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## Just Friends

by [Cindy Olsen](#)

### Rated NC17 for adult content

He sat there quietly, leaning up against the hull, blending into the shadows created by the ship's bow mandibles. Six concussion missiles hung above him, nestled in their holding bay, while the freight loading doors protected his back. Elbows resting against bent knees and one hand loosely holding the neck of a small bottle of ale, he appeared comfortably relaxed. Only his eyes betrayed his casual pose – they remained guarded, watchful, predatory.

Han Solo had always loved this particular spot on his ship, above all others, even the cockpit. Sitting at the helm in the pilot's seat, he was the master of the ship, in control yet separate from her. But in this place, sheltering within her embrace, he became a *part* of her; integral to her existence. He had already ensured that when he died, Chewbacca would strap his dead body to the front of this recess and allow the forces of hyperspace to rip his physical being apart, scattering and mixing the atoms of his existence with the *Falcon's* hull and with space itself.

Sitting in the recess between the *Millennium Falcon's* bow mandibles was the perfect place to watch the galaxy. At this moment, it was ideal for watching the sombre memorial service occurring on the far side of the hangar. Solo sneered. Truthfully, it was the perfect place to watch *any* sombre ceremony. The Rebel Alliance seemed to hold so many memorial services, he'd come to think of them all by the title, 'Yet Another Sombre Occasion'. This current 'YASO' was to commemorate the second anniversary of the destruction of Alderaan. In essence, it was also to pay tribute to all who had fallen in the fight against the Empire.

Solo raised the bottle to his lips, enjoying the cool bitterness that slid down his throat. It had been two years since the Death Star had destroyed Alderaan, that absurdly peaceful world. And two years since Solo had gotten mixed up with a crazy old wizard and a Tatooine farm boy. " The old man and Alderaan were long gone now, but the kid, these 'YASOs', and Solo of course, were still here. " At times such as this, Solo often wondered why he remained with the Rebellion, even if it was on an informal basis. " Granted, the pay was good and the work steady. But ceremonies such as this one brought home to him how different Alliance ideology was from his own. " That was, if the belief that the galaxy revolved around Han Solo could be called an 'ideology'. " He knew for sure, though: 'Looking out for Number One' had certainly saved his ass on more occasions than he cared to remember.

Although this was the second memorial service since the destruction of Alderaan, it was the first Solo had witnessed, albeit from a distance and through a sheen of alcohol. Last year he had ensured he was absent from the Rebellion when the ceremony occurred, uncomfortable with the thought of all that outpouring of emotion. As far as he was concerned, it was pointless to dwell on the past. So here he sat, in the embrace of his ship, barely observing as the day progressed. If he had to be here at all, it was going to be on his terms. This way, he didn't have to get dressed up either. " He almost pitied the ranks of soldiers, aircrew and senior officers who were forced to wear their high-necked, formal uniforms. The enormous expanse of camouflaged roofing may have offered protection from the harsh rays of the midday sun. But underneath, a relentless, dry heat blew across the two square kilometres of hangar. " Solo was grateful for the relative coolness of the sleeveless white undershirt he wore.

Solo's first mate, Chewbacca, had been determined not to miss the ceremony this year because of his partner. " Being a spiritual, ritualised race, Wookiees had a profound regard for all living beings and a strong belief in an afterlife. Annoyed that Solo had deliberately missed the previous year's service, particularly after the Wookiee had expressed a desire to be there, this time Chewbacca had insisted upon participating. Chewbacca wished to pay his respect to all who had perished in the destruction of Alderaan. " But Solo suspected his friend also wanted to be there to support the sole survivor of the Royal House of Alderaan and now Rebel leader, Princess Leia Organa.

After a terse exchange of words and growls, the Wookiee had self-righteously stormed off to the ceremony, leaving Solo to nestle himself away with a decipak of Corellian Red Vrelt beer. " Oh well, he'd deal with his disapproving partner later. Chewbacca just didn't seem to understand that life was far too short to spend one second doing something just because it was expected. And Han Solo certainly never did anything people expected him to do; that wasn't his gig.

The beer was light and easy to drink, and he was leaning rather heavily against the *Falcon's* superstructure by the time he slipped his fifth long-necked bottle

from the package and watched the tenth speaker ascend the platform. " This thing was taking forever. " Ten speeches, a slow march past by troops, a chorale recital, and *still* it didn't seem to be winding down. Just as well only twelve rebel squadrons were currently based on this unnamed moon in a system so far out along the Outer Rim, the astrogation charts only listed it as SHF-420713. If any more squadrons and troops had been based here, it would take as long to hold a parade as it would to defeat the Empire. *And that little feat won't happen anytime this millennium*, Solo considered bleakly . He was more glad than ever he'd decided to park himself right here with a few suitable refreshments. By now, had he been forced to attend this 'YASO', he'd be ready to bite someone.

A few more mouthfuls of beer. " A sorrowful rendition of the Alderaani anthem. Then the ranks of soldiers slowly broke their formal alignments and began congregating in casual groupings as the proceedings gave way to informal, personal expressions of remembrance. *Thank you very much, gentles*, Solo thought cynically, swallowing the remains of the beer. *Now perhaps we can get on with living again.*

A gust of hot air ruffled his hair and he picked indifferently at a sliver of leather that had partially torn away from the scuffed toe of his boot. His mind toyed with a few ideas that had recently surfaced again: heading off to Kessel to haul a cache of glitterstim; checking out the scene in the Corporate Sector or Tion Hegemony; making a concerted effort to pay off Jabba so he could be rid of that foul-smelling slug and his two-credit bounty hunters; looking up Lando to see if he was still ticked off with him; swimming naked with Leia under the moonlight of a midsummer Corellian night...

Solo swirled the dregs in the bottom of the bottle and was considering whether he would have another, when he noticed a figure in a white ceremonial gown approaching the ship. Even from a distance of two hundred metres, he knew it was her. " *Leia, the Princess*. Marching down the promenade that separated the ranks of snub fighters. That was the beauty of this particular spot of the *Falcon*; he could see everything, but it would take keen eyes to see anyone hidden in the shadows. He would have recognised that determined, confident walk of hers from any distance. " And from the way she was clasping the elbows of her folded arms, he could tell she was annoyed or angry about something or someone. He surmised *he* was the source of her ire.

His head dropped back against the hull. " Why did it have to be her? " Couldn't she leave him alone, in peace? " He had enough trouble with the way she haunted his dreams and continued to hover in his thoughts when he woke, the touch of her still tingling on his lips. Seeing her in person was becoming sheer agony. That was one of the reasons why he had recently taken to avoiding her. Just the mention of her name was enough to send his mind off-course, careening into fantasies that left him in knots of lust, frustration and regret. To actually be in her presence brought on the undeniable, and uncomfortable, physical evidence

of his desire. Fortunately he had a reputation for discourtesy and arrogance, allowing him to abruptly leave before it became too obvious exactly what was on his mind.

The strange thing was, Solo couldn't work out exactly why he had taken to fantasising about the Alderaani princess. " Over the last few months, the taunts and hostility between them had mellowed into good-natured banter and suggestive teasing. Sharing frequent missions had seen them develop a comfortable relationship; they enjoyed each other's company, and were appreciative of the other's intellect and humour. " Why Solo had to spoil things by drawing sex into the equation was beyond him.

Then it suddenly occurred to him that Leia was coming to see him – actually going out of her way to see him – and it pleased him immensely. Okay, so maybe she *was* angry with him, and would no doubt reprimand him, but didn't the fact that she was coming to see him indicate that he meant something to her?

He shook his head in an attempt to clear it, from the beer and the delusions. *Sure. It indicates you're a pain in the ass. That's what you mean to her.*

The princess drew closer and Solo pushed himself deeper into the shadows. The angle of her approach suggested she was heading for the *Falcon's* boarding ramp.

