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## RESOLUTIONS SOLO: Part 2

by [Homer Sapiento](#)

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Han stretched lazily in his sleep. He awoke as he felt nothing where Leia should have been. He peered into the darkness and noticed the ship had stopped. If that engine went out again, the Corellian thought in disgust as he hit the inter-com. "Chewie!" he yelled. "What the hell's up!"

Leia's voice replied. "It's about time you woke up."

"Where's Chewie?"

"Sleeping," she replied.

"Lando?"

"Same thing," she laughed.

"You got it."

"I'm comin' in," he switched off the set. "Now she's flying my ship, what next?" he thought.

Han motioned Leia out of his seat and checked through some controls. "We should almost be there ..."

"Where?"

He hushed her with a wave, "I gotta call in ..." When he was finished, he shut the radio off with a snap. "Go get Chewie and Lando; we're being boarded."

"But why?" Leia asked.

"I haven't any idea."

As Chewie and Lando manoeuvred the Falcon into the proper descent, Han led Leia to their quarters. "Stay here and keep the door closed. If there's any trouble out there, get a blaster ... and I expect you to use it."

Leia looked at him. "You're scaring me."

"I don't mean to," he kissed her forehead, "but this isn't a palace. There are rules to live by, and I mean that literally. Now do what I say."

Solo waited until the ship was locked down, then he lowered the hatch and unfastened the trigger guard on his blaster. It seemed forever before two armed guards came up the ramp and longer before a familiar shape appeared. "Zuanne!" Han called. "What's with the guns? Since when does the old man have the Falcon boarded?"

"Since we hear that Han Solo is being picked to pieces by Jabba the Hutt. The old man takes no chances when this trash heap lands," a throaty voice replied. Zuanne stepped closer to him. A native female of the planet, she was almost as tall as Han, her skin tinged in apricot. "I told the old man it would be you," she moved her body against his. "no one can keep you down for long."

Han backed up. "You haven't changed a bit."

Zuanne toyed with his hair. "Neither have you." From behind her came a growl. "Oh," she laughed, "if it isn't Chewbacca ... and who might that be?" A vividly painted nail pointed at Lando.

"Part of my crew," Han said quickly. "Now, what's with these goons? The old man never needed gunhands before."

She ran her hands along his chest. "Times have changed, it's not so easy any more. The old man wants everyone to come to the house. These men will search the Falcon after we leave ... no need to protest, it won't do any good."

"I've got someone else on board," Han said quickly. "Chewie, go get her."

"Her?" Zuanne twirled in front of him. "Did some lone female finally trap Han Solo ... or do you share her?"

"She's uh, mine," the Corellian muttered.

Zuanne frowned. "I don't know if the old man will like you bringing your own dessert." She laughed and walked to the far corridor. "Mind if I freshen up? It's horribly warm out today?" She ran a hand along a graceful arm.

"You know where it is," Han mumbled.

"Yes, I certainly do," she smiled and swept away.

Lando moved next to Han. "Am I right about this? Great place to bring the Princess, Solo."

"It should be simple." The Corellian shook his head. "No, it's not that simple. This is gonna be a big mistake, especially with Leia here. I just hope Chewie explained it to her." Lando coughed slightly.

"Look, just follow my lead. The old man's not bad, he's always dealt fair with us." Han nodded toward the armed men. "I just wish I knew what that was about ... anyway, he's in the business ... Zuanne's his favourite. He also likes to play games, so just keep your mouth shut and we'll all be happy." Han glared at him. "And, whatever you do, don't be so damn charming!"

Lando smiled fondly at the Corellian. "Life is so interesting being around you."

Zuanne swept back into the lounge, just as Chewie came in, followed by Leia. Han took a deep breath. "I think I'm in trouble."

The Princess strode into the lounge and stared holes through Han. She had changed into a silken gown of deep green with a low bodice and a slit in the side that stopped barely short of her hip. Her hair was pushed dramatically to one side and pinned back by a cluster of emeralds which matched the band around her arm. A small green star shown on her cheekbone. Determined, she walked up to Han. "Am I presentable?" she glared at him as he felt his stomach turn.

Zuanne broke the moment and walked around Leia, examining her closely. She smiled. "Han, isn't she rather short? But perhaps she has special training? You always were a difficult one." Her smile faded as she ran her hand across his gunbelt. "The blaster stays."

"Now wait a minute ..."

"You take it off ... or they will," she replied curtly.

Outside the Falcon stood a waiting passenger car. Han was duly impressed; things certainly had picked up for the old man. He hoped this wouldn't be a

repeat of Cloud City; the thought of electronic torture made him nauseous. As they piled into the car, it was clear they were one too many. "Oh, I am sorry, Han," Zuanne smiled. "Your female will have to sit on your lap."

The Corellian smiled weakly and Leia plopped into his lap with as much force as she could, it was enough to make him wince. "How dare you do this to me!" she whispered in his ear. "I'll never forgive you for this!"

Han's anger rose and he whispered back. "Just remember your Rebellion, Princess; that's what this is all about. So go along." He turned in exasperation to stare at the passing countryside.

Leia watched him with concern. She had been so wrapped up with her own fight that she constantly ignored all that it cost him. The Princess slowly kissed his cheek, then pulled his mouth toward hers totally confusing him as he tried to release himself.

The car came to a stop in front of an obviously newly-built mansion. As they alighted Han stared in amazement. "Is this just the house?"

"No," Zuanne led them up the stairs, "the old man also uses it was a warehouse. But for now there is no talk of business. First you feast. You must be hungry for some real food." She entwined her arm in Han's and led the party down a long hall.

At the end of it, two more females opened tall doors of solid hardwood. It was similar to the house that Han remembered, but twice as large and four times as ornate. The walls were covered with rare tapestries. Instead of typical chairs, massive lounges were covered with thick furs. Han noticed the low tables here and there were actually simple slabs of the finest marble he had ever seen. He also counted at least twenty females around the room. The old man had definitely come up in the Galaxy.

Still holding on to Han, Zuanne led the party to the owner of the house. The man wore deep purple robes, a gem on each finger, he looked no older than Han remembered.

The green eyes twinkled as he stroked a neatly trimmed white beard. Finally he held up one hand and the procession stopped. "It looks like Solo," his voice echoed in the large room, "but is it? You, boy, come here!" The Corellian moved forward as the man stood. A full head taller than Han, he looked down on him. "I never thought I'd see you again!" The two men embraced warmly. "What happened?" the older asked. Not two time parts ago, a trader came in, told us Jabba had you ... told us all sorts of terrible things. My females were beside themselves! Even demanded my going to claim you!" The man hugged Han again, and finally noticed the others. "Chewbacca! I knew you wouldn't allow this

mere child to receive any more punishment than he could handle." He embraced the Wookiee. "After all this time, Chewie, I'd have thought you'd have taught him how to behave." Han cleared his throat and ignored the put-down. "Now who might we have here?" the old man asked Lando.

Han rushed in. "He's on my crew. I've, uh, had to take it easy."

"Of course. Jabba gave you a bad time, did he? Well, what do you expect from the likes of him! Never did like him, no, no." He turned toward Leia. "Oh, my, now who might you be!" He lifted her chin and tilted her head ever so slightly.

Leia was about to reply when Han jumped in. "She's ... uh ... she's mine."

The old man stared at the Corellian. "Yours? She is charming, I never knew your taste was so, shall we say, refined. Wherever did you find her? Is she well-trained?" The old man took her hand and twirled her. "Delightful! Would you consider selling her?"

Han took a deep breath. "Uh. No ... I ... I just picked her up ... haven't had ... time to get to ... to know her ... uh ... yet."

The old man winked at him. "Oh, yes, yes. I see. Well, should you ever reconsider call me first, we would relish her. Now, you must all freshen up before we feast. Ladies! Show our guests the way!"

Zuane led Han and Leia to the third of many small cubicles. Opening the door, she winked at the Corellian. "Take as long as you want."

The door slid shut and Leia cut loose. "I ought to blast you one! How dare you allow that man to do that! I have never been treated in such a manner! OHHH!"

"You finished?" Han asked as he glanced around. "Look, Princess, until we get out of here with the supplies your General wants, you'll go along with this. I got enough to worry about without worryin' about you, too."

"Which means I should behave like a common, common ..." Leia stuttered.

"Correct."

"I refuse," she sat down and folded her arms in front of her.

"Fine. Refuse." Han walked away and began to fill a basin with water. "Refuse and maybe get us killed." He looked at her. "I don't know why I walk into these things. I should be playin' with Chewie's kid right now. But, oh no, not Solo. I thought I could do something for you ... for your people ... and all I get from you is arguments!" He glared at her, then turned and started washing up.

She touched his arm. "Would I have to ..."

Han cut her off. "Nobody is gonna force you to do anything."

"Well, just how am I expected to behave? I've never done this sort of thing before, you know," she smiled weakly at him.

Han grinned back at her. "Sit down, Princess, I'll give you a quick course in being a common, common."

When Han was done, Leia stared at him. "Do you ... did you and Chewie come here often? I mean, you're certainly knowledgeable about ... how ... oh, you know."

"Yeah, we've been here a number of times. The old man's fair, and because of the nature of his operation, everybody winds up here one time or another."

"Did you ever ..." she flushed slightly.

Han encircled her in his arms, kissed the top of her head and held her tightly. "A long time ago." He patted her arm. "Are you ready?"

The Princess was still shaking, but her confidence had returned. "I think so. Can I stay by you?"

Han grinned as he opened the door. "That's the whole idea."

Zuane rose as they rejoined the group. "Well, you certainly took your time, Han." She touched his cheek. "You look a little tired."

Han reclined on the lounge nearest the old man and Leia moved quickly to the pillow on the floor. From a large tray offered her, she deliberately chose the foods he hated. While she held the plate for him, the Corellian faced the old man's questions. "So, Han, what was the problem with Jabba? We heard some rumours, but never believed you were a cheater!" He held his glass for Zuane to refill. "If anything, you're too honest for this business. But, I believe I told you that!"

Han looked at him, thought about it, and reconsidered his position. "Just what did you hear?"

The old man glanced at him, then laughed. "Oh, Jabba didn't damage your brain!" His face grew serious. "Whatever you need ..."

Han looked at Chewie and nodded back. "Jabba's dead. So is the Emperor. The Galaxy is wide open." He then followed with an edited version of what happened on Endor. "I need to know what you've heard."

"News is late in reaching us, my boy." The old man leaned forward and touched his arm. "You know we have always been avoided by the more Imperial among us. They have still collected their remuneration." He sipped from his glass. "You realise it isn't over yet, not the with pompous asses who fill the Council seats! Nor is it over for you, my boy." The old man waved Zuanne aside. "Fett may well be fodder for Jabba's pet, but bounty hunters never give up."

Han nodded solemnly. "It's a matter of pride, I suppose."

"You know the old saying, Han," the old man smiled tautly, "credits don't mean a thing when one's pride is at stake. In fact, I heard that just the other day."

"What else have you heard?" Han asked as he drained his glass.

"Oh, the usual old sayings. You know, things like more accidents happen in the home than any other place." He leaned forward again. "Well, I can see your health is good, your brain is sharp, there is nothing more I can do but get on to our business. I'm sure you've only brought the finest, my females do love you and your cargo so much ... I spend much time appeasing them on both counts." He winked broadly.

When the meal had ended, the old man rose. "Well, gentlemen, does anyone care for dessert? I know the Wookiee doesn't indulge, but what of you, Lando?"

Lando looked briefly at Han, then addressed the older man. "That is very generous of you, sir, however, my spiritual belief prohibits such things." Han closed his eyes and waited for the clap of thunder that story would bring.

The old man shook his head. "So you are one of them? I've often heard about it. It is a pity, though, we have the finest desserts in the Galaxy. And it is only when you travel with Captain Solo that you are given your pick." Their host put his arm around Han's shoulder. "And you? You haven't been here in so long and now ... now you bring your own! Oh, Han." He looked at Leia. "Think about it, Han, maybe you could teach her."

Han looked from one to the other. "Well ..." Finally he sighed. "No, I guess I couldn't. She's kind of new at this ... maybe later."

At the Falcon, cargo was exchanged. The old man laughed out loud. "I still cannot understand how you can manage in this piece of junk."

"Hey!" Han objected. "I never called you names. Sides, she's the fastest ..."

"I know, I know," the old man sighed as the others burst into laughter. He handed the Corellian a leather pouch and winked at him. "Keep your back to the wall, Han." Finally he bent and whispered in Leia's ear, kissed her hand, and slid into the waiting car. As the craft slowly pulled away from the landing area, the old man waved back. "Take care of the Princess!"

The Corellian stared after the departing car, then turned and sprinted up the ramp after Leia. He stopped her in the lounge. "You knew him?"

"Not until I saw him," she grinned. "Some day I'll tell about my long, lost uncle, although I haven't seen him since I was a child. He was rather like the black sheep, of the family ... oh, do shut your mouth. What's in the pouch?" Han stared into space and tried to digest this latest development, so Leia took the purse from him. She sat at the game table and stacked the Imperial credits in neat piles.

The Corellian looked from her to the gleaming credits and tried to smile. "Any more surprises?" he asked.

Leia opened her mouth, then shut it. She shook her head. "Well, I'm gonna ..." he thumbed toward the cockpit. The Princess watched his retreating back. Sighing, she scooped the credits back into the pouch. "Just as well, you'd probably faint."

Over the late meal, little was eaten or said. Finally Han stared at the group. "I made a decision." He squeezed Leia's hand as she began to protest. "I'm resetting the coordinates. We'll drop the Princess off at Chewie's, she'll be safe there."

He moved to the cockpit and watched as the streaks of light played on the walls. Silently a hand reached out and touched his shoulder. "I'm not leaving you."

Without looking at her, Han replied, "I'm leaving you."

"I won't let you." Leia whispered.

"Sister, you gotta stop giving orders. I'm not one of your subjects." He smiled ruefully at her. "I do love you, but I'm not gonna put you in danger. Just wish this would end. I'm tired."

Leia touched his head. "Are you coming to bed?" He shook his head and she bent to kiss his cheek. Soon he was alone.

"I don't care what he says! I am not leaving this ship!" the Princess yelled at the astonished Wookiee and Lando.



C3PO waved his arm. "But, Mistress Leia, Captain Solo is perfectly correct ..."  
His voice trailed off as she glared at him. If droids were capable of having a nervous breakdown, he was certain these humans were driving him near one.

Lando broke in. "He's right, you know. I don't have to tell you what it means to be hunted. Like the old man said, it's a matter of pride."

"Surely, with no reward, what would be the use?" Leia looked for a solution.

"There were a lot of guns looking for him before Jabba put a price on his head," Lando interjected. "Han hasn't been all that modest about his skills."

Chewie bellowed loudly as Leia scowled at the Bespinite. The Wookiee still remembered his friend's directive to take care of the Princess, but she wasn't the type of female -- human or otherwise -- he was used to dealing with. And having two humans of the same temperament was wearing on Chewie's nerves. He growled his decision, against his own better judgement, and Leia laughed in spite of herself. "Okay, if we can't think of anything else, you can sit on him!"

Solo sat and watched the sleeping Leia. Not for a long time had he thought of another Princess, and the sadness and hurt he felt long ago. This time it was his decision, his choice, but the pain was still there, maybe more so. The Corellian's logic was simple: if you don't care about anybody, you don't get hurt in the end. If only he had followed his own advice ... Exhaustion finally overtook Han, and he fell asleep touching Leia's hair. While he slept, Chewie carefully changed the co-ordinates back to the originals.

Han slammed the computer with his hand and glared at Chewie. "You had no right to change those co-ordinates! No! I don't care! And I don't want to hear about it!"

He hit the computer again and Lando grabbed his arm. "Hey, pal, it took us a long time to fix that thing ... you want to break it?"

The Corellian jerked his arm away. "Yeah, sure." He looked at the Wookiee. "Okay, fur brain, you planned this mutiny, now what!"

Leia stroked the back of his head. "We go just like you planned."

"And what if we walk off this tub and get blasted?" Han muttered.

"Sweetheart," Leia said soothingly, "you aren't thinking. If there's any chance of that, we won't get off the ship. It's simple."

"Simple? You call it simple?" Han's head spun. He looked at the trio and shook his head. "Okay, you win: it's simple. I'm the one who's crazy!"

"C'mon, buddy, this is your plan. It's a good one." Lando said. "Why change it now?"

The Corellian's mind screamed Because I no longer know which end is up! Because I haven't know what I'm doing since Leia! Because all I want to do right now is run off with her to some deserted planet!, He rubbed his temples and felt Leia's hand squeeze his shoulder. Han took a deep breath and forced a smile. "Well, what are you all standing around for? We got work to do!" He pushed out of his seat and called to a distressed C3PO. "Go dig up some cold weather gear. This ain't Hoth, but we gotta disguise this Princess of yours!"

Han pushed away the last of the freshly-charged blasters and stretched. He moved to the window and stared into the void. "Don't move," Leia called from behind him. "I want you to get the full effect of this, this thing!" He heard a swishing sound and then, "All right, now."

He turned and laughed at the sight in front of him. Somewhere under a furry parka, under a furry hood, was the Princess. At least he recognised the feet. "I love your designer!" he chuckled.

"It was the best 3PO could do." She threw back the hood.

Solo walked around her, rubbing his chin. "The idea is to make you look inconspicuous." He waved slightly and pulled the blanket off the bunk. She shrugged off the parka and watched as he made a slit in the centre of the blanket. "This should do." he nodded as he slipped it over her head. "You'll need a hood."

"What am I supposed to use as a blanket?" Leia complained as he slipped an oldfashioned wool hood on her head.

"I'll keep you warm." He smiled as he tugged at his creation.

The Princess felt very safe under his gaze. "Are we going to stand here until land?"

"Tired?"

She nodded and Han pulled the blanket off her. He took her hand and led her to the bunk. They paused at the window and glanced at the lights twinkling around them. "It's so beautiful," Leia whispered. "it's hard to believe the evil in it." She shuddered slightly and Han hugged her tightly.

The soft golden light of the small lantern glinted in the corner, Han held Leia close to him in the bunk. "We've got to stop meeting like this."

She smile at him. "You said something the last time we met like this."

"Did I?"

"Uh huh," she nodded. "Something about weddings, and babies ..."

The Corellian kissed her forehead. "You are so small."

"And you are avoiding the issue." Han looked behind her and she poked him.

"Will you look at me!"

He pulled her mouth to his and kissed her gently. "It's not that. I feel ... like a kid." He traced a line down her cheek. "I love you, that's the simple part."

"That's all that matters." The Princess whispered.

