship and fire up the engines 1 NOW!" Han Solo yelled over his shoulder as he fired another round at their pursuers. The wookiee gave a thunderous roar of agreement and increased his speed.

They were still about a block away from the docking bay in which the Millennium Falcon was berthed, and the Imperial troopers chasing them were gaining. Chewbacca was now several hundred yards in advance, his long legs eating up the distance. Ranging behind him and in front of Han were the other members of the fleeing party. Princess Leia Organa followed Chewbacca as closely as the differences in their strides allowed, and on her heels ran the rebel agent they had come to Praaxim to liberate. Closer to Han was Luke Skywalker armed with a high powered blaster. The two of them alternated fire providing cover for the others.

They'd been able to retreat a considerable distance from the Imperial detention center before the alarms had brought dozens of stormtroopers pouring into the streets. Using carefully engineered strategy, Luke, Leia, Han and Chewie had been able to enter the Imperial fortress with surprisingly little trouble. Their time-tested ruse of prisoner transfer had worked more smoothly than they had expected, and they met what resistance there was with little violence. Because the alarms had been sufficiently delayed and their lead was great enough, it appeared that they would make a clean escape from Praaxim, their objective accomplished and, as Luke might have said, the Force with them.

Chewbacca reached the docking bay, activated the entrance doors and dashed inside. Within moments, Leia followed, the rebel agent still close behind her. Luke made no effort to move farther away from Han, but kept taking potshots at

Imperials. Both men paused outside the docking bay, endeavoring to pick off as many of their pursuers as they could before making their final dash to safety.

"Get in there, Luke!" Han yelled as he fired yet another round at the advancing white-clad figures.

"You, too, " Luke replied tersely, without breaking fire or moving any closer to the docking bay doors.

"I said get in there!! I'll be right behind you!" Han fairly screamed out his order, irritated by the younger man's willfulness.

"We'll go together, " Luke replied, unaffected by Han's tone. He gave his friend no time to reply as he continued, "On the count of three. . .one. . . "

Han was about to counter with a well-chosen expletive when a flash of movement to his far right caught his attention.

". . .two. . . "

The movement proved itself to be a stormtrooper, dashing up a back alley. In the fraction of a second that it took Han to see and recognize the Imperial, the same trooper was bringing up his laser rifle to fire. Han had no time for warning. Instead he swung out an arm which caught a startled Luke midchest. The blow sent Luke sprawling backward through the gap in the hanger doors. In the same instant, the stormtrooper fired his rifle. Han dove, knowing that his reflexive action would be too slow to carry him to safety. The bolt of energy passed by him, narrowly missing his body. The hyper-charged energy ball impacted with the docking bay wall, a matter of inches from where Han's body landed. The explosion that followed seemed to rock the entire planet.

Luke had fallen into the bay proper, carried backward and down by the force of Han's shove. He scrambled to his feet in time to both feel and hear the rifle blast's explosion. When Han did not come scrambling into the bay, Luke's blood ran cold. He leaped back through the opening, oblivious to the startled cries of both Leia Organa and the rebel agent.

Han lay just outside the doors, unmoving and seemingly untouched. Luke did not waste time in checking for the whereabouts of the Imperials, but instead grabbed his unconscious friend under the arms and pulled him into the safety of the bay. He was oblivious to the fact that Leia pounced on the door controls, or that Chewie had returned from the ship. As the doors slammed shut, he made a quick check for apparent injuries on his friend's body. Finding none, he immediately bent his head to Han's chest, simultaneously checking for breathing and heartbeat.

He found neither.

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At first he thought the roaring in his ears was the Falcon's engines preparing for take-off. But instead of building up into a high pitched whine, as would be normal, the noise only increased in volume. Then it gradually died away and was replaced by the faint sound of delicate wind chimes — rising and falling as though borne by a gentle wind. His body seemed to be wafting on the same breeze. He felt as though he were floating pleasantly in a pool of warmth. He felt totally at peace, profoundly relaxed.

"Captain Solo, " a voice came to him faintly, like the delicate chimes. It was a pleasant voice and somehow familiar. "Han Solo. . ." It grew louder and somewhat more insistent. ". . .Han. . ."

A silhouette now took shape before him--no, above him. He squinted to improve his vision and after a few moments he could see a face hovering above him.

"Aw, hell, what kinda crazy dream is this? " Han heard himself say in a tone of voice that was plainly exasperated. "You caused me enough grief when you were alive, Kenobi. Why ya still botherin' me now that you're dead? "

The features of Ben Kenobi arranged themselves into a pleasant smile. "Is this a dream, Captain Solo? " his chuckling voice intoned. A hand reached down and offered itself. Han raised himself up on his elbows and eyed the proffered extremity suspiciously.

"Of course it's a dream. I don't believe in ghosts," Han replied succinctly.

"Take my hand. Let me help you up and then tell me whether or not I seem a ghost. "

After a moment of mental debate, Han did so. The hand he clasped felt warm and alive.

"Cute, old man. I don't know what a ghost feels like, seeing as I don't believe in them. " Han, now on his feet, looked Kenobi in the eye.