*Why can't I settle for the nice, quiet type for a change?* style='font-size: 12.0pt; the Corellian wondered. " *Certainly go outta my way to make things difficult for myself.*

But Leia was the 'nice, quiet type' – around other people, anyway. " Luke especially. It used to amuse him to see how closely those two resembled one another in the way they thought and behaved, almost as if they knew what the other was thinking. Lately though, jealousy had tainted his amusement, and he found himself speculating about the extent of the friendship between the Rebel commander and the princess. " Speculating, worrying and obsessing late into the night. And all of this craziness over someone he didn't stand a chance of being anything more than a friend with.

About 30 metres out, Leia craned her head to get a better view of the cockpit. With any luck, she would give up once she saw he was not there. " He held his breath and willed himself to stay still. A scowl pinched lines into her forehead. Solo allowed a small smile across his lips and softly expelled the air from his lungs. " Her head tilted again, this time in his direction. He saw her eyes ignite triumphantly and she plotted a vector straight between the freighter's bow mandibles. Somehow, she'd managed to see him.

Accepting he'd been caught, Solo sighed and shuffled forward on the seat of his pants until his long legs dangled over the edge of the hull. He waited for her to come to a halt immediately beneath him. He liked this position, he decided. Hovering above her. Looking down into her upturned face. With the added benefit of a bird's eye view of her breasts.

Arms folded tightly across her chest, Leia looked up at him. The facetious smile he greeted her with only hardened her frown. It occurred to him that she wouldn't think about chasing after Luke to scold and lecture him. Then he abruptly ignored the thought that Luke's behaviour seldom required correction. " His smile dropped and he openly returned her disdainful glare.

"If you're lookin' for Luke," he growled defensively, "he ain't here."

Leia arched an eyebrow and unfolded her arms. " They both knew exactly where Luke was; proudly leading his squadron on parade.

"I'm looking for you," she told him, her tone cold and flat.

Solo's arms opened wide in an elaborate gesture. "Looks like you found me." He added a token bow to his spread arms. "How may I be of service, Your Highnessness?"

Leia almost flinched. Of all the monikers he assigned her, he knew she loathed that one the most. But he had to admire how well she controlled herself, choosing to ignore the jibe in the hope that her lack of response would annoy him. *Not a chance, sister.*

"Why don't you come down from there so I don't have to shout at you."

Solo almost laughed. "Never stopped you before," he muttered to himself. " "Why don't *you* come up here so you don't have to shout at me." " He was momentarily distracted by an amateur band of jizz-wailers that had just cranked up their instruments. " It was about the most sensible thing that he'd seen all day. Now *that* was the only way to have a party. "We can watch the floor show together," he suggested. He reached behind, grabbed another bottle of beer and flipped the lid. " "*Falcon's* open." He raised the bottle to his mouth. "Use the top hatch."

He didn't think she would take his invitation seriously, preferring instead to leave him to finish his beer in peace. " Her hesitation was barely noticeable, but he saw it. She strode under the cockpit access arm and headed for the ramp. As soon as she was out of sight, Solo scrambled to his feet. " He slung the remainder of the pack of beer onto the *Falcon's* upper hull, and hauled himself up next to it; there was no way he would give up the height advantage he had over her by standing in the recess, beneath her feet.

He combed his fingers through his hair, tried to smooth down the strands that stood up on the crown of his head, and waited for her to appear. " The service lift carried the princess up, and she rose out through the hull of the ship, a vision in white materialising from nowhere. Solo was momentarily transfixed by the breath-taking image that was making her way across to him. *How does she manage to look like that in heat like this?* he wondered. She wore the same gown that she had on Yavin when she presented him and Luke with medals for the destruction of the Death Star. Solo knew she didn't wear it often – only for formal occasions – but he wished she did. It nicely revealed the shape of her waist, her graceful arms and a glimpse of cleavage.

Leia came to a halt directly in front of him, forcing him to refocus a couple of times before he was able to look at her properly. The frown still marred her features and she stared at him intently, yet she remained silent as the anger radiated from her. He took a gulp of the beer in an attempt to centre his thoughts, then decided he'd had enough of her silence.

"What's the problem, sweetheart?"

Leia's lips hardly moved. "You weren't at the service."

The Corellian shrugged his shoulders and sneered dismissively. So, she *did* only want to see him in order to reprimand him. How come his fantasies never matched up with reality? But he had no legitimate response to her accusation. He had blatantly ignored the personal invitation she had extended to himself and Chewbacca to view the ceremony from the VIP platform.

He took another mouthful of beer. " "Chewie was there."

The muscles of her jaw strained with effort. " "It would've been nice if you had attended."

"Nice for who?"

"/ would have liked to see you there."

Solo ignored the quaver in her voice. " "Well / didn't wanna go."

The princess nodded knowingly. " "And just for once, you couldn't have put aside what you wanted and have done something unselfish because a friend asked you to."

Initially, Solo only picked up her description of him. *Friend? She's never called me **that** before. Maybe she thinks I'm a worthwhile friend if she's bothered to see me...* Then he realised exactly what she had said to him.

"Now wait a minute," he growled, loosening a finger from the bottle in order to point it in her face. "Don't try to hang a guilt noose round my neck. I didn't know your 'invitation' was a royal command. You *asked* me to attend and I *told* you I'd think about it. " So I thought about it and decided I'd rather have a few drinks in the shade than get dressed up and hang out with some sweaty generals while a bunch of morons march past." He pursed his lips to the bottle, took another swig, then wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Besides, I ain't a hypocrite. I don't believe in glorifying war and I got no time to dwell on the past."

Leia raised her chin and folded her arms again, gathering her strength around her chest. "You don't let anything get under that thick skin of yours, do you, Han?"

He straightened his tall frame so that he towered above her. "Look, *Princess*." He put as much insolence into her title as possible. "It's a real shame Alderaan got blown up cos the Empire wanted to make a point. But moanin' and cryin' and all the sermons this side of the Inner Core ain't about to bring *it* or anyone back. " As far as I'm concerned, dead is dead. " The sooner you Rebels wake up to that fact, the sooner you'll get your shit together and land a few good hits on the Empire."

His head snapped back as her hand stung across his cheek. The force and fury of the blow was as unexpected as the fire in her eyes. Pure hatred raged at him, a startling contrast to the princess of his dreams. Solo was accustomed to standing against her toe to toe, and he returned her angry stare with as much affront and fervour as she did. However somewhere locked deep within, he considered the wisdom of his words. " He had baited her without thinking, without thought of how fragile the ceremony had left her. The alcohol had helped loosen his tongue, his callousness and his idiocy. He knew he hadn't meant anything he had said; it had just come tumbling out. *Nice work, Solo*, he berated himself. *Sometimes you're a moron*. He considered apologising, but realised he didn't even know how to start taking back such spiteful words. And he wasn't used to admitting when he was wrong.

The rage colouring Leia's face suddenly cooled as she swallowed and shuddered away the knot of emotions bunched across her shoulders. " Hiding his grimace, Solo glanced down at his boots, then looked back up at her from beneath his brows. " Tears glistened in her eyes.

"You wanna drink?" he asked softly.

It was too little, too late. Without another word, the princess turned and left. " Solo stood on the hull of the *Falcon*, watching as she sank down into the ship, then as she headed across the hardstand, away from the remembrance celebrations and towards the Base accommodation units. " He took another drink, but the bitter ale was no longer pleasant. He grimaced, nearly gagging on

the taste as he swallowed. The thin material of his shirt clung to his chest and back, and he could feel the sweat running down his skin.

Deciding he'd had enough of the beer, the heat and the damn YASO, Solo collected the last four bottles and headed back into the air-conditioned comfort of his ship. He slid the beer into the galley's cooling unit and poured the remains of the open bottle down the recycling processor. Feeling a little fuzzy around the edges, he gulped down two beakers of water before retiring to his cabin.

Solo stood just inside the hatchway to his cabin and stripped off his clothes, leaving them in a pile on the deck. He pulled back the covers of his bunk and flopped onto it. " The air in the cabin was cool against his bare skin, but not enough to bring down his body temperature. " His head felt alternately light-headed and stuffy. He shifted uneasily, dropped an arm across his face and tried to ignore the images of Leia streaming through his mind. Images of her under him, opening herself for him, encouraging him to slid inside her. " And then she was above him, riding his body, moaning her way to climax...

He was reaching for the tube of lubricant he kept in a bedside drawer when a sudden, different vision of Leia seemed to fill his every sense. " Dressed in ceremonial white, she stood before him on the hull of the *Falcon*, trying not to cry. Trying not to cry because of what he had said to her. Something clenched inside his gut and he rolled from the bunk.

The water was cold and hard against his skin as he stood in the refresher, hands pressed against the stall walls, head bent down as he leaned his weight forward on his arms. He watched the water spill down his body, washing away the sweat and the heat, but his erection remained defiant. He couldn't believe he was obsessing about Leia, and yet the remorse still welled in his stomach. How could he have said that stuff to her?

Rubbing the liquid cleanser into his skin only seemed to invigorate him further; he couldn't help but imagine it was Leia running her hands over his body. He closed his eyes and vainly tried to douse his desires and his guilt in a combination of calculus and astrophysics. But the intoxication would not let him slip from its grip.

He swiped a hand at the sensor to turn off the flow of water, and pushed himself out of the stall. Dripping wet and naked, he headed back to his cabin and fell back onto his bunk with an angry finality. Rolling over restlessly, he tried to find a position that was comfortable and would allow him to ignore the aching stiffness that jutted from his groin. Nothing seemed to work.

He dressed in fresh clothes and was halfway to Leia's room before it occurred to him exactly what he was doing. Dazed, he came to a halt in the corridor. He'd even collected the four remaining bottles of beer. " A love token? *What the hell*

*am I doing?* he wondered. *Do you think she'll just open the door, let you in and ask you to fuck her?*

He turned around, strode back a few paces then stopped again. " *I need to apologise, he realised. She didn't deserve what I said. She must be feeling like shit. And I was an asshole.* " He spun on his heel, took a step in the direction of her room and stopped. *Don't make a fool of yourself. Stop now. Go back. Jerk off in peace.* " He actually shook his head. " *No. Gotta make things right between us. That's what a friend would do. See her. Check she's all right. Apologise. Then go back and jerk off.* He self-consciously adjusted the front of his trousers, grateful that most of the Base was attending the post-ceremony events. " At least his desires weren't so evident now; his hesitancy had obviously tamed his imagination.

Shaking his head at himself one final time, Solo hiked the beer up under his arm and continued onto Leia's cabin.

*Bastard!*

Leia tossed back the Alliance-issue mug and swallowed most of its contents in one gulp. The wine was rough, cloyingly sweet, and she coughed at the unexpected bitter after-taste. She eyed the metal flask. Solo had given her this wine, at least, that's what he had called it when he had presented her with the flask. A 'gift' for her from his latest freighting run. At the time, she had been surprised at his affectionate gesture, and secretly delighted he had thought to bring her back something personal. Delighted, because he infrequently made any displays of tenderness towards her, and lately it seemed something was not quite right between them.

Leia had noticed that Solo had been distancing himself from her. " Bringing up his shields against the friendship they had been nurturing. She had come to enjoy his companionship and appreciate his dry, sarcastic sense of humour. They worked well as a team, so she had ensured he was frequently contracted to accompany her on her missions. She admired his piloting abilities, and envied the way leadership came to him naturally and effortlessly. At one time they had seemed so close that Leia suspected she felt more for the smuggler than simple friendship. Initially shocked at the depth of her feelings for Solo, she had been attempting to reconcile her emotions when he had suddenly pulled away from her. His attitude towards her had resumed the insolence he'd had when they'd

first met. He went out of his way not to be in the same room with her. And he had roughly refused her offers to accompany him on his latest freighting runs.

This may have been what he wanted, but it wasn't what the princess wanted. She wanted him to like her. Wanted to be in his company; to see his smile quirk up to one side at some remark she might make. " Wanted to ignite the warmth back into the depths of his hazel eyes.

*Bastard!* " This wasn't wine. It tasted more like coolant better suited for that rusting hulk Solo called a ship. Yet she refilled her mug and drank from it again.

Leia tucked her legs up under her and shifted uncomfortably on the too-hard bed. Despite the fact Solo had been ignoring her lately, the princess had thought there was some progression in their relationship. Or, at least, regression to the point they had left it at. Unlike last year, this time he had stayed on Base for the Alderaan commemorative service. He had seemed open and attentive when she had discussed the details with him, and had invited him to view the service as her guest. Admittedly, he hadn't actually *said* he would attend. But then, he hadn't told her that he wouldn't be attending.

When he hadn't appeared at the service, she had been more annoyed than disappointed, and had felt compelled to confront him about his discourteous behaviour. Then he'd said those spiteful, ill-thought words. She knew it had been the alcohol speaking. That and some crazy Solo defence mechanism kicking in. His vicious attack had shattered her more than she had anticipated, and she had retreated to her room, unable to face the idea of taking part in further activities.

Upon returning to her room, Leia had immersed herself in a quick, real water shower. Although the summer months on this moon were relentless, there were plentiful supplies of artesian water so she had not felt guilty at treating herself to a second shower for the day. The ends of her hair now hung damp against the thin, Alliance-issue top she wore, and she had not felt inclined to dress in more than that and her underwear. The cool air caressed her bare arms and legs as she sipped at the wine again.

Her anger with Solo was rapidly depleting, but a tension lingered in her muscles. She should've have known better. Solo was the most unpredictable being she had ever known. She really shouldn't have expected him to attend the ceremony just because she had asked him to. She considered him a friend; perhaps not quite the way she thought of Luke as a friend, but one nonetheless. It was frustrating that he obviously didn't think of her in the same way.

It occurred to Leia that Solo's disregard for her had upset her more than the memorial service. He had made her cry – remembrances for the destruction of her homeworld hadn't. " She pursed her lips and shook her head. " She couldn't work out this relationship with Solo. Not for the first time, she acknowledged that

she found him attractive. *No*, she amended, *he's gorgeous*. Luke was attractive. Half the pilots in Rogue Squadron were attractive. Solo was something else altogether. She could watch him for hours, *had* watched him for hours. Watched him pilot his ship, work on the hyperdrive, argue with her, or just fill out his clothes. Had even watched him watching her. At times like that, she could only wonder what was going on in that lopsided mind of his.

Leia refilled the mug and sipped at it again. The wine wasn't that bad after all. *Either that*, she thought wryly, *or it's killed off my tastebuds. Trust a present from Solo to compromise my taste.*

The entrance chime sounded and she glanced at the door. " Without considering her state of undress, Leia rose to answer it. Solo was standing there, and for a moment she thought she was dreaming, as if her thoughts had materialised him in all his 'gorgeousness'. " He was dressed in similar though not exactly the same clothes as he had been wearing before. His arms and shoulders were bare, toned from manual labour, the muscles and veins shifting as he hefted a pack of beer from one arm to the other. An undershirt scooped across the top of his torso and under his arms, defining the muscles of his chest and revealing a strong neck that rose from his shoulders. Mussed with dampness, his hair hung across his forehead. " His skin had the fresh aroma of water and cleanser. Above it though, Leia could detect the scent that she equated with Han; a musky maleness that made her heart beat faster.