"I want to ... us to be together." He stammered. "I ... I don't ever want to lose you. I never needed anyone in my life as much as I need you." Leia put her hand on his k and he kissed the palm of her hand. "I want us to get married, have kids. None of that's been important to me for a long time."

Leia held his hand tightly. "I want that, too." She whispered hoarsely.

"I ... I just ... I'm, I'm sorry about the other day. I know you have responsibilities ... I just wish ..." he shook his head. "Leia, I don't have anything to offer you ..."

"You're all I want, Han." She stated.

"Some day you might regret that."

"Never." She whispered. Her heart sank slightly at the turn in the conversation. She took a deep breath. "Can't we just live one day at a time?" Until I can think of something to do besides beating you over the head,, she added to herself.

"I just wanted to lay the cards on the table, Leia." He touched her face. "I ... I love you too much not to be honest with you."

"Then, love me now, Han," she whispered. "It's been too long ..." He moved her slightly and bent over her. And for a time they were apart from the ship, along in their own universe.

OUTSIDE the locked door 3PO was going through a major crisis and decided to take it out on the first person he came across. "Really, Chewbacca, I do not care to hear what you have to say. I am responsible for the Princess. This is an outrage! It is not proper, not proper at all!" Chewie growled and the droid creaked down the corridor in search of a quiet spot to malfunction.

LATER Leia nuzzled closer to Han. "You're awfully quiet," she smiled.

Han rubbed her arm. "I was just thinkin' ..."

"A first," she giggled.

"Funny."

"I thought so," she turned and kissed the scar on his chin. "What were you thinking about?"

"Oh, just that if this was Alderaan, any second now -- you bein' a Princess and all -- well, your father's guards would break down the door and shoot me."

Leia reached across him and brushed back his hair. "Oh, no. My father ... was a very fair man." She outlined his face with her fingertip. "First, he'd make you marry me ... then he'd have you shot!" she giggled harder. He grimaced as Leia tugged at his hair.

"What?" he mumbled.

"My being a Princess?"

Han stared into the distance. "No. Yeah. Maybe."

"Why?"

"Why!" Han grinned. "I knew a Princess once ... a long time ago." He shrugged, "Just that she liked being a Princess more than being a woman."

"On Corellia?"

"Yeah ..." his voice trailed off.

Leia stared at him. "Tell me about it."

"Not much to tell," he hugged her tighter. "It seems like a long time ago. We were children picked to go to the Academy. Special," Han smirked. "Trained to respect and follow our leaders ... the usual bow down and kiss my feet, garbage ... uh, sorry." She kissed his cheek. "Something happened ... one day everything was perfect ... the next," he shrugged, "it was gone."

Leia sat up. "What happened?"

"I'm tellin' you I don't know," Han pulled her back to himself. "All I remember that if it hadn't been for Chewie, my own people woulda killed me that day ..."

whatever it was, Chewie won't tell me ... says I'll remember it on my own. Later, I heard about some of the other pilots, some friends, either forced or resigned. Then not much later, when me and Chewie were runnin' some cargo, word was out that Corellia joined the Empire."

Leia studied his hand. "Is your family still alive?"

"No. They're all dead ... to me, at least. Seems they had the decency to pack up my junk. When I was better, Chewie gave it to me ... there was even a note tellin' me as far as they were concerned I was dead."

"Chewie took very good care of you," Leia said softly.

He nodded absently. "He's the only one I cared about in a long time."

"You shouldn't go back to Corellia."

"It'll be all right. We're not goin' into the high-rent district. Should have some friends left. It'll be all right." He repeated quietly, convincing no one but the walls.

"And your Princess?"

His face clouded. "My Princess? Heard her father died, she married some ass ... had a couple of kids .. she runs the place now."

"Have you ever stopped loving her?"

"I never thought about it before," Han hugged her. "Doesn't matter, does it? I won't ever see her again." He pulled Leia to himself and kissed her. "Now you can call me a scoundrel,. I just had my way with a Princess!"

"Oh year, laser brain?" Leia frowned. "Ever think maybe I had MY way with a scoundrel,?" She shivered slightly. "I'm cold."

"Yeah, must be the heating unit again ... thing ain't worth a Gundark's turd. Wait a sec," he leaned over her and searched in a side storage compartment. "There should be somethin' ... unless Lando ... here it is." He leaned back and handed her a tarnished silver flask.

Leia turned it in her hands. "Was this part of a cargo? There's some kind of crest on it."

Han took it from her and warmed it in his hands. "No, no cargo ... and no, I didn't steal it. It was in my jacket after Corellia, Chewie says it was my father's."

"Look, Han, maybe if we could find out more about this..."

"For what?" he cut her off. "Sorry, sister, I ain't Royalty. My ... my father's way of feeling important more'n'likely. Does ... it matter?"

Leia shook her head, took the flask from him and shook it. It was full. "What's in it?" she asked suspiciously.

"Fruit juice. Just fruit juice. Have some, it'll warm you up," he played with the blanket.

Leia opened the top cautiously and slipped: it did smell like fruit juice. She took a large sip, swallowed and coughed. "That's a jet juice, you nerf herder!"

"No, it's not. It's fruit juice. Jet juice is a lot more ... uh, well, potent." Han took it from her and raised it in salute. "This is fruit juice." He drank deeply, relishing its warmth.

"Could you get me some water for this?" she asked sweetly.

"You gotta be kiddin'!" Han laughed. "It's cold out there!"

Leia leaned back on the pillows and pouted. "If you loved me, you'd get me some water for this ... this ... fruit juice, of yours!"

Incredulous, Han stared at her. "If I what?" he shook his head. "Hey, sweetheart it is cold out there, remember? You want water -- go get it! I'm comfortable right here." He kissed a very cold nose.

She glared at him and grabbed the flask. "You're impossible!" Leia took a sip and coughed.

"Maybe these would help?" Han smiled as he lifted her nightgown from the floor.

"OH!" she fumed. "You are incorrigible, arrogant, egotistical, and ... and ..."

Han grinned broadly. "And what?" Leia jerked away from him, pulling the remaining blanket with her. "Hey, sister!" Han pulled back and she came with it. A moment of silence passed, then she fitted herself against him.

The Princess smiled at him. "Did I ever tell you how much I love you?"

"Not lately," he smiled back as he moved his mouth against hers and pulled the blanket over their heads.

In the humming ship, they awoke together. Han cradled her in his arm. "You all right?"

Leia smiled sleepily. "Nice."

"Nice?" Han asked.

"Did I hurt your ego?" she yawned.

He shook his head. "No. Just that nobody ever said it was nice, before." He glanced at her in amazement to find her sound asleep. About to kiss her, the Corellian groaned inwardly as the computer beeped loudly. Carefully he slipped out of bed and took a look back at Leia. A nice deserted planet,, Han thought as he pulled on his pants, no lifeforms except the edible kind ... and no damn computers!,

LANDO met the Corellian in the cockpit. "They want you."

Han answered the call. "This is Solo?"

A familiar voice came through. A voice out of the past. "Hey, Slick! How you doin'?"

Slow recognition lit Han's face. "Colin? Is that you?"

"Who else? Long time no see! I'm gonna give you back to this guy here -- I'll be waitin' for you when you land!" Colin said.

After getting final landing instructions, the Corellian filled Lando in about Colin. "We were in the Academy together."

"Can you trust him?" Lando asked.

"Right now I can't afford to trust anybody, pal." he slipped out of the pilot's seat. "Take over. I'm gonna fill Leia in on this."

Lando shifted seats. "So how's loveland?"

Han shrugged, preoccupied with the problem at hand. "How's it ever go?"

LEIA stared at her reflection in the mirror when Han came up behind her and kissed her neck. "G'Mornin', sleepyhead."

She stuck her tongue out at his reflected image. "How do I look?" she asked as she turned to face him.

He leaned against the bunk, crossed his arms and shook his head. "Sure don't look like a boy!" Han knelt and opened a footlocker. "Got somethin' for you." He took out an old gunbelt and blaster, fixed it around her waist and knelt to tie it

down around her leg. "Watch this thing. It's on full charge, for kill. So don't use it unless you have to." He stood and put an arm around her, kissing her forehead. "It's also got a kick to it, and not much range ... so watch it." He sat down and checked his own blaster.

Leia came up behind him. "What did I miss? You look worried."

Han explained about Colin. "I just don't know how he knew it'd be me. It doesn't compute, as Goldenrod would say."

"You don't trust him, do you?"

"Right now, the only ones I trust are on this ship." He said.

WITH a final warning to 3PO, the quartet left the ship and waited at the foot of the ramp. Han glanced around and saw nothing out of the ordinary. A short fussy man approached. "Captain Solo? I've got your forms here, and will take a copy of your manifest to post." He looked at the list the Corellian handed him. "This is a lot, but of course, it will go fast. Will you need help unloading?"

Han shook his head. "My crew'll handle that later. We'll be at the Hall first, then get something to eat, if anybody asks."

The harried man rushed off. "Very well, Captain."

They all turned as a voice called: "Hey, Slick!" Han remembered Colin immediately but not the girl at his side. The new arrival introduced them. Han, this is Ilsa. Ilsa, this is the guy I've been telling you about. Best pilot in the Galaxy and, if I remember, best gun hand, too." He nudged the Corellian.

"I've been looking forward to meeting you." The slight girl said heavily.

Han turned from her piercing eyes and looked at Colin. "I gotta get the manifest down to the Hall and get my crew fed. Maybe we could meet later?"