"Then perhaps I am not a ghost."

Han looked away in exasperation. After a moment he looked the older man in the eye once again.

"Well, whatever you are, I saw you die on the Death Star. Now why don't you go away and let me dream of someone better looking? "

Kenobi chuckled again, and folded his arms across his chest. "Tell me, Captain Solo, are you in the habit of falling asleep in the middle of Imperial attacks? "

"Huh? "

"Think now, what is the last thing you remember? " Kenobi persisted.

"Ah. . .the kid and I were. . .there was fighting. . .we'd just gotten some rebel agent out of jail, the goons were chasing us. . .one of 'em tried to shoot Luke. . . " Han tried to concentrate on suddenly evasive memories.

". . . you pushed Luke to safety, but couldn't quite save yourself. Isn't that right?"

"Hey now. . .I got out of the way in time. As a matter of fact, I probably knocked Luke out of the way savin' myself, " Han replied truculently, yet he broke gazes with Kenobi.

"Then tell me what happened afterward, Han. "

"I. . . I. . .just what the hell do you want from me, anyway? " Han blustered, anger arising. He couldn't remember anything past that, no matter how hard he tried.

"I don't want anything from you, Han. Except perhaps your admission that this might not be a dream. "

Han was taken aback. He fell silent. If this wasn't a dream, the alternative was that he was. . . .

"If this isn't a dream. . .just what the hell is it? " he asked finally and with a hint of uncertainty in his voice.

Kenobi smiled reassuringly and put a hand on Han's arm. "I could call it a fork in the road. I am not familiar enough with pilot jargon to describe it in terms more familiar to you. In any case, this is nothing that should frighten you. "

"You're trying to tell me I'm dead, aren't you, old man?"

"Easy, let's not be so drastic. I did not say you were dead. At this moment in time you are neither dead nor or you alive. You were suspended between both realities. As I said, you are at a crossroads. "

"Why, what's the purpose? Why am I at a crossroads? What am I supposed to do? " Han demanded. Han Solo didn't care for mysteries, at least not unless he was privy to the answers.

"There's nothing you really have to do. I have discovered things often don't happen for readily apparent reasons. It is true everything that happens has its place in the scheme of things but we are not always cognizant of the whys and wherefores. "Why don't you and I take the opportunity to do something we did not do when last we met. Let's talk. "

Han was confused and did not like the sensation. "I never could understand you, Kenobi. Here I'm either dead or I'm not and you want to talk!"

"Perhaps that is why you are here, to talk. You don't talk much about yourself to anyone. If that is the way you wish to think about this situation, let us say that this is what you are required to do before you can advance. You must talk a bit. " Kenobi smiled enigmatically.

"Yeah, well, I ain't a conversationalist. " Han sighed.

"Then let me choose a topic. You are still with the Alliance. "Why? " Kenobi asked.

Han blinked several times. "They need pilots. I'm a pilot for hire, " he replied tersely.

"But surely there are others in the Galaxy who can pay more for your services. The Empire for instance? "

Han laughed, more to cover his shock than out of amusement.

"Me, work for the Empire? That's rich! Hell, I'd sooner take a space walk without a suit. "

"Why? "

"The Empire uses people, bleeds 'em dry and throws 'em away after their usefulness is gone. Sure, they pay a good credit but only as long as they figure they can get a return on their investment. Hell, the Empire and I have been on opposite sides of the fence since I was born. I intend to keep it that way. I may not have much else, but I've got a life to call my own. . . at least I did. "

"The Empire represents oppression for you, as much as the rebels then? "

"Sure. I ain't an idealist. I don't worry about abstracts. I just know how I've been treated and how I figure I should be treated. It's as simple as that. "

"Fair enough. The Alliance treats you right?"

"Right enough. "

"But that's not the only reason you stay, surely."

"What other reason should there be by? "

"We're being honest with one another. Aren't we? " Kenobi asked, eyeing Han levelly.

"Yeah."

"There are more personal reasons, surely. "

"For instance? " Han asked defensively.

"Your action of not more than a few minutes ago--that of pushing Luke to safety at the risk of your own life. Surely that is some sort of indication? "

"I told ya, I didn't push him out of the way, leastways not like you mean. "

"Didn't you? Luke was trying to get you to give up the fight and get to the ship. He was worrying enough about you that he didn't see the stormtrooper preparing to fire at him. You did. You reacted not to save yourself, but rather to save him, " Kenobi said gently.

"No, I tried to save myself. I thought about myself first, " Han repeated, more to convince himself than Kenobi.

"This pretense is very important to you, isn't it? Something like a deflector shield, I would think. You play at being a cynic, pretend to be the perfect mercenary, just so you won't be forced to admit that you have feelings, so you won't have to risk being hurt.

You don't need to be so defensive, Han. I know all about not wanting to be hurt, I also know all about pretenses. I spent twenty years on Tatooine playing at being crazy, didn't I? But then I reached my crossroads and I realized I had to risk again."

"And look what happened to you--you died!"

"Are we back to that again? If you're not alive and not dead, isn't it possible that perhaps I am not dead after all? No. By taking the risk I gained something far greater than life without risk could have ever afforded me. You can't understand that, I know, at least not yet. But trust what I say: risk your emotions as you risk your life, or neither is worth having. "

Han couldn't reply, but only looked at the older man. Why was Kenobi here, talking to him like this? Why had he been the pilot Kenobi had approached to

begin with? What was it he'd been searching for in that Mos Eisley cantina? Surely there'd been enough good pilots within those walls to fly a hundred farm boys to Alderaan and back again. What quirk of fate had seen to it that he'd been the one chosen? Or was it fate — another little something Han had never believed in? Kenobi had another name for it, and so did Luke and Leia. . .the Force.

"Are you trying to prove something to me, Kenobi?"

"Such as? " Kenobi asked, his enigmatic and maddening smile returning.

"The Force?"

"To you, the man who once said: 'there isn't any mystical energy field controlling my destiny'? What would be the point? "

Han opened his mouth as though to make some sort of reply when a new sound caught his attention. It made him forget whatever comment he had been going to make and strain to listen.

"What is that?" he asked suddenly and sharply.

Kenobi shrugged. "I don't hear anything. Sorry."

"But I hear. . ."; Han began.

Han! You can't die. « .do you hear me?

He heard the voice as clearly as though it had originated in the air near his head. But Kenobi seemed sincerely not to have heard it at all. Suddenly, Han recognized the voice. . .it was Leia.

Please, Han, breathe, breathe, damn you, BREATHE! the voice continued, strident with emotion.

C'mon, Han, you can't give up that easy, c'mon, Han. . .A new voice, like an echo to Leia's worked its way into his hearing. He recognized it also. . .Luke.

Suddenly, sensations began flooding into his being. Kenobi's features, smiling their confounded smile, wavered before him. Noises, movements, and pain began to register where peaceful nothingness had existed before. Han began to fall, down, down, into blackness and pain.

The overriding sensation was that of a tremendous weight on his chest, constricting his ability to breathe. Marshalling his strength, he forced his eyes open and at the same time drew in a ragged breath. His vision focussed on Leia, whose face was mere inches above his own. He saw relief and unreserved joy spread across her face. She bent down and cradled his head in her arms gently and brushed his cheek with a kiss of welcome. Han tried to smile up at her.

The constriction was gone from his chest, and Luke was suddenly bending over him, his face very close to Leia's, his feelings expressed plainly by a wide grin. Han realized slowly what had been happening. Luke and Leia had been applying cardio-pulmonary resuscitation in an effort to save his life. The concussion from the blaster explosion had, for all intents and purposes, stopped both his heart and breathing. Han realized for the first time that he was lying on the floor of the docking bay and no longer floating in the pool of warmth.

"How long. . ." Han managed, his voice little more than a rasping whisper.

"Five minutes, Han. . .we worked on you for five minutes." Leia whispered. It had seemed like an eternit

"Got to get out of here, " Han said weakly.

"He's right, " came a third voice, that of the rebel agent. "If they can get a small laser cannon set up, they can cut through this door in a matter of minutes. "

"Okay, now we can go..Chewie!" Luke yelled, and Han saw a furry head float by far above, "get back into the ship; we'll carry him. Get the engines primed."

"I can walk. . ." Han rasped.

"Never mind that, Han; you can't do it by yourself, " Leia said. Hands helped him to stand and an arm reached around his waist. The petite princess was beside him, looking up into his eyes with concern. Another arm joined hers, and Luke offered his shoulders as support. Together they helped him aboard the Falcon. Once on board they guided him to his cabin and placed him on his bunk. It did not even occur to Han to protest that he was not being taken to the cockpit. Both Luke and Leia settled him down, making him lie back against his pillows. Then Luke bent over him.

"Hey, next time forget the heroics. Just give me a yell. I know how to duck!" he whispered. "Thanks, Han. I owe you. . . again. "

The whine of the engines rose in pitch. Giving Han's shoulder a squeeze, Luke sprinted out of the cabin. Han watched him disappear out the doorway. Then he turned his head to look at Leia sitting next to him.



"You'd better strap in. . .Princess, " Han said softly.

Leia looked at him for a long moment. "I'll be fine here. Will you lend me your hand? " She smiled.

Han paused. Damned if he wasn't feeling suddenly lightheaded. He could almost hear Kenobi's voice inside his head again: Risk your emotions as you risk your life or neither is worth having. . . .

He considered a moment, then reached out his hand to Leia. As she took it, he squeezed gently and gave her a broad smile. A wave of exhaustion passed over him and he felt his eyelids grow heavier. He tried to look at Leia for several more moments, forcing his eyes to remain open.

"Rest now, Han. We're going home, " Leia soothed.

"Yeah. . .home. . .I'll do that. . .an' remind me when I wake up. . .to tell you about the strange. . .dream I had. . .Princess."

Leia smiled gently as the eyelids lost their battle and closed. As the Falcon lifted off and shot away from Praaxim, she continued to sit at Solo's side, holding his large hand in both her own.

Han Solo slept deeply and dreamlessly. Somewhere an old man chuckled a satisfied chuckle and smiled a knowing smile.

**end**

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