Solo's jaw unhitched at the sight of the princess standing there in her underwear. Initially entranced by his presence, then confused by his unabashed gawp, Leia soon realised *she* had caused this reaction in him. In the two years she had known him, this was the most skin she had ever displayed. If it hadn't been for the wine fortifying her self-confidence, the princess might have flushed with embarrassment and shut the door on him. Instead she watched him openly, haughtily, taking delight in the fact that she had finally found a way to render him speechless.

The smirk playing across her features forced his jaw to re-attach and drew him back to reality. Leia placed a hand on the hatchway, effectively blocking his entrance with her body.

"Can I help you, Captain?"

The Corellian's pulse was racing, but his unspoken response was pure Solo: *I can certainly imagine a few ways you could, sweetheart*. Uncharacteristically, he chose to keep his mouth shut long enough to recall the real reason he was here. He moistened the inside of a suddenly dry mouth.

"I wanted to see if you were all right."

Mimicking the previous facetious words he had said to her from the top of the *Falcon*, she replied, "So you've seen me. I look all right, don't I?" *This is more like it*, she decided. A return to their old pattern of banter.

He looked at her seriously and quietly admitted, "You look better than all right."

*You bet I do, buster!* Leia agreed, her eyes sparkling with glee. *And don't you know it.* " If she had known all it would take was a simple glimpse of flesh to make him agreeable, she might have done this long ago.

She placed a hand on her hip, enjoying the way his gaze followed the movement and his larynx bobbed as a result.

"Why did you want to see if I'm all right?"

He shifted the pack of beer again, moved his weight from one leg to the other.

"Why shouldn't I be all right?" she pressed.

Solo's eyes met hers and he attempted a small grin. " I thought..." His smile faltered when she did not match it. " He tried again. "I thought maybe something I said might've upset you."

"Nooo?" Leia exaggerated the word. "Something you said upset me?"

He chafed under her sarcasm, but surged on regardless. " I came to apologise, okay? " I was concerned about you."

Determined to make this at least a little difficult for him, she pointed out, "You've never been concerned before. Why now?"

The muscles in his jaw and cheek visibly clenched. " "It was a shitty thing to say."

Her smile was taut and mirthless. This may have been like pulling teeth, but she wasn't about to let up on him.

"And...?"

Solo's gaze dropped down to her shoulder and he looked past her into her room. "I was thinkin' what you said before. You called me a friend."

*I did, didn't I?* Leia acceded.

He continued, "I guess friends shouldn't do that to one another."

"Or should at least apologise when they do."

His eyes returned to hers, relieved that the apology appeared to have come to an end. "Yeah."

Smuggler and princess stared at each other, trying to guess what the other was thinking. Leia eventually broke the silence.

"And...?"

Solo blinked. "And what?"

"Are you going to apologise?"

He sighed. "I'm sorry."

"That was certainly heartfelt" she commented dryly.

Smiling tightly, his head dropped and he looked at her tiny, bare feet. *Ain't this going swell. What more does she want? Blood? " Sweat? Tears?*

The touch of her fingers around his biceps was an unexpected pleasure. He looked up as she pulled him forward, almost stumbling as she dragged him into her room.

"Come in and have a drink with me, friend."

The door cycled shut behind him, and he nearly gaped again as she settled onto her bed and reached for a mug, leaving him standing there inside the doorway. He noticed the metal flask of wine he had given her sitting on the bedside desk, and guessed that was the cause of her good mood and lack of inhibitions. When he had originally bought the wine for her, he hadn't dreamed it would result in this situation. Still, he wasn't about to question fate, especially when it led to his advantage.

"You must've read my mind," he told her. "That's exactly what I was gonna suggest." " He placed the beer on the desk next to the wine, pulled out a bottle and flipped the lid. "Some of Luke's Jedi magic must be rubbing off on you."

Leia crossed her legs and drew the mug to her lips. " "Hardly!" She looked down into the wine and added, "We're not even that close."

Solo hid the spark that momentarily lit his eyes and filed her comment away in the back of his mind for future reference. She sipped at her wine while he took a quick gulp from the bottle and wondered where he should sit. Her bed certainly looked inviting. When it appeared she was not going to suggest what he should do, he took the initiative and casually sat at the other end of the bed from her,

half folding one leg up to rest his knee on the covers while keeping his other foot on the floor. " Leia watched him carefully but remained silent.

There seemed nothing much to say so they sat there quietly, accepting the stillness that hung between them, and sipped at their drinks. " Solo kept his eyes focussed on his hands, the bottle, the corners of her room, anywhere but on the princess. " He soon realised she was openly studying him. He met her gaze, initially with curiosity then wry amusement. Leia's cheeks flushed with humour and she stifled a giggle.

A grin spread across his face. "What's the joke?"

"Us," she explained. "Two outcasts wallowing in an alcoholic haze."

Her stomach dipped as his smile spread up to his eyes.

"Speak for yourself, Princess. I don't 'wallow'."

She laughed at the mock-indignation in his tone and he joined in, chuckling at her easy laughter. At least she appeared happy again. Perhaps he had gone part way to absolving the spiteful things he had said to her.

Her laughter ebbed away and he settled with her, entranced by how seductive she looked sitting there in her underwear. He tried not to stare too obviously at the thin material of her shirt pulling across her breasts, the gentle curve of her thighs. " Her hair was held back in a simple tail at the back of her head, a few strands falling around the sides of her beautiful face. Her skin, soft and fair, smelt wonderful and he was tempted to touch her, however lightly. " The sound of her voice drew back his attention.

"Funny to think that we're doing this," Leia told him. " When he frowned at her comment, she gestured at herself and at him with her mug. "A princess...a smuggler. Sharing a drink."

There was something in her description of him that didn't sit well with him. "Friends?" he suggested, hoping to cement that was exactly what they were.

Leia's stomach dipped again, tightened. *Is that really what this is between us?* She was friends with Luke and he certainly didn't have this effect on her. But if it wasn't friendship that was between her and Han, she didn't want to contemplate *what* the alternative was. "I guess so."

One side of his mouth curved up slightly and she found herself lost in the depths of his eyes. The silence between them was heady with anticipation, and she found herself leaning towards him, hoping to find an excuse to touch him. No one had *ever* had this effect on her before.

"I've never had many friends," she admitted softly. " That's why, she realised, she had never experienced these sensations before. "Not even growing up. Occupational hazard of being a princess."

Solo swallowed the mouthful of beer he had taken. " She didn't normally make such personal admissions to him and he was intrigued where this might lead, especially considering the significance of this day for her. He tilted his head encouragingly.

"I didn't have what you might call a normal childhood. " The palace was a very secure environment, and it wasn't often that I was exposed to children my own age. " There was no need to attend school as I had a personal tutor. My aunts never had any children, so there were no cousins to play with. And when I did actually get out of the grounds, it was usually under the escort of my aunts and a bodyguard."

Leia paused as she thought back on her childhood in the palace at Aldera. There was no denying she had been raised in wonderful, caring environment. She had known that her father and her aunts loved her, and she had revelled in the diplomatic duties of state. There was nothing that she hadn't enjoyed about being an Alderaani princess. Except now, from a distance, she acknowledged it had been a solitary existence.

She sipped at the wine again and noticed that Solo had moved further onto the bed. His legs stretched halfway down the bed towards her while he leaned a shoulder against the bulkhead. " Both of his feet were now off the floor but not on her bed, boots crossed casually at the ankles.

"Don't get me wrong," the princess continued. "I had a very happy childhood. I even grew up with someone who was only a few years older than me." " *Winter.* " She pushed away the ache in her heart that threatened to crumble her mood. "But there was somehow always a distance between us."

"Why was that?"

She was surprised by his question. Or perhaps by the fact that he was still listening to her.

"I suppose we were close in many ways. But there was still a formality we abided by. After all, I was 'the Princess'."

He smiled at her deprecating tone and that, in turn, helped to lift her spirits and made it easier for her to continue.

"Everyone treated me as 'the Princess'. They would never be open or honest, around me or with me. " They were too concerned with serving me, training me.

Keeping me safe and appeased. I never really knew what others were thinking. In the Senate, it was much the same, though the reasons were political and self-serving. " Even here in the Rebellion, people still treat me like a 'princess'." She turned her full attention back to the smuggler sitting on her bed. " Her 'friend'.

"With you, it's different. You treat me –"

"Like I treat everybody else."

She carefully considered his response before shaking her head. " "Not like everybody else. " You treat me as an equal."

He didn't coddle her or revere her. Around her, he certainly didn't watch what he said; she had often experienced his crude vocabulary. And she had most definitely been exposed to his arrogance and mercenary attitude. But in spite of this, or *because* of this, Leia knew Solo thought of her as his equal. She had come to realise that the smuggler only sparred with those that he considered worthy of his time and ire.

The way Solo treated her was so different from Luke – dear, sweet Luke. Luke may have been her friend, but he still revered her, at times to the point of worship. " With Luke, she also knew nearly everything he thought; so much it was sometimes uncanny. With Solo, she could only guess what he was thinking; even when he emphatically told her his beliefs, she frequently doubted it was the truth.

"Do you have many friends, Han?"

His mouth twitched indifferently, not certain how much of himself he wanted to reveal and yet obliged to offer her something in return for her openness. He reverted to her description of himself. "A smuggler can't afford to let anyone get too close. Clouds the judgement." Despite the flush of the wine, her cheeks paled, and he hurried to soften his statement. "But I'll always have Chewie. The best friend a guy could ever want. And then there's you and Luke." He felt a moment of relief when the brightness and colour returned to her face. "And that's about it."

"What about when you were growing up?"

Another taste of beer made it easier to reply. " "Believe it or not, Princess, I was a bit like you." In response to the eyebrow she raised, he clarified, "Of course, without any of the trappings of royalty. I didn't have many friends. I guess you could call me an outsider." Much to her frustration, he didn't elaborate. "There was one girl who was closer to me than anyone." He met her curious gaze. "But I kinda ruined that when her father caught us in her room."

"Caught you?"

"Having sex."

Fascinated, Leia clutched at his leg. "Really? How old were you?"

Enjoying the weight of her hand on his knee, Solo smirked at her response. "Seventeen."

Leia shook her head in amazement and, to his disappointment, removed her hand from his leg. "Did he do anything to you?"

"Threatened a lot of things, but only threw me out of the house in just my shorts. And forbid my girl from seeing me again."

The princess decided she liked the way he said 'my girl'. " Even after all these years. " She wondered what her name was... " Then an image of a seventeen-year-old Han, scampering away from the girl's father – in his underwear – made her grin.

He shrugged. "Didn't matter much. Got to see her again before I headed off to the Academy."

He stopped, painfully aware that he had told her more than he had intended. Her eyes suggested she might question him more about his time in the Imperial Academy, but for now it seemed she was intent on discovering other, more intimate things about him.

"How old were you when you first had sex?"

He grinned. This line of questioning was more to his liking. "Sixteen. Same girl as the one I was caught with. It was her first time too. We were fooling around in her room. Heavy petting, you know, that sort of thing."

She nodded once, but she had no idea about *'that sort of thing'*. When she was sixteen, she had just been elected to the Senate; sex had been the last thing on her mind.

"Next thing we knew, it was all over. Must have lasted all of two minutes."

Leia looked at him slyly. "I hope you've improved since then."

Solo studied her carefully. "Why's that?"

Her response was smooth, almost rehearsed. "Otherwise I pity the poor women you've had relations with since."

Grinning, at her quaint phrase and the teasing jibe, he advised. " "You never have to pity them, sweetheart. Don't worry about that."

She averted her eyes as she re-filled her glass. " "Oh, I'm not worried."

His bottle was now empty, but he had no desire to grab another one. Things were taking an interesting turn. Their conversation had resumed its familiar bantering tone, however the sexual edge to it was animating them both.

Wondering exactly where this would lead, Solo chose his next words carefully. "Have you ever been with a man?"

Leia's face was guileless. "'Been'?"

He knew her innocence was staged. "Had sex?" he bluntly elaborated.

The princess squared her shoulders. "Why? Do I look like I haven't 'been' with a man."

He smiled. "As a matter of fact, yeah."

"And how can you tell that?"

"It's an ability I have. A sixth sense."

Her smile was sly. "A bit like the Force?"

"Nothin' like the Force." He grinned and winked at her, then hunted for a way to continue in the same vein. When he couldn't think of any clever way to segue sex back into the conversation, he jumped in with both feet. "So. Have you had sex with a man?" His eyes gleamed wickedly. "Or do you prefer women?"

She regarded him for a moment, her look a heady mixture of promise and mystery. "Is that a problem if I prefer women?"

His voice dropped to a sensuous rumble that reverberated throughout her. "Not as long as you let me watch."

The image of Han watching her having sex with someone sent an unexpected spike of pleasure through her body. Then she turned it around, felt a further buzz at the thought of watching Han having sex. "Have you had sex with a man?" she ventured.

Solo's eyes widened, but he grinned at her daring question. " "Had the opportunity. " Plenty of opportunities."

His gaze turned inward, recalling private memories he was not quite prepared to share with anyone, let alone her. He glanced at her. She was staring at him intently, hanging on his every word, clearly fascinated by how open he was being, and how different his life was from hers.

He grinned again and continued. "But it's not my preference." He would almost have sworn she seemed disappointed by his admission. " "What's your preference, Princess?"

"I like men." At his quick smirk, she added, "*Nice* men."

He prompted her to answer his original question. " "And?"

"And I haven't 'been' with one. For a number of reasons," she quickly asserted. " "Primarily time, energy and effort."

Solo guffawed. "If you found the 'right' man, you would find the time, energy and effort."

"Let me guess," she surmised. "You're one of those *right* men."

"I don't like to boast—"

"Hah!"

"—but I've had no complaints."

She smiled devilishly. "What was that you mentioned before about 'two minutes'?"

He grinned. "I told you. " I've improved."

"Up to three minutes now?"

"On a good day, I can make it to five."

She chuckled and he smiled with her, enjoying the sound of her laughter and the fact he was the cause of it. It was a shame she didn't laugh more. It might improve her disposition. And he could think of at least one other thing that might help.

"Sex is great for relieving stress," he suggested.

The look she gave him was prudent, almost cautious. " "I don't need a man to relieve any stress. I know how to satisfy myself."

Solo felt himself harden, but could only cover his mouth with a hand to hide his surprise at her admission. "I figured as much." And, in his wildest dreams, he had; the princess was far too sensuous a woman *not* to know her way around her own body.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I understand. Sometimes the only way to survive is to satisfy yourself."

A spurt of adrenaline surged through her system as Leia pictured Han in his cabin 'satisfying' himself while thinking about her. " She certainly thought about *him* when doing the same thing.

"But it's not the same," Solo advised, the voice of experience. " "Not as good as the 'real' thing."

"I don't need the 'real' thing," Leia replied, not sure who she was trying to convince.

"I know women who've thought the way you do, but they've changed their minds once they've tried it." He pursed his lips. "Maybe you'd also change your mind if you tried it."

"I don't need any complications in my life at the moment," she insisted, "so it is not an option."

Solo placed the empty beer bottle on the floor by the bed. " "Sex doesn't have to lead to complications."

"That's easy for you to say, Solo. I've heard all about you Corellians." Their relaxed, almost casual attitude towards sex. " Especially *him*. In the time that he had been with the Alliance, Leia was aware that he'd already had several dalliances with female Rebels.

"And all of it's true," he agreed congenially. " "But it still doesn't have to be complicated." His face brightened as an idea occurred to him. "You're a princess. It could be a 'royal command'." She laughed at his ridiculous suggestion. Surely he wasn't serious. "Or it could be purely a business transaction."

She blanched at his more earnest proposal. "Are you suggesting I pay someone for sex?"

"It's been done before."

She raised her chin and asked, "Has someone paid you before?"

The crooked grin he gave her nearly melted her on the spot.

"Always back to me, huh?" He shrugged and added cryptically, "Sometimes when you don't know where your next meal is coming from, Princess, you'll do anything."

"But you do know where your next meal is coming from," she pointed out.

His gaze fixed her, a felinoid hunting its prey. " "In your case, I'll make an exception."

"I'm not paying for sex," she quickly insisted. " Sex was too sacred and intimate for it to be reduced to a financial transaction between strangers. But between friends... "Not to you or anyone else."

Her defensive tone broadened his grin. "I'm not suggesting you pay me."

Leia froze. Her pulse had increased and she felt under siege and uncertain. Hadn't Han just proposed that she should pay him for sex? " She had the distinct impression he was laughing at her. And the strange thing was, she could see the funny side to this. She met his smiling eyes and ducked her head in deference, admitting he had won this round.

"You could always ask a friend to help you out," Solo ventured.

His tone seemed slightly desperate, and it was Leia's turn to smirk. "A friend?"

Solo took a deep breath and laid his cards on the table. " "You believe sex is complicated. " Why not get away from the emotions. " The attachments. Expectations and obligations. No..." – he hunted for the right description – "...'relationship'. " Just sex for its own sake."

His argument was convincing, almost impassioned, and for some reason she couldn't fathom, Leia felt compelled to hear him out.

"We're friends," he explained. "We don't wanna be anything more than friends."

*That's for sure*, Leia agreed. " The last thing she wanted to do was get 'involved' with a smuggler. Especially Solo.

It occurred to Solo that he also needed to re-assure her of a few details. "I'm clean, disease free and chemically sterile." He grinned and added as an afterthought, "And I'm *nice*."

Leia certainly had to hand it to him and she told him so. " "What a sales pitch!"

But he had come to the end and had nothing left to lose. " "Why don't we have sex? " Just as friends." He couldn't have put it more simply. "What do you think?"

Leia stared at him calmly. She was, she thought, the most poised she had felt all day. " Han had presented her with a logical suggestion. A logical 'solution' to a problem she hadn't realised existed until she had let him into her room. " At times it *did* feel as if her damn virginity weighed her down, or was written in large font across her face, and maybe it did affect the way others acted towards her. Perhaps if she 'got it over with', there would be a noticeable change in her, and people would treat her differently. Better. " More like she was a 'real person'. " And it was certainly an itch she felt inclined to scratch.

Solo returned her gaze earnestly. Yes, she decided, she most definitely found him attractive. " Gorgeous. Downright sexy. She felt comfortable with him. She liked him. And he treated her as his equal – a real person. Above all, he was her friend. But it wasn't the alcohol making these decisions for her. This was something she had dreamed about doing for a long time. " Strangely enough, the wine seemed to have cleared her head enough to realise this.

Leia nodded slowly. "All right."

Solo thought he was dreaming. He couldn't believe he heard what he *thought* she had said. He didn't want to ask her again lest it *was* his overactive imagination placing words in his ears. For a moment he was content to remain there, gaping at her, revelling in the sensations coursing through his body, the fantasies looping through his mind at lightspeed. But eventually he had to clarify exactly what it was she had said.

"What?"

Leia looked down at the mug still cradled in her hands, her eyes averted as she placed it on the desk. She took a small, steadying breath and solemnly met his gaze.

"I said 'All right'."

"Oh." His response was totally inadequate, but he was lost at what action to take next. " This was the direction his fantasies normally took, *not* his reality. " Against his better judgement, he asked, "You sure?"

Leia smiled fondly. It appeared that, yet again, she had floored him. "Yes. I'm sure."

Now his heart and mind raced with thoughts of what he should do next. He had to act fast, but at the same time ensure he did not rush her into it. The smile he returned was small yet hopeful.

She frowned when he suddenly rose from the bed and headed into the refresher, then just as suddenly poked his head back around the doorway.

"Don't go anywhere," he told her. "I'll be right back."

He relieved himself into the sanit unit before it became too uncomfortable or impossible to achieve. Previous experience had proven it was best to have sex with an empty bladder.

After washing his hands at the basin, he ran his fingers across his jaw, checking in the mirror to see how rough his stubble of beard was. " As he had only shaved this morning, it wasn't too bad, though if he had known he was going to spend the afternoon making love to Leia, he might have shaved again.

*Making love...* He stopped the self-analysis and considered his reflection. " *Is that what I'm about to do? Make love? Or have sex?*

Before he could question or contemplate the situation further, he splashed cool water across his face, used her toothbrush to clean his teeth, rinsed his mouth and hurriedly stripped down to his underwear.

Leia did not move from her position on her bed. " As he had left the door open to the refresher, she could hear Solo undertaking his ablutions and couldn't help but blush at every intimate detail. It occurred to her that if she had trouble listening to Han urinating and brushing his teeth, then how would she handle actually making love with him.

*Making love...* Leia strictly reminded herself that what was about to occur had nothing to do with 'love'. " It would be, as Han had so succinctly put it, 'sex for its own sake'. She glanced at the wine flask and wondered if she should have another drink.

She looked up as Solo appeared from the refresher, hugging his boots, clothes and gun-rig against his chest. The uncertainty was gone from his face and he moved towards her slowly, deliberately, laid his clothes on the desk and turned back to her. " He stood there for a moment, staring at her, naked save for the thin material of his shorts covering his hips and thighs. Leia's eyes roamed over his body, following the strong, rangy lines, caressing the definition of his muscles and his erection. It took every conscious effort for her to remember to breathe.

"You okay?" he asked, genuine concern in his voice.

The princess could only nod. This was *really* going to happen.

"Worried?"

She shook her head. A little nervous, perhaps, but not worried. She had frequently trusted Han with her life; there was no reason not to trust him with this.

He sat down next to her on the bed, so close she could feel the heat radiating from his body. He took her hand and met her eyes. "Don't be." " His smile was gentle and reassuring. " "I promise it'll be better than my first time. Just relax and enjoy it."

Leia wondered if he would be slow and tender, or rough and arrogant. His hands, his smile, his eyes... all suggested there was a hidden sensuality to him. " She found herself longing to discover that part of him, and of herself as well.

The breeze of the environmental control system drifted around them, raising the hair on her arms. The desire to lose control, lose responsibility, blew through her. " She suspected the wine had helped shed her inhibitions, but the sight of a near naked Han Solo had played a part as well.

The princess wet her lips with her tongue, anticipating the kiss Han must surely start with. She knew enough about sex to know that it inevitably started with kissing. " She wondered what it would feel like to have those full lips of his caressing hers, to feel his tongue inside her mouth. But how would it move on from there? She still had her underwear on. " Should she remove it now, or allow him to undress her? At least there was one thing she was sure of: he would safely lead her through this.

Solo's eyes burned across her skin. He longed to kiss her, to take her face in his hands and taste her mouth. Except, that wouldn't be right. This was meant to be sex, not love. And they were just friends. " Not lovers. Kissing her would add another dimension to this. " An unwanted complication. " Instead he released her hand and shifted down the bed along the length of her legs.

As he touched her, tentative fingertips smoothing her upper leg, Leia felt a spark flare between them and the pulse beat high in her throat. " She felt herself grow moist in anticipation.

Solo moved his hands over her thighs, her skin silk under his deft touch. Soft young skin, untouched by another man. He smiled as he felt a shiver tremble through her.

Leia closed her eyes as his hand moved down the outside of her leg, momentarily distancing herself from the situation, listening for the fall of footsteps outside her door, the knock that would shatter this dream. " *This is innocent enough*, she tried to convince herself. " *Just a few caresses between friends*. The breath suddenly left her as Han stroked the inside of her knee, then moved up her thigh, polishing, burnishing, exciting her with his touch.

She felt him shift further down the bed, to position himself better. She unconsciously moved with him, stretching herself across the covers. He caressed the outline of her underpants, pulled the edges of the material so the lips of her sex pressed hard against the cloth. " She gasped, arched her back. " At that moment, she wanted him more than she thought possible.

Her eyes remained closed as he slipped the pants from her legs, then he nudged her legs apart and she opened herself to him, compliant and willing. His touch was light, whispering, moving the air past her exposed skin. The brushing contacts of his fingers teased her, causing waves of pleasure to ebb and flow. Twitching unconsciously, she repressed a moan in the back of her throat. " She felt herself throb, deep in the core of her body.

She didn't realise he had positioned himself between her legs until he peeled her open and gently kissed the nub of her sex. Leia groaned as a rush of adrenalin overwhelmed her. " Nothing she had previously experienced had *ever* felt like this. " This was without comparison, without equal.

Solo pressed his tongue to her, licking through her folds and valleys, alternating with tantalising nips and kisses. Leia settled back against the pillows, enjoying the soft wetness of his probing tongue. He was an intuitive lover, instinctively knowing how to please her. She followed his lead, allowing him to take control of her body. Her hips shifted at every touch of his tongue and mouth, and her muscles gripped the finger he slipped inside her.

Leia spread her legs as wide as she could, allowing him easy access to her. She had recently dreamed about this situation, but usually it involved a faceless, nameless individual. " The fact that it was Han causing these indescribable feelings throughout her whole body was more erotic than any fantasy she could conceive.

Her breasts ached and she cupped her hands to them, rolling the nipples between her fingers and the fabric of her shirt. Han's pace changed, and it felt and sounded as though he was enjoying the act as much as she was. She found that thought empowering. She imagined that he was feeding himself on her sex, finding nourishment in her juices. *You love this, don't you, Han?* she silently asked him. " *I bet you've never had a princess before. I've certainly never had a smuggler before. Or any man, for that matter.* She realised that as much as he was providing her with a special experience, she was, in turn, giving him her own special gift that could only be given once.

The intensity of the sensations he created in her increased, rippling and swelling towards ultimate release. Her thoughts became incoherent, focussed solely on reaching that elusive peak. Her hands left her breasts and she reached down towards him. She ran her fingers through his hair, encouraging his explorations, needing to touch him, to draw him into her pleasure.

The delicious tremors mounted within her, propelling her onwards. " Then a shuddering climax tore through her and she cried out in sheer ecstasy.

Grinning, Solo sat back on his knees and allowed her to recover. " He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand as he watched her spin down from her orgasmic high. Sitting there between the legs of a princess – a beautiful, half-naked, virgin princess he had just feasted upon – he was overwhelmed by the situation. This was Leia spread out before him. Leia, gasping and trembling from the pleasure he had given her. All his fantasies, waiting for the taking.

He slipped from the bed and removed his shorts, the material catching on the extent of his erection. Leia's eyes opened to see him climbing back onto the end of bed, mirroring his body above hers. She ached at the sight of him, found herself wanting him again, wanting him even more. " His hand grazed the erect nipple that rose against the fabric of her shirt. From the smile on his face she could tell he was pleased with himself, pleased that he had given her such pleasure. At that moment, he looked more handsome, more desirable, than he had ever looked before.

Unable to resist the urge, she pulled his head down and kissed him. Solo's eyes widened at her unexpected actions, but his lips moved against hers, gently working open her mouth until his tongue speared inside. The taste of herself on his tongue excited her further, and she deepened the kiss.

He weaved his body around hers, slipped the shirt over her shoulders and head. He cupped the mounds of her breasts and sucked at her nipples. Leia arched against him, softly colliding with the hardness of his body. " Her hands slipped down the sides of his torso, past the narrow hips to his buttocks. Her mouth found the curve of his shoulder and she nibbled at his skin. There was a warm, inherent maleness to the taste of him, something that shaped his name on her tongue. She pressed her teeth against his shoulder to muffle the sound of his name as it sighed from her lips.

Her legs widened around his, hips tilting up instinctively, tantalising her sex against the tip of his. Reaching down to position himself, Han ran a finger through her moistness, then with eyes locked on the other and breathless in anticipation, he slid inside her. Leia's initial discomfort was quickly subsumed by intense pleasure, and he nudged deeper. " He had ensured she was ready, eager for him, and the further in he slid, the more she wanted.

Once fully inside her, he closed his eyes and revelled in the incredible sensations radiating throughout his body. Her body twitched, her muscles tightened around him and he groaned. Leia responded in kind and he met her eyes again. He began to withdraw from her slowly, smiled at the disappointment that crossed her face, then pushed himself back in with gentle force. Leia gripped his arms and moaned in delight. It was all the encouragement he required. " He commenced

his stretching rhythm, moving inside her, pushing his passion into her, enticing her to take it up as her own.

The touch and scent of Han compelled her on. The friction of skin on skin, flesh meshed, was intoxicating, his desire contagious. Leia relinquished all control and responsibility, floating to a place where there was just the two of them, united in this warm, luxurious deluge.

His lips were everywhere: on her skin, her eyes, her mouth, across her nose, his tongue licking through her ear, filling her every sense. " Then his kisses became feral, nipping, biting – her breasts, the lobes of her ears, her neck. " Laying beneath him, relishing his hardness lodged within her and running her hands over his body, she recognised what was happening. The more she held onto him, the more she felt enamoured. Bewitched. This was no longer 'just sex'.

Leia was so hot, tight and moist around him, Han vaguely wondered if he might die from sensory overload. *Still*, he considered, *if you've gotta go, what a way to go!* " He had never experienced such intense sexual pleasure in his life. Every sigh she made, every moan... His excitement grew with each breath that passed her swollen lips. The touch of her hands across his body was sweet agony. " And when her hips rose to meet his thrusts, the ecstasy threatened to overwhelm him. He realised he was attuned to her in a way that he had never been with any woman before. This was certainly more than sex. *Making love...* ? He turned the words around in his head, distantly toying with the concept. " And while he did not readily accept it, neither could he discount it completely.

He could feel that she was close to reaching climax. " Her eagerness had increased, as had her grip on him. Her sighs of delight turned into groans and Han lost track of his steady rhythm. His fervour was so inflamed that when she moaned again, it involuntarily triggered his own release and he came before he had intended. His momentary self-annoyance was subsumed in a sensual rush that spasmed through his whole body and forced a cry to rise from deep within his chest.

The unexpected spurt of warmth and his groan initially confused Leia. She focussed on the man above her, the pleasure-pain that contorted his features, the spasms quivering through his muscles, and understood what had happened. " She experienced another satisfying moment of empowerment. The idea that *she* had caused this reaction in him set off an ecstatic surge inside her. It wasn't enough to bring her to climax again. Already she could feel previously unused muscles tightening, and it was with some slight relief that she felt him withdraw from her.

Han dropped as if felled by a stun blast, but with enough sense of mind to aim for the empty mattress off to her right shoulder. " He rolled onto his back and wallowed in the dizzying sensations that wracked his body. His heart beat hard

against his sternum, the blood roared in his ears, and his muscles trembled with grateful release. For a while the only thought that came to his dazed mind was: *Nothin' like it... Nothin' like it...*

When he had recovered enough for the blood to start flowing back into his brain, he realised Leia was laying next to him, also on her back, her arm touching his. It was tempting to roll over and take her in his arms, press his lips to hers and tell her how incredible she was, how fantastic everything had been. " He knew he needed to apologise for allowing his own eagerness to take priority, but he was unable to form the words in his mind let alone on his tongue, and he was still panting with exertion. " Then he wondered what she was thinking. " If she had enjoyed it as much as he thought she had, even if he hadn't been able to bring her to climax again. " He hoped he had made her first time at least a pleasurable experience. There was one thing for certain; they couldn't go back and undo what had happened.

Solo inwardly cringed at the realisation that he had effectively talked a slightly drunk young woman into giving up her virginity. " He had 'deflowered' a virgin princess. " *Defiled, more like it*, he berated himself. A spice smuggler, the slime of the galaxy, had just screwed Alderaan's sole surviving royal heir. His 'friend', what's more. Solo imagined that if the Alderaani generals Dodonna and Rieekan ever found out, his balls would be on the menu at the next official dinner. *Or they could make things a whole lot easier for themselves just by arresting me for rape*, he thought bleakly.

Resting shoulder-to-shoulder, smuggler and princess lay there quietly, listening to the other breathing and wondering who would be the first to speak. Initially content to allow him time to recover, Leia soon found she needed to hear Han voice his approval and satisfaction. When he didn't say anything, she wondered if she had somehow disappointed him. " Had her inexperience irked and irritated him? She had thought things were special. More than she could have hoped for. Solo had proven to be a sensual, kind and selfless lover.

Leia was the first to move. The strange liquid trickling down her legs was as unsettling as Han's silence. " She hurriedly rose from the bed, moved into the refresher and cycled the door shut. The urge to relieve herself was pressing and a great relief to her bladder and kidneys. At the basin she used a cloth to clean off what was left of the milky fluid between her legs; she had never realised that sex could be such a messy business.

Finished with her ablutions, Leia took a moment to consider herself in the mirror. *No longer a virgin*, she told her reflection. " The familiar image of herself looked back. *Well and truly fucked by a smuggler*, she added angrily. " Still nothing changed. " Maybe nothing would ever change, she realised. They would all continue to see her as 'The Princess'. " Nobody would treat her any differently just because she'd had sex. Except perhaps Han. It almost scared her to think

how this might affect the friendship she had with Han. *'Sex for its own sake'...* " She shook her head. *Stupid to even think it could be dealt with so glibly.*

Sighing, Leia made a half-hearted attempt to straighten her hair. " Deciding not to waste the effort, she was turning to leave when something in her reflection made her turn back to the mirror. She stared at her image, but couldn't work out what it was that had caught her eye. " Whatever it had been, it was now gone.

On impulse, she leaned towards the mirror and whispered, "I've just made love with Han Solo. And I loved every second of it." Her stomach pitched at the admission and she grinned wickedly at herself. " *And I wonder if I can talk him into it again!*

She left the refresher and moved back into her room. " Solo looked up from pulling on his boots. Except for the gun-rig, he was fully dressed. As she was still naked, Leia felt inexplicably vulnerable. Vulnerable and disappointed. She snatched up her underwear from the floor, quickly pulled on her pants and shirt while Solo settled the holster on his thigh and snapped together the tie-down strap. They stood there in the small room, the awkward silence between them exacerbated by the rumpled bed covers and the scent of sex wafting in the air.

"Are you all right?" he finally asked.

Leia pressed her lips together and nodded. "Fine."

He looked at her dubiously. "I...I didn't hurt you, did I?"

She folded her arms across her chest and shook her head. " "No."

Solo rubbed a hand through the hair on the back of his head and muttered, "Good."

The princess raised her chin. "I didn't hurt *you*, did I?"

The smuggler started for a moment, then a grin slowly broke across his face. "No."

"Good," she agreed.

The teasing, playful tone was back in their banter and their eyes. " As though he had not just seen her naked let alone had made love to her, Solo resumed ogling the princess. " He shook his head to himself, marvelling at how ravishingly beautiful she was, especially when viewed in the light that he had just made love to her. He now knew she had enjoyed it as much as he had. He may have talked her into it, but she had been a willing and active participant. For all he cared, Rieekan and Dodonna could go screw themselves. Or each other.

"We're still friends, aren't we," she suddenly asked him. "Nothing's changed that?"

Recalling the vibrant images he had of their lovemaking, Solo shivered. How could they only be friends after *that*? "Still friends," he confirmed, adding silently, *And if that's all it's gonna be, I gotta get outta here. Now.*

"I better go," he told her. "Lotta work to do."

He moved towards the door and she followed him. " *Seeing me off the premises*, he suspected.

"I guess I'll see you around," Leia said as the door cycled open.

He nodded agreeably. "Sure."

He had taken a step forward to leave when Leia called his name. "Han." He turned towards her, felt her unexpectedly grab the front of his shirt and pulled his face down to hers. She kissed him, a slow, devouring kiss as her lips moved over his, her tongue slipping into his mouth. The sensual nature of the kiss, and the control she had over him, took his breath away. She rounded off the kiss by nibbling on his upper lip, before gradually pulling away from him. "When his eyes flickered open, her hands were still bunched in the front of his shirt, their faces only centimetres apart. He eventually released the breath he had been holding and she let go of him.

Leia dropped her eyes to his chest as she attempted to smooth out the wrinkles she had made in his shirt. "Thank you," she told him.

Han swallowed. "You're welcome."

She patted his chest one final time and looked back up at him. "I guess we're lucky we're just friends."

He forced a smile. "Guess so." He shuffled his feet, but as it seemed there was nothing else to add, he turned to go.

"Han."

A corner of his mouth curved up as he stopped again. "Leia."

She blinked. He so infrequently called her by her real name, his use of it had surprised her.

"If you ever want to share a drink again," she said confidently, "or don't know where your next meal is coming from, give me a call."

Han nodded. He didn't know what he was waiting for, yet still found it difficult to leave. " A restlessness filled his stomach. " Or perhaps it was excitement. " Before he knew what he was saying, the words had left his mouth. "What are you doing tonight?"

Leia's pulse rate increased. There was the regular evening briefing she normally attended. " Followed by a small formal dinner with a handful of high-ranking Alliance officers. Nothing she couldn't get out of.

"I have a few things scheduled." Feigning innocence, she tilted her head at him curiously. " "Why?"

"If you're busy—"

"That all depends on whether you make me a better offer."

Her smile was an erotic mix of mischief and seduction. " His mouth twisted wistfully, and he realised that when it came to diplomatic negotiations, Leia was as skilled and experienced as he was when it came to sex.

"How 'bout you come up to the *Falcon* and I'll cook you dinner. To apologise properly."

She nodded, then added, "And?"

He moistened his mouth and took a risk. "And maybe we can discuss our friendship in more detail."

Her eyes held his and she agreed, "Sounds nice."

They stared at each other for some time, eyes unwavering, before he spoke again. "Drop by whenever you're ready."

"I'll do that."

His lopsided smile broke their trance, then he turned and left. " The door closed as he headed off down the corridor. Alone in her room again, Leia flopped onto her bed, blissfully weary. Despite appearances to the contrary, things *had* changed. But there was at least one thing she was certain of. She and Han were still 'just friends'.

**End**

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