"Let us take you!" Colin smiled. "You'll never get a passenger car this time of day and it's too cold to walk. After you're done at the Hall, we can go to dinner ... I know a place with great food ... and great help!"

Han looked at Colin, then at the girl. Chewie muttered behind him. Yeah,, Han thought, something's not quite right. But I'd rather have him in my sight than out of it.

AT the supper club, Han leaned forward. "So what brings you to this floating warehouse? Haven't seen you since the Academy, what've you been up to?"



Colin pushed the food on his plate. "Well, I've dabbled in a few things. Right now I'm a trader for, uh, private parties. Have a good deal coming up and a proposition to make you. I only have a few crates and Ilsa here; part of my contract was to deliver her to her family, but my ship won't be ready for a few weeks. You wouldn't happen to be going anywhere near Corellia, would you?"

He asked that same question of the Corellian from time to time during the meal. Finally, Han shook his head. "Corellia? Not really. We could probably drop you off at the next cross-station. What happened to your ship?"

Colin shrugged. "Engine trouble. Times have not been overly prosperous."

Han nodded. "I know the feeling. Well, you're welcome to ride with us to the next cross-station. The Falcon's not equipped for passengers, but it's not too long a ride."

At the door, Colin hesitated. "If you don't mind, we'll meet you at the ship. I ... I have to settle my bill. You can take the car back to the Falcon, we can walk to the hotel. Then you can send it back for me."

"Cargo's at the dock?" Han asked and Colin nodded before waving good-bye.

WHILE Chewie checked on any possible buyers for their cargo, Han drew Leia and Lando into a quiet corner of the bustling Hall. Calrissian eyed him. "What's up? I saw you looking at the girl."

"So did everyone else in the cabaret." Leia muttered.

The Corellian ignored her jibe. "I just got a very bad feelin' about this." Han frowned. "Maybe I'm just bein' paranoid, but somethin' about that girl ..." He nodded as the Wookiee rejoined them. "My bet is they'll be at the ship when we get there. There shouldn't be more'n, two others, Colin never was one for too many partners."

Chewie growled that the cargo had been bought, sight unseen, by an acquaintance in business. Also, the supplies and equipment were all ready to be loaded. The cost, as Solo ordered, would be deducted from the profit by the manager. An odd occurrence in the life of a professional haggler, but necessity had a way of changing Han's life of late.

KEEP your eyes open," Han said as they approached the Falcon. He made a cursory check of the hatch and hit Lando. "Grab somethin' and start loadin'. Somebody's been pickin' the lock."

"How can you tell?" Leia asked as she stared where Han pointed.

Lando chuckled, "Simple. There were only five scratches -- now there are six!" He turned away from the Corellian's glare and toward the boxes of supplies.

Inside the ship, 3PO was in a bad state. "Oh! Captain Solo! There was the biggest human I have ever seen ..."

The Corellian nodded slightly. "Well, at least we know ... just wish I could count on them not knowin' we know."

With the cargo unloaded, they waited anxiously for the manager to bring the receipt and their money. Finally Han glanced at Leia. "Go start eh engines. If we have to, we go without payment." When she was gone, the Corellian sidled up to Lando. "It's me they want. You stay out of it."

Just then Colin and the girl came toward them. "Hey, Slick! Sorry we're late, but the car broke down and it's getting worse out there!"

"SOLO!, a voice called from the shadows. Han looked from the girl to Colin and noticed the grip he had on her arm.

"Sorry, Slick," Colin smirked. "The blaster. Two fingers."

The Corellian handed over his gun. "Why?"

"Why not?" Colin smiled. "You were always so smart, so right ... You had it all after Corellia. You had to ruin it all, didn't you? Didn't you!"

Han kept his hand waist high and stared at him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Smug, Han, old buddy," Colin seethed. "But we were never buddies, were we? You must be losing your touch; I didn't think it would be this easy!"

Han glanced over Colin's shoulder. "What're you getting, out of this? Jabba's dead ..."

The other man's face fell. The gun shook in his hand. "You can't bluff your way out of this one."

"It's no bluff, Colin. Jabba and the Emperor are both dead. It's over."

"Well, then," he forced a smile. "I'll need another new start, won't I? That ship would be the beginning, for one." His voice trembled slightly. "Jabba's dead? No matter, I'm sure your hide's worth a few credits to somebody on Corellia ... you ruined a lot there, buddy. Maybe you'd be worth more alive so a certain Princess

can have the last word!" He laughed hoarsely. "You know how royal tempers flare!"

Do I ever,, Han thought. He looked around, even with his blaster it would be hard to take out the others. "What about my crew?"

Colin laughed. "A sign of losing it, Han! You and the Wookiee never needed a crew before!" His smile vanished. "They're nothing to me as long as they stay out of the way."

Behind the pair a human as tall as Chewie walked slowly. Han stared at the behemoth he thought was just a droidian hallucination. The mass of flesh stopped behind the Corellian and put a hand on his shoulder. Han slowly was brought to his knees, unable to bear up under the pressure of the massive beast behind him. Colin laughed derisively as another behemoth joined the group.

What happened next was never really understood although the Corellian would shrug it off as Corellian luck, and the fact that he was an innocent. The Princess, on the other hand, would consider it the wisdom of the gods in protecting the children, handicapped, and mentally incompetent. Whichever it was the next few minutes were a blur in Han's mind.

A shot from somewhere in the shadows eliminated the latter behemoth. The one holding Han grunted and shoved him to the ground. Lando and Chewie moved quickly. The Wookiee caught the monster off-guard and twisted his head around. Shots came from all sides as Colin dragged the girl behind a pile of crates, and the Wookiee half-dragged Han toward the ship.

From somewhere another shot rang out and a voice called. "Give it up!" Colin looked away from where Han was sheltered and fired vainly into the dimly lit interior. Han caught his blaster as Chewie tossed it to him and fired directly into the crates in front of Colin, determined to destroy them if all else failed.

Leia climbed cautiously on top of the Falcon. She fired in the direction of Colin, which was the momentary lapse Han needed. He got off one shot into the other man's leg, the force of which made him release the girl. The next shot, from the rear, tore the blaster from his hand.

The docking bay was bathed in conspicuous silence. Slowly, the girl stood from behind the docking crates and cried, "Please! Please! Don't shoot! He forced me to come with him!"

Han stood and motioned her out as he waved to the others. Leia, meanwhile, made her way slowly down and around the Falcon. In her line of sight, she was the only one to notice a small blaster under the girl's loose parka. The Princess caught her breath and stumbled over the ramp. "Han!" she called as she fell.

The Corellian dove as the girl drew her blaster level and fired. The shot missed him but splintered the crate above his head. From her prone position, Leia fired directly into the girl's chest.

WHILE the smoke was clearing, a tall almost-purple-skinned humanoid moved toward them. He holstered his blaster and gave Han an arm off the floor. "Seems I always wind up picking you up!" he laughed.

Han stared at him. "Aldro! Somehow I knew you'd show up!"

The taller man shook his head. "Just protecting my interest. If you died, that old codger of a manager probably wouldn't give me my cargo!" He glanced around at the carnage. "Your typical calling card, Han!"

Han shook his head. "Always a kind word." He rushed over to where Leia was just sitting up. He helped her to her feet. "You all right?"

The Princess nodded dully. "I think ... so." She rubbed her temple. "What kind of a blaster do you call that?"

"Old," the Corellian hugged her. He turned as Aldro cleared his throat. "Uh ... Leia, this is Aldro ... an ... old, uh, business acquaintance. He ... uh, helped."

Leia smiled politely and offered her hand. "Hello. It was very fortunate for us that you were nearby."

The tall man kissed her hand lightly and laughed. "Dear lady, I've it always pays to be nearby, when Han Solo is in town; it's safer that way." Still holding her hand, he turned to the Corellian. "Han, my friend, your tastes have definitely improved." Leia swayed slightly and the purple-skinned man caught her. "I do believe you should go lie down."

Han took the Princess from Aldro and glanced around at the bodies. "What about .."

The Corellian's friend produced a small leather pouch and handed it to him. "Your payment ... I told the manager I'd give it to you myself."

"I meant the mess." Han frowned.

"Oh!" the taller man laughed. "No problem. My men will handle it. Has the young lady provoked some inner trait of neatness on your part?"

"Uh, just don't want to ... uh, call attention to ... uh ..."

"It's a little late for that, don't you think?" Aldro asked. "We'll take care of this, you had better take her inside and get out of here."

Han glanced down at the white-faced Leia. He quickly said his thanks to the older man and hustled her on board the humming Falcon. As the hatch closed behind them, the man glanced around at the dead bodies, shook his head, and set to his task.

LEIA opened her eyes as a soothing voice called her name. "You're gonna have one beautiful shiner!" Han smiled down at her. "Does it hurt?"

"No, not really," she looked around. "What happened? Where are we going?"

Leia sat up quickly, wavered, and the Corellian gently laid her back on the pillow. "Take it easy, sister. You sure you're all right?" She nodded and put a hand over her eyes. "never known you to faint before." He shrugged.

She sat up slowly. "Where are we going."

"Corellia."

"No!" she cried. "We can't go there, not now."

"We have to." Han said.

Leia touched his arm. "The General would understand ..."

"Maybe he would, but I've never gone back on my word. Not in my life!" Han backed away from the bunk as she swung her legs slowly over the side.

"Not now!" Leia protested. "We know the danger there! Not now that we're together!"

Han pointed at her. "Walk away from it? Is that what you're sayin'? Hey, Princess, this is me, remember? I tried walkin' away from it twice before ... and you were the one to stop me. So don't start tellin' me what to do NOW!"

Leia began a retort. Suddenly she put a hand to her mouth and shoved past the bewildered Corellian. Later, when the loo door opened, Han watched her in concern. "You sure you're all right?"

The Princess held a damp cloth to her mouth and nodded. "Must have been something I had at the cabaret."

"Uh huh." Han nodded skeptically. "Why don't you lie down for a while?" he asked and prepared for an argument.

"May I better." She said quietly. Han pulled the blanket over her. "You will wake me when we land, won't you?" The Corellian nodded and kissed her forehead.

AS the door slid shut behind him, Han began his search for an understanding of females. He had always found them enjoyable and diverting, but having taken one so deeply into his life had proven to be more confusing than he had ever thought. The Corellian put that particular problem back in his mind and headed for the cockpit and the new situation awaiting them all on Corellia.

### **PART 3 - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

AS the Falcon neared Corellia, Han Solo had totally forgotten his confusion over females in general, and the one boggling his mind in particular. Where the ship was headed was far more uninhabited than the other side,. This was the involuntary exile of those who had withstood the Empire's demands. If Solo had any friends left here, this is where he would find them.

This landing area was as Han remembered it from Academy days; a little overgrown now, but still useable. In the pilot's seat, his mind wandered back to earlier days. Only Chewie's jabbering brought him back to the reality of the moment. He stared at his friend. "I see it, I see it! No, it's okay, I'll take it down myself!" Leia watched from behind him with great concern.

Han cut the engines early and brought the Falcon down in a thwump,, a part of Lando's plan should anyone ask: they were only down to repair a faulty engine. The Corellian alighted from the ship first; leaving Lando and the Wookiee to shut down the engines. Leia hung back and watched as the Corellian stepped out onto his birth planet's soil.

He stopped on a gentle rise and stared off into the distance. Haltingly, he reached out and touched a nearby tree. Feelings long forgotten swelled up in him, tightening his chest and churning his stomach. Han turned back and saw the Princess watching him. He glanced back at the scene before him, then determinedly stepped toward her.

There he met not only the Princess but Chewie, Lando and an agitated 3PO. The Corellian took one look at the droid, turned and walked toward one of the rear landing gear. Lando came up to the leaning Han who nodded toward the droid. "What's his problem now?"

"He's worried about the Princess, and that landing of yours threw him across the lounge."

Han shook his head. "Shoulda thrown him outta the hatch ..." Chewie growled from the ramp. "As Chewie says," the Corellian stood straight, "it would be nice if we at least pretended this ship needed repairs." They made their way to the

underside of the ship and Han ran his hand over a panel. ",Bout how many bottles would you say?"

Lando studied the situation. "Three hundred even."

"Three hundred? I'd say closer to four." The two men glanced at each other and began dismantling the panel. Chewie roared with laughter.

"Now what are you doing!" Leia joined them.

"Huh?" Han finally turned around when she poked him. "Oh, nothing. It's just a normal bet."

"You do this often?" she asked.

"Often as we can," Lando grinned. He nodded at Han. "Kid'll never learn."

"Oh, yeah?" Han scowled. "Remember that when you pile those credits in my hand!"

LANDO counted his fifty credits into a neat pile in Han's hand. The dark-skinned man shook his head. "You set me up, didn't you?"

Han gave him a Who me?, look when Leia interrupted. "I hate to break this up, but are we going to just sit here all night?"

The Corellian stretched. "If nobody shows up soon, I'll go out and scout around. According to the General, they shoulda been expectin' us." To no one in particular he added, "I almost forgot how nice it smelled."

The enemy were now surrounding the landing area. "On the ship! Put your hands on your heads and step out slowly! One at a time! Don't try anything, we've got you covered!"

Leia glance at Han. "It sounds like a boy."

Han shrugged. "I'd rather be wrong than dead." He raised his hands and walked away from the Falcon.

Slowly the procession of four moved into the clearing. Han scanned the area, but the sun was just setting and in the dusk it was difficult to see more than a glint in the trees. Lando came up behind him. "I make it four."

"No. Five. One behind us, noise on the ship." Han said quietly.

"Usual bet?" Calrissian whispered.

The Princess moved between them. "Not now!" she seethed.

"Kindly separate. I ... I don't want to shoot you." The voice was shaky now, bravado was fading fast.

"Kid's polite." Lando stated.

"Scared, too." Han added.

"He's not the only one." Leia whispered as she moved sideways.

"Please stop talking and move." The voice called again. As Lando and Han moved apart, the bushes rustled behind them. The Corellian began to turn around when the voice warned. "Don't move!"

The same voice regained partial courage. "Whoever is in charge ... take ten steps forward!" After Han moved the required steps, two figures approached in the now total darkness. The only light was provided by a dim carbon lantern held by the shorter man.

"They're just kids." Han's mind raced.

"Who are you and why did you land here?" the taller asked.

Han peered at him. "Freighter. Got open cargo. On our way to Calaan ... threw a stud in the engine, set down here to repair it ..."

The old fashioned blaster poked Han's stomach. "You're no freighter -- not with those pants; why did you come here and who are you?" Han repeated what he had said and the kid poked him harder which caused him to stumble. "Don't hurt him!" the shorter one cried.

The Corellian regained his footing and stared at the shorter. "She's a girl!" he said to himself.

"Take his blaster," the taller one ordered. "And search him ..."

The smaller one picked Han's blaster from its holster and laid it on the ground. Gingerly she searched him and retrieved the credits he had just won, a manifest list and a communicator.

The taller one looked over the list. "Well, you do have cargo and we could use it, so we'll appropriate it."

Han frowned. "Who's in charge of your operation?"



"I am!"

"I'm talkin' about an adult." Han grinned. "Put down the blaster, sonny, you shake any more and you'll not only blow me in half, you'll break your arm!"

"Don't call me sonny,!" the boy screamed.

Wrong move. The Corellian winced. He waved his hands. "Okay, okay, kid. Calm down. You want the cargo, you can have it!"

The boy raised the blaster. "You bet we'll have it!" He levelled the gun at Han.

"No!" the girl cried. "Dell, no!" She pushed the blaster down just as he pulled the first shot and moved to Han.

The three other children came out of their hiding places with blasters drawn. The girl cried. "No! He didn't do anything!"

Han shook his head to clear it and moved to his knees. He saw the girl bent over the boy and nodded. "I could help." The others cautiously separated and Han reached the pair. The Corellian checked the boy's arm. "His arm's broken for sure ... I need a medi-pak." He watched as the girl looked at the new boy who shook his head. Han sat back on his heels. "Fine. Let him either lose his arm ... or be a cripple. Look, go get it yourselves ... or gimme the communicator and I'll call our droid to bring it." The boy with the blaster hesitated then finally agreed.

Within moments a frightened 3PO was at Han's side. He took the medi-pak from him and offered it to the girl. "Here, you don't trust me, do it yourself."

The girl whispered, "Please help him."

When the boy was made comfortable, Han sat back. "You call him Dell. His father wouldn't by any chance be named Lido?"

"Mine, too." The girl wiped her face.

"Then your name must be Cassander." Han said quietly. The girl nodded slowly. The Corellian smiled slightly. "I remember when you were born ... your father was real happy ... he had his son, and now he wanted a girl." Han leaned back against a tree, his back hurt as his mind raced to the past. "You never could pronounce your name ... I always gave your father a bad time about that!"

The girl moved nearer and stared at him. "How did I ... I say my name?"

Han shrugged. "Everybody called you by different names. You wanted your mother to call you Cass, but she always called you Cassander, your father called

you Catey, and Dell never called you anything but Cassie. Cept when he young it'd come out Tassie."

The girl studied Han's tired face. "What ... what did you call me?"

"Tandy." The Corellian grinned at her.

The girl flew into his arms. "Uncle Han!" she cried and sobbed against him.

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Leia knelt by Han. "She called you her Uncle."

Han stroked the crying girl's head and nodded. "Her father was ... is my best friend." He nodded toward the injured boy. "His, too."

Tandy looked up at the Princess and wiped her nose. "Is ... is she your wife?"

The Corellian kissed the girl's cheek. "Kinda," she said softly, "but you'll always be my best girl."

Tandy wiped her face and her sleeve. "Father will be very cross if he sees me cry." She hugged Han. "I'm so glad you're here!"

Finally, the Corellian got to his feet, unceremoniously dumping the young girl to the ground. "When am I going to get to see your father!"

Tandy stood and brushed off the seat of her pants. "I even missed that!"

As she turned to fill the others in, Han caught her hand. "Your mother?" Tandy looked at the ground and he shook her arm. "Your mother!" Somewhere inside himself, the Corellian knew the truth, but had to hear it from her. The girl looked at him and shook her head slowly. Han dropped her arm and in a violent move struck out at the tree behind him causing an explosion of bark and leaves. He leaned against the tree.

Leia moved to him, but was stopped by Tandy's hand. "Leave him alone ... he'll be all right. He just has to be alone now."

The makeshift dwellings looked dismal even in the dim light of the town fires. Through the smoky haze, the Corellian stared at a lone, tall figure coming toward him. He smiled slightly and held out his hand. "Lido."

The man frowned and searched the other's face. "Han? How cou ..." Tentatively, the older man pulled the Corellian into his arms. "You've grown!"

"You've shrunk!" Han laughed. He gazed at his old friend. "I never thought I'd see you again." The older man clapped him on the shoulder and led him into the small home.

AFTER a hot, but simple meal, Lido showed Han and Leia through a doorway, the only one which had a door. Inside was a bed Han remembered. The bed where both Dell and Tandy were born, where they probably both conceived. He lightly touched the quilt their mother had made and remembered how long it took her. It was special ... like she was. He turned over on his back as Leia came to him. She began to unbutton her top. Han reached for her. "No. Not now. I just want to hold you ... I want you to hold me." They lay together for a long while, the Princess cradled Han in her arms. He slept deeply, his breathing barely noticeable; yet he clung to her out of a mixture of need and love.

LEIA shook him awake; his eyes opened with a start. "Who? What?"

Lido shook him harder. "They've traced your ship. You must leave now ..."

Han looked at him dully. "The cargo."

"Everything's been done. We have a special ... cargo for you ... hurry up now .."  
Lido hurried out.

As the couple moved out into the cool night, the air sharpened the Corellian's instincts. Something was definitely wrong and within a few minutes, all hell broke loose. Between blaster fire and explosions, the Corellian could hear a woman scream, "They took my baby!" It suddenly became very clear to him. The people were getting their children off the planet and in so doing laying a big, fat kidnapping on him!"

Grim-faced Han nodded at Lido. The other man smiled and fired his blaster into the air. "Here they are!"

Han pushed Leia up the trail that would lead them to the Falcon and safety. All of a sudden shots were coming at body level and he shoved the Princess to one side. "Hell, now we got the real thing!"

At the ship, Lando yelled. "C'mon!" Then he, too, fired into the bushes.

The Corellian pushed Leia up the ramp behind his cover. She pulled his shirt. "They're children!"

He shoved her into the ship and fired into the small group. "They're also trying to kill us!" His last shot made contact and a boy slightly shorter than Han dropped. A voice from the jungle called a halt to the shooting. "The Prince is dead!"

Taking advantage of their enemy's retreat, Chewie readied the engines. Han turned and hesitated as he stared into fifty pairs of juvenile eyes. He stared at Leia. "Do what you can, hold em down or something, ... we're takin' off now!"

AS the stars streaked past, Han leaned back and took a deep breath. He thanked whatever gods there might or might not be that there were no Imperial cruisers, Star Destroyers, or any asteroid fields between them and their destination. Han jumped from his seat as he remembered the children. He stopped at the doorway and called back to the Wookiee. "Chewie, take us home!"

THE Corellian and Lando entered the lounge and found a very frazzled Princess dealing with various ages and various conditions of panic, including her own. Han clapped his hands and everyone quieted. "We're all goin' to a great planet ... it's gonna be one big picnic!" He began telling the children about Kashyyk as the youngest began nodding off.

Finally, Tandy poked him. Your stories always put us to sleep. Where can we?"

The Corellian led them to a hold and pulled back the top. Leia frowned. "You're not going down into the smuggling compartment!"

Han waved her off as the Wookiee lifted the cover and revealed, not a stuffy rat's nest, but a spacious enclosure which held a moderate supply of soft furs. "They'll be fine."

When all the children were settled, Tandy turned to the Princess who still held a small blonde-haired girl. "I can take her."

The Princess kissed the blonde curls and shook her head. "Oh, no, I'll take care of her."

Han and Leia walked slowly back to their quarters. "Isn't she the cutest thing you've ever seen?"

"Adorable," he muttered. "Just where is she gonna sleep?"

"With us," she answered softly.

IN the bunk, Leia laid the baby in the middle. She caressed the baby's head. "Will you turn down the light, they're bothering the baby. Get to bed, too, you're exhausted."

Han shook his head and turned down the light. He climbed into the bunk and reached over to kiss Leia. "Not now," she whispered. "You'll wake her."

The Corellian moved as close to the edge of the bunk as he dared and tried to get comfortable; the baby kicked. He finally fell asleep only to be rudely awakened by a very damp feeling on his left leg. Han got out of the bunk and nearly tripped over a chair. Something is very wrong here,, Han thought. First Leia, now a kid -- not even MY kid!,

HAN wrapped an old parka around himself and tried to get comfortable in the navigator's seat, swivelling to put his feet up on the sideboard. Damn heating unit,, he thought, once we land I'm tearin' it apart. Don't care what Chewie says -- he's got fur!, Mumbling to himself, he finally fell asleep only to be wakened by another of the Falcon's failings: a loud wail from the computer. Before he fell back to sleep, one computer received a swift kick.

THE computer sounded loudly and Han jumped in his seat not quite sure where he was. Chewie reached around his Captain and shut down the alarm. He glanced at Han who sat up straight, the parka under his chin, eyes closed. The Wookiee grunted and the man opened one eye, and slowly pulled himself out of the chair. "Take over, will ya? I'm goin' in your bunk ... I don't want nobody to wake me, got it? No, you land it ... Don't get excited, there'll be plenty of time to see your family, we ain't leavin' for a long time ... settle the kids somewhere or dump em with the garbage, I don't care ... calm down. Look, if I don't get some sleep here, I'm gonna fall on my face." Han stopped when Chewie questioned him. "No, not even the Princess ... got it?"

Grumbling past a staring Lando, he finally made his way to Chewie's quarters and sat on the oversize bunk. Shivering slightly, he rummaged in a drawer for a medi-pack and a thermometer. Finding one, he took his temperature and felt a hundred times worse. "It's impossible," he muttered, "to be this hot and freeze at the same time." He poked around in the small box and found a vial of pills which resembled anti-biotics. Not finding any water, he forced them down and crawled into the bunk. As he pulled a blanket over himself, his last thought was that he was definitely getting too old for this sort of thing.

THE natives of Kashyyk greeted the Falcon's crew and her passengers with open arms. Chewie was joyous in his reunion with his mate Malla, son Lumpy, and the massive variety of other friends and relatives. Soon a party -- complete with food -- was in progress. Wookiee-style. Leia's own joy was dampened by the missing Corellian and the anger she felt rising inside her was due to his insistence that nobody bother him -- not even her! She quieted her own annoyance and forced a smile as she aided Malla in settling the children for the night. Only Tandy seemed concerned about this latest development.

As the party atmosphere lessened, Leia decided she had had enough. She slipped away unnoticed and quickly made her way to the Falcon. Chewie's quarters were dark.

Solo was lying asleep on his back, a tight frown on his face. He looked rather pale. Leia brushed his hair back and was startled to find it soaked with sweat and his forehead burning up. She shook him slightly and he opened an eye and smiled somewhat. "Leia," he whispered.

The Princess rubbed his cheek and tapped it lightly. "Han, wake up. Look at me!"

The Corellian groaned slightly and half-opened his eyes. "I feel terrible."

She touched his cheek. "Part of carbon sickness. It'll pass." He forced a grin. She kissed his forehead, "I'll go get Lando."

CHEWIE, Lando and Leia stood in the Wookiee's quarters. "I agree with Chewie, he'd be more comfortable in Chewie's house." Leia said firmly.

"Fine," the dark-skinned man sighed. He leaned over Han and slapped him hard. "C'mon, you old pirate, talk to me!"

"I ... don't feel too good," the Corellian's eyes were glazed.

Lando grimaced as he and Chewie helped him out of the bunk. "That's a-okay, pal, we'll fix you up ... I told you this wild night life of yours wasn't good for the health ..."

The Corellian hung onto him. "Always knew the Princess would get me in trouble ..."

Lando held him tighter. "Don't go out on me, pal."

LANDO met the Princess outside Chewbacca's home. "You're shaking like a leaf." He smiled. "He'll be all right, you know. Just has to get some sleep."

Leia nodded. "I know ... it was too soon after ... I want to stay with him."

Calrissian pointed to Malla at the foot of the stairs. "Think she has the same thing in mind."

WHILE the Corellian slept, Leia perused the room he called home on Kashyyk. The books scattered here and there amazed her; she never thought of him as a reader. She chose a book and curled up in a chair near his bed, close enough to touch him. As she glanced out the shaded window into the peacefulness of the planet, she thought it would be quite a nice place to live. Birds of all colours lighted on the branches near the window, flowers released their fragrance into the air, Leia could understand why the Corellian would consider this home.

Han coughed slightly and Leia came out of her daydream. He opened his eyes and glanced at her. "How long have I been out?"

Leia kissed his forehead. "Your fever's down; that's good. You've been sleeping for three days. How do you feel?"

The Corellian reached for her hand. "Tired ... no, lazy's more like it ..." Slowly he drifted off again.

EACH day Han grew a little stronger and more energetic. During this time, the couple would talk or just sit silently. He tested his patience by teaching the Princess his favourite card game. She was a fast learner and soon they were involved in a violent disagreement concerning the rules of the game. At times the children -- Wookiee and human -- would sneak up to the window of Han's room and spy on them. During a long deep kiss, a giggle was heard outside the window. "We've got company," Han said as he kissed her neck. Leia opened her eyes. "On the right, should be right outside the window." Han said without looking at her.

Leia pushed at him. "Well, stop it!"

"Why?" he asked.

"Why!" Leia pushed him harder. "We can't go on like this with the children watching! That's why!"

Han pulled her back. "It's perfectly natural."

"Maybe where you come from," Leia broke in.

"What's wrong with the way they do things here?"

Challenged, Leia pulled herself up to her full height. "Everything, if you make love in front of children!"

"Make love!" Han was incredulous. "We weren't exactly making love, there, Princess!"

She walked away from him. "You were leading up to it."

Han followed. "I was ..." He grabbed her arm and turned her around. "You weren't so cool yourself, sweetheart."

The Princess jerked loose from his grip and stormed across the room. "Why I ever thought we could ..." Suddenly there was a loud Wookiee roar, the sound of scattering children, another louder roar, and a few whacking sounds of paw

meeting rump. Han laughed out loud as Leia glared at him. Her anger at the boiling point, she marched to the door which, surprisingly, wouldn't open. Leia pulled harder, still nothing. "The door won't open." She turned to Han.

Puzzled, he came over and leaned into the door, hard. As the Corellian bounced off on his third try, a Wookiee growl sounded from the other side. "Okay, Chewie, it's a good joke, but it's over -- open the damn door!" Chewie roared again, louder and longer. Han looked at Leia and shrugged. "He won't open it." The Corellian slid down to the floor and laughed.

"I don't see what's so funny!" Leia yelled.

Stifling his laughter, Han said, "Chewie's upset. He says he won't let us out until we quit arguing."

Leia's eyes opened wider. She banged on the door and kicked it as she screamed at the Wookiee. Han got up and walked away. The Princess turned on him. "What are you going to do?"

"Eat," he said as he rummaged through a large fruit bowl.

"OH!" she screamed and kicked the door again; Chewie roared back.

"It's no use," Han said as he munched a large apple. "He's a very stubborn fellow ... almost as stubborn as you!"

The Princess stormed over to the chair and sat in stony silence. After a while, she said, "Just what are we supposed to do now?"

Han chucked the apple core high outside the window. "We could sit around and talk, but we'd probably start arguing again ... then we'd never get outta here." He lay down on the bed and stared out the window. "Think it'd kill you to admit I'm right on occasion," he muttered.

Leia stared down at him. "I do," she insisted.

He glanced at her and laughed. "Like hell! Every time I say something or do something, you either question it or put it down!" Han swung out of bed and looked out the window. "Ah, what's the use?" He turned and faced her. "Just once, just once, I'd like to find out I was wrong on my own!" Leia touched his arm and he shook his head. Han looked around the window and straight down; finally he straddled the sill.

"What are you doing?" Leia whispered.

"Getting, outta here," he tested the thick branch.



The Princess protested. "You can't! You'll break your neck!"

Han glanced at her and frowned. "See what I mean?"

"Well ... I'm coming with you." She looked for some way to climb out the window.

"You'll break your neck," he retorted.

She glared at him. "If you don't help me, I'll scream."

Reluctantly, the Corellian picked her up and swung her over the sill. He held her tightly.

Don't tempt me,, he thought. Slowly he released Leia's legs, but held her against himself with one arm. He pushed against her, but he didn't lessen his grip. "You want to fall?" he hissed in her ear.

Leia looked below them; it was a long way down. "Oh, my," she clung to him. "Now ... now what do we do?"

Carefully, with Han in the lead, they made their way down the tree. They moved in silence: Leia bit her tongue when the urge to advise came over her. The Corellian was lost in his own conflicting emotions. Her nearness was disturbing the thinking he wanted -- needed to do. At the final branch, they both sat down. Han jumped first and turned to look up at her. "Well, c'mon." He called in a whisper.

Leia shook her head. "It's too high."

Han reached up and slid her down. For a moment they were at eye level and the feelings he had for her built up inside him again. Han firmly put her down and separated from her. Determined, he began to make his way through the jungle.

"Where are you going?" she called in a whisper as she ran after him. He didn't break his stride. "Will you slow down! Or is this a race!" The Corellian stopped and sat beneath a large, flowering tree. Leia, her breath coming in short gasps, slid to a halt beside him. "Will you say something?"

"There's nothing to say. Nothing to talk about. Even if we did, we'd probably start arguing." Han plucked a stalk of dry grass and rolled it in his hand. "I'm tired of it, Princess ... I want to do the protecting, make the decisions, in this relationship. ... You won't let me." He never looked at her.

"But ... but we love each other," Leia insisted.

"Is that enough?" Han stood and held out his hand to her. She took it and they made their way through the brush. The day and the jungle were beautiful, and the Corellian delighted in seeing Leia's reaction to the wonders of it. She gasped at the sight of a tree with blossoms of white. Gallantly, the Corellian climbed the tree to pick one.

Below him Leia cried, "You're going to kill yourself!"

After picking the largest flower he could find, Han jumped from a low branch. Leia screamed as he lay inert in the soft pine branches. She touched him gently. "Oh, Han, are you all right? Talk to me." When he didn't respond, she looked around frantically, not sure of what to do. "I'll go find Chewie," she said, close to tears. As she turned and began to rise, Han grabbed her wrist and pulled her down on top of himself. Startled, she emitted a small scream, then saw the mischief in his eyes. "Why ... you ... you ... you ..."

"What?" Han smiled as she wiggled to free herself.

The Princess smiled back and lay still. "Scoundrel," she whispered.

Han held her closer and said softly. "There aren't any children around, or do you count birds as bein' impressionable?" He reached up and brushed a curl off her eyes. Leia moved slightly against him and reached for his mouth with her own, soon they were alone in their own world.

WHILE Leia picked grass and leaves from her hair and gown, Han handed her the flower and kissed the back of her neck. "Will you help me, please?"

"Help you with what?" he muttered.

She threw a leaf at him. "I must look a mess."

"You look beautiful," he replied as he pulled some grass from his own hair.

"We can't go back looking like this," she hissed. "Everybody'll know!"

Han pulled her into his lap and kissed her nose. "Everybody already knows, sister."

"I'm not planning on telling anybody anything," he gave her his most offended look. "I've some standards, you know." Shrugging, he played with her sleeve. "It's just obvious. Don't think Chewie or Lando'd think I'd sleep in a chair."

The Princess stared at him. Finally she poked his stomach. "Will you please help me! I don't want to go back like this."

Han took his time, absently toying with her hair. "Who said we're going back?"

She turned and looked at him closely. "What do you mean?"

The Corellian helped her to her feet and took her hand. "I got somethin' to show you." He grinned slyly. "Somethin' nobody's ever seen -- not even Chewie."

SUNLIGHT poked through the dense growth overhead as they walked arm-in-arm through the thick undergrowth. "This is spooky," Leia whispered.

Han shrugged. "Yeah, I forgot it can be the first time. You get used to it. It's kinda interestin' though." He stopped. "Wait here," he moved down a little-used trail and disappeared.

Left alone, the stillness surrounding Leia was broken by an occasional bird call or a rustling noise from somewhere. "Han?" she called softly, hugging herself. A twig broke and she jumped with a start.

"Hey, sweetheart," the Corellian took her into his arms. "Take it easy ..."

Leia put her arms around him and began to cry. "Don't leave me."

"I ... won't," he said in surprise. "I won't ever leave you." Han kissed her gently. "I brought you something." Leia wiped her eyes as the Corellian split open a fruit of a type she had never seen.

They shared it as they continued down the trail which now sloped more sharply downward. The Princess slowed to a stop. "Are we going to walk all around this planet?" she asked tiredly. The Corellian smiled at her and pulled back some thick foliage; he motioned her through. Leia looked around in stunned silence and amazement: from the thick growth of plant life, they stepped into a sunlit clearing. A field of tall grasses dotted with a variety of wildflowers stretched out before them. A short distance from them was a tall waterfall which floated into a turquoise pool. She looked at Han. "It's the most beautiful place I've ever seen."

Filled with the excitement of a child showing off a prized possession, the Corellian guided her through the field of flowers. "There's more," he said eagerly.

Leia bent to savor the fragrance of a tall yellow bloom. "More?" she asked. "What more could there possibly be?"

Han stopped at the other side of the field in front of a group of tall trees. "Stay here." He ordered. "I'll be right back." He climbed the tallest one and she followed his progress until he was out of sight. "Look out below!" he called as she stepped back and a rope ladder fell a few feet in front of her. She grabbed it and looked up into the leaves. "Be right down!" he called from above.

As he joined her by the ladder, he motioned with his thumb. "Up."

"Up?"

"Uh huh. Up." Han held the ladder steady as she began her ascent. He followed close behind her. At the top, they came to a landing. Solo sat with ease, his long legs dangled over the side. "Well?" he asked anxiously.

Leia glanced around at a two-room tree house, similar but smaller than the type of Chewie's people. "Who built this?" she asked. "It's beautiful."

Han nodded happily. "Yeah, it is ... if I do say so myself."

Leia sat next to him. "You did this?"

"All by myself ... talented, ain't I?"

The Princess messed up his hair. "You going to show me around?"

"Not much to see. This is all there is. I never needed more'n this ..."

Leia sat on the bed. "I think it's beautiful," she reassured him. "Whenever did you do all this?"

Her eyes penetrated far deeper into him than he wanted and he shrugged. "First time here, I explored around and found this place ... it seemed ... I ... I did it a little at a time." He sat near her. "Was gonna fin ish it, but ... well, you know what happened." Lost in thought, he glanced around the room. "This is the one placed I've always felt safe ... one place I ... could always stay ..."

Leia glanced at him in concern. "And now?"

Han shrugged. "Maybe some day when your Alliance is runnin' the Galaxy ... when nobody cares about getting, my head anymore can't stay here too long ... somebody'll track us here sooner or later ..." He pulled hi knife and started to trim back some overgrown leaves from the window."

"Are you sorry you brought us here?"

"No," he replied as he stopped cutting, the knife held in mid-air. "A place like this needs to be shared ... with someone you ..." Han turned toward her and grinned. "Had an idea of maybe keepin' you here ... by force maybe." He shrugged. "Can't do that with the kids here. Couldn't wait to ... I just wanted you to see it, that's all." The Corellian stared out the window, "Maybe ... maybe when things get dull with the new government you'd want some place to .."

The Princess changed the subject in a desperate attempt at changing the mood. "What's all that?" she asked lightly.

Han looked at the containers she pointed to. "Clothes and junk ... what's not on the Falcon is here ..." He opened one. "The sum total of my life, sister."

She pulled out some things. "You travel light."

"Easier that way," he tried a smile and failed. He dug into the bottom of one and pulled out a couple of bottles. Uncorking one, Han tasted it and grinned. "Still good. Want some?" He searched through the piles and found a mug. "Ah ... wait a minute ..." The Princess watched as he climbed down the ladder and quickly returned. She followed him to the second room and leaned over the railing as he pulled up a scooped-out gourd full of water. After he cleaned out the mug, he filled it with fresh water and added some of the jet juice. Pleased with himself, Han handed it to her. "You like it with water."

Leia sipped the drink and gave him a push into the other room. She was darned if this, too, would look like the Falcon. When all was set right, her gown was covered in dust. "Now what?"

"You can always take it off," Han grinned. He held up his hand, quickly handed her an old shirt and pants of his own. "You can wear these until your gown dries!"

"And just where do I undress?" she glared at him. "And don't even think it!"

The Corellian pointed to himself. "Wasn't thinkin' anythin'! Look, I'll heat up this water and you can wash up ... and change. We even got soap! A class establishment!" She stared at him. "I'm goin'!" He backed up toward the rope ladder, slipped down it, then stuck his head up over the landing. "I'll just ... uh, dust the grass down here!"

THE Princess pulled up the rope ladder, then moved to where the water was warming. She lowered the handmade woven shades and gingerly undressed. The branch rustled outside and she peeked through the shade. "Rotten bird," she muttered as the blue feathered creature eyed her with animosity. Leia sniffed the soap Han had left her and groaned. Definitely military issue,, she thought. But the soap served its purpose and soon she felt refreshed. Putting on the Corellian's clothes, she rolled up the legs and the sleeves and found an old piece of rope to use as a belt. After some time, she found an old mirror, and fixed her hair as best she could, then pulled some flowers from a nearby branch: one she crushed for its fragrance, the other she tucked in her hair.

Willing herself to calmness, she moved out to the cool air on the landing and sat to wait for Han in the dusk. The beauty of the clearing invaded her being, and soon she was lost in a daydream of a future in a small treehouse.

"Hey! Throw the ladder, will ya!" Han's voice broke through her reverie. He reached the landing and turned on the lantern. "You like sittin' in the dark?" Leia shrugged and watched as he pulled up a container. "You find the dishes? I think there were some here ..."

She handed him the largest plate she had found. "What is all that?"

His eyes twinkled in the artificial light. "This establishment is nothin' but class, your Highness ... we got some vegetables, some fish, a ground bird, some fruit ... and to jazz it all up, some spices and herbs. Oh, yeah ... for the cook," he handed her a bunch of wild flowers. "They got kinda dented."

She kissed his cheek as she took the bent flowers. "Thank you."

The Corellian spun he around. "My stuff never looked that good on me!" He moved toward the other room. "Whenever you want to start dinner ... I'll go fix us some drinks."

HE returned to find her sobbing on the floor. Frantic, Han pulled her to her feet. "What happened? What's wrong?" She held on to him; her words lost in her tears. He pulled her away and smiled lopsidedly. "Hey, c'mon, Princess. I can't understand you."

She pushed away from him. "Don't call me that!"

"Sure ... Leia," the Corellian said softly and gingerly held her. "What's wrong?" She mumbled into his chest. "I didn't get that."

She moved away from him and stared at the floor. "I ... I don't know ... how ... to cook!"

Han frowned. "You cooked on the Falcon ..."

Leia shook her head, and waved her hand at the food on the platter. "All I did there was push buttons ... that ... that doesn't come with directions!" Han chuckled lightly and she clenched her fists. "Don't laugh at me!"

He pulled her close to himself. "I'm not. I'm just relieved nothin' serious happened! C'mon, I'll show you," he rubbed her back and led her to the platter. "Nothin' wrong with not knowin' how to cook ... I can't run a Rebellion."

LEIA hadn't realised how hungry she was until the Corellian settled a dish in her lap. They sat on the floor together and finished everything down to bone and seed. Outside, the night birds called to each other. Han leaned back, a satisfied smile on his face. "Dishes," the Princess poked him.

"Dishes?" he groaned. She nodded firmly and pulled his hand. Groaning louder, he let himself be pulled up to heat the water. He took the dishes from her and muttered. "You are a cleanliness nut, you know that! Never saw anybody like you in my life!"

Leia pinched him and grinned. "I should hope not."

The Corellian dumped the last of the water out the window and turned to Leia. "Now then ..."

"We'll need water for the morning," Leia smiled as she backed up.

"I'll get some in the morning," he reached for her.

Leia avoided his grasp, but grabbed his hand. "Let's go for a walk."

Han stumbled as she pulled him. "Now?"

Han helped her off the ladder and she grinned at him. "Race you to the pool!" Taken by surprise, he ran after her. He caught her just short of her goal, grabbed her wrists and wrestled her to the ground. She kicked and Han put a leg over both of hers and held her arms above her head. She kicked again. "You nerf-herder!"

A group of birds were startled by her yell and scattered from their tree nest. They flew by noisily and Han held her tighter. "Will you be quiet!"

"This is no way to treat a Princess, Solo!"

"A woman and not a Princess?" he asked. She struggled again, but he held her firmly, his body pressed against hers. "If I'm hurting you, I'll let you go ... I think all I'm hurtin' is your pride ... you just can't stop bein' a Princess, can you? I bet when you were a little girl, you always won at games ... not cause you were better, but cause you were ... are a Princess ... you always got your own way, didn't you? Even to how your precious Rebellion was run!"

"I hate you!" she glared at him.

"No, you don't," he shook his head. "You love me because ... because I don't buy your Princess garbage ... because I don't, sit up and beg when you snap your fingers ... or wait round until you're ready to throw me a bone or pat me on the head ... that's why you love me."

"I hate you." She struggled harder.

Han sighed patiently. "Do we have to go through this again? You don't hate me, you love me ... you can't hate me and still be with me like you are." He lessened his grip and she kicked again and he moved her slightly. "Besides we got a future to talk about ... you can't hate the father of your kids ..."

Leia stopped squirming. "What ... what did you say?"

"I said I intend to be the father of your kids ... but I won't be your subject ... you don't give me orders which I wouldn't follow anyway. I love you." He grinned at her.

Her defenses melted. "Oh, Han. Poor Han. You have to teach me how to cook ... now you have to teach me how to be a woman." She pulled him down and kissed him hard. She moved to bite his ear. "I do want you," she whispered hoarsely. "In any way, no one could have a better subject, than ..."

Suddenly, he pulled her into a sitting position. "Don't! Don't make a joke of this!" He shook her. "I won't go through that again!" His voice rose, and stopped as he realised where he was and who she was. Slowly he embraced her and rocked her back and forth. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He mumbled in her hair.

Leia softly touched his cheek. "Are you all right?" He nodded as he shook slightly. She brushed back his hair. "That boy, on Corellia, they called him the Prince,."

Han moved from her. "Her son probably. I killed her son ... he woulda been mine ..."

She touched him in the darkness. "I love you." The Corellian nodded and put an arm over her shoulder and led her back to their tree.

The rope ladder was pulled up and Han lowered the lantern as he moved toward the bed. He climbed in and laid his blaster by the bedside. Leia raised her eyebrows and he shrugged. "Force of habit?"

She snuggled closer to him and he held her tighter. "Some day we'll come back here." She sighed.

Han nodded slightly. "Sure'd beat the Old Spacer's Home,!" He yawned and absently rubbed her shoulder. "When you're ready to quit government and have kids ..."

Leia caught her breath and ran a finger down his arm. "Han ..." She looked up at the sleeping Corellian and sighed. "Oh, you old pirate ..."



SUNLIGHT danced in Han's mind only because it burned his open eye. He reached over -- Leia was gone. Groaning slightly, he pulled himself to the side of the bed and reached for his pants. His nose twitched at the smell of something burning, and he grabbed his shirt and raced into the other room to confront Leia.

She turned and smiled as he pulled on his shirt. "Thought I'd let you get some sleep .. I went out and got some fruit! I hope it's all right." She handed him a plate. "If it's not all right, don't tell me."

The Corellian lifted the plate and sniffed the contents. So far so good,, he thought. He cautiously tasted a mouthful then spat it out.

"You hate it!" she cried.

He shook his head. "No! It's just HOT!" He gulped down the water she handed him. "Try it without anything on it ..." he sighed as the water cooled his throat. " ... until you learn what spice is what..."

She crumpled beside him. "I can't cook ... I'll never be able to cook ..."

Han lifted her chin and grinned. "Just takes time, Leia. We got the rest of our lives."

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