

[Back To Index](#)

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## **And a Guy Like Him**

by [C. Minor](#)

There was silence in the tiny office for a full second.

"What?" Han Solo shouted in horrified amazement, half rising in his chair. "Sir, you can't do this to me!"

"Sit down, Solo," General Rieekan said tiredly. He'd just known the stubborn son-of-a-vreilt would react like this.

"What about Luke? Why can't Luke take her?"

"Luke's off planet with Rogue Squadron."

Han paused, then slumped back into his seat and ran a hand through his hair. "I don't believe this," he muttered. He looked up at Rieekan, his eyes shining with the haunted look the general had only ever before seen in prisoners of war.

"She's gonna kill me! She'll knock my head off, I know it . . ." \_Maybe I can convince him to change his mind . . .\_\_

"Her Highness understands that this reception is potentially dangerous, and that your past activities will be a great advantage should something untoward happen."

"You already told her?" Han bellowed, leaping to his feet.

Rieekan had to smile. "Yes. We, ah, thought she would be the harder one to persuade." He looked pointedly at him.

-Great,- Han thought. There was no way he could simply walk away from a challenge like that. He was, after all, Corellian.

He sighed in defeat. "Can I at least take Chewie?"

"Sorry." Rieekan shook his head. "A Wookiee's too noticeable, especially to a boarding Imperial group."

"Excuse me, but isn't Leia just a tad noticeable herself?"

"Yes, but you're not, as long as you're not accompanied by eight feet of towering Wookiee," Rieekan pointed out.

"I'm taking the Falcon."

Rieekan had counted on that. "Fine, but change the markings first."

Han grimaced. "Okay."

Rieekan chose that moment to pounce. "And you'll need to get a uniform and a haircut."

"Now, just a blasted moment!"

"Unless you'd rather I sent her in with Danken?"

*That drooling idiot?* Han thought. *Not likely.*

"Fine," he ground out through clenched teeth.

\* \* \*

"This sucks," Han Solo declared loudly, striding into the hold of the Millennium Falcon. "I officially hate my life. I'm an experienced man of the galaxy, for crying out loud. I shouldn't be subjected to this. "

Princess Leia Organa looked up from the datapad she'd been studying. Her face broke into a smile as she saw Han's uncomfortable frame wedged into an official military uniform.

"You look good," she said, trying to calm him down somewhat. Her own robes were uncomfortable, though beautiful, but Leia had had too much experience wearing them to worry at all.

"I look stupid," Han grouched, tugging at the stiff collar. "This thing's gotta be at least two sizes too small, and my feet hurt. These boots are too new."

"For an experienced man of the galaxy, you sure whinge a lot."

Han collapsed into the navigation chair next to the holochess board and began fiddling with his buttons. "Experienced men of the galaxy usually get to dress themselves." He ran a hand through his newly cropped hair. "And I'm still not over the brutal shearing your so-called 'hairdressers' gave me." He leaned forward in his seat and laid his head in his hands. "I still can't believe you agreed to get me to come with you."

"'Agreed' isn't the right word, Captain," Leia said icily. "'Gave in' would be a more appropriate term." She shrugged. "You're along for the ride now; you might as well enjoy it. Besides, it's only a diplomatic reception. I'm sure you can handle it."

"I'd better be able too - that's why they sent me in the first place, isn't it?" He sighed. "Ah, screw it. Maybe I'll get lucky and some Imperials'll crash the party." He tugged at his sleeve.

"It's not the Imperials we're worried about," Leia said. "There won't be an Imperial within twenty parsecs of the reception. We're worried about traitors and faction groups who think it'd be a good idea to take out the headstone of the Rebellion." She said it so matter-of-factly that it took Han a moment to figure out she was talking about herself.

"Oh, fine," Han said. "Like I can tell the difference between a real diplomat and a fake diplomat."

Leia smiled sweetly. "Don't worry, Captain," she said. "You don't have to think. You just have to jump in front of any blaster bolts that happen to come my way."

Han grinned. "That I can do."

A buzzer sounded in the cockpit. Han turned his head towards the sound. "Coming up on the system," he said. "Strap in. I'll go get her prepped for landing."  
\* \* \*

Han stood in the corner of the reception hall, his arms crossed, uncomfortable in the midst of an overwhelming array of diplomatic finery. He took a sip of the drink clutched in his hand, and scanned the crowd again, searching for any tell-tale signs of betrayal. As far as he could tell, it was clear; everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves and were knocking back a drink or two. Many of the diplomats had paired up and were weaving slow circles on the dance floor, which was no doubt a nice private way to discuss future plans for the Alliance. His glance settled on Leia, who fit perfectly into her princess role, and was laughing politely at some joke the senator from Camoren made that probably wasn't even funny. She looked stunningly beautiful in her white gown, and she took his breath away momentarily. Her smile was radiant, and he found himself simply staring at

her, the rest of the world fading to a faint buzz in the back of his mind. There was something about the look on her face - that simple pleasure she was taking in being able to actually be a princess for the first time in a long time - that made her even more enchanting than the sharp beauty of her features allowed.

"Enjoying the party?"

The voice snapped him out of his reverie, and he mentally cursed himself for his lack of attentiveness. He turned fractionally, and saw some senator he'd never met looking at him in a slightly disdainful way. The expression on his face immediately caused Han's hackles to rise. This guy was out for blood. He knew just as well as Han that the smuggler didn't belong here.

"Sure am," Han lied. Privately, he thought he'd never felt quite so uncultured as he did at that moment. "It's nice to be able to forget about all the worries in the galaxy for a night."

"Yes," the senator agreed. He held out his hand. "My name is Fri'vol. I'm the representative of the Seven Worlds of H'Gishi."

Han held took the offered palm. "Solo. Uh, Captain Han Solo of the main Rebel fleet." Great. A H'Gish. The H'Gishi, a short bipedal race with not-quite-human faces and a soft layer of down that covered their bodies, were renowned as a difficult species to deal with. A H'Gishi senator had to be right up there on the 'most annoying sentient's list.

"Ah." Fri'vol smiled knowingly at Han's response. "So you're the princess' . . . companion. There's been much speculation about you, young man."

Han blinked. "What?"

Fri'vol waved a hand. "Ever since you made landing in your somewhat . . . unorthodox . . . ship, there has been a constant buzz about your purpose here."

Han felt his lip twist. "There has, huh?"

Fro'vil grinned. "We've been gambling on it."

"I'll bet." Han didn't offer any further conversation in that particular area; the look on his face said clearly to drop it.

Apparently, the senator wasn't as skilled in his field as he would have liked Han to think, because he missed the rather obvious hint completely. "I must admit, I found it odd that the princess would be seen in the company of someone so distinctly different to her."

Han frowned. "I'm sorry, but I'm not too sure where you're heading with this."

Fro'vil smiled, amused at Han's presumable dullness. "I mean that you're an odd choice for the Princess' consort."

Han's eyes narrowed, then brightened in recognition. "What? Oh, no we're not together," he said hastily. "I'm just her . . . bodyguard, I guess you could say. We work together sometimes. I'm usually the one drawing fire while she gets the important work done." He grinned at himself.

"Ah, so the rumours are unfounded, then?" the senator asked. At Han's nod, he smiled. "Well, I must admit I never believed them for a second. I personally always believed her highness to be a little too cold for that sort of thing."

Han's blood temperature spiked immediately. There was only one person who got away with insulting the princess in his presence, and that was him. He was the only person she didn't seriously blow up for taking a dig at her - even if she pretended it wasn't like that most of the time. It was a privilege he took very seriously. He opened his mouth to say something.

*Watch it, he thought. Be diplomatic.*

By the time he processed that thought, Fri'vol had started up again. "She's not the most . . . sexually inviting . . . woman I've ever met," he said, smiling, immensely pleased with himself. "Don't you agree?" That set him off chuckling. He obviously thought that he was an amusing guy.

"Uh -" Han smiled inwardly, fumbling with his words, embarrassed at finding himself actually defending Leia. "I always thought she was pretty beautiful."

"Of course." Fri'vol allowed the point with a wave of his hand. "But even roses have sharp thorns. I have always had the feeling that if I tried to touch her beautiful face she'd break my hand off."

*Are you kidding? \*I'd\* break your hand off.* "Look, don't you think it would be more fitting to avoid talking about Leia's . . . assets . . ." Han inwardly grimaced at his poor choice of words.

Fri'vol sidled in closer. "There's a rather amusing saying about her that goes something like 'I'd rather cuddle Darth Vader.'"

*Actually, I'd probably snap your neck,* Han thought. "Funny," he said blandly.

Fro'vil laughed harder. "She's about as attractive as a wild Pathenon whore."

As quick as a snake's bite, Han grabbed the front of the senator's shirt and hauled him off his feet with one hand. He grinned viciously. "Hey, you know what? I've got an idea - you say one more thing about my princess and I'll rip your arm off. What d'you think about that? Huh?"

Fro'vil got a look at Han's eyes, saw he was deadly serious, and held his hands up. He gave a sickly smile. "My apologies, Captain Solo," he said. "I had no idea you felt so strongly for the princess. I'll watch my words in the future."

"You better," Han snapped. He dropped the senator ungraciously.

Fro'vil dusted his shirt off indignantly. "Well," he said, affronted. "I can see you two suit each other perfectly. Though, actually, I feel somewhat sorry for Leia having to keep such pathetic company."

"And I feel sorry for your wife, jerk-off. Now why don't you go bug someone else before I get frustrated and have to do something you'll regret later." He glared at the senator until he turned his back, then gave into a chuckle.

*Well, that was fun, he thought. Maybe these parties had their uses after all.*

\* \* \*

Leia laughed politely at the Camoren senator's joke, inwardly thinking that the guy was probably the most unimaginative and least amusing person she'd ever met, and flicked a glance at Han, who was quietly watching her from across the room, making sure she was safe. As much as she hated to admit it, he did look pretty handsome in that uniform.

She blinked, bringing herself back into the present, as a new senator joined her little circle. So many people had wanted to talk to her tonight, and she fought to remember his name. "Graffen," she finally said, with a companionship she didn't feel. Ex-Imperial, the man was nicknamed 'the butcher' because of his relentless pursuit of the enemy without regard to his men. She shook his hand. "How are you?"

"Fine, now that I know that you are still around to keep us together," Graffen said warmly.

Leia nodded her thanks. "How are things in your sector going?"

"The usual," Graffen said with a hint of frustration. "One step forwards, two steps backwards. And yourself?"

"About the same, but without the forwards part," Leia said with a smile. "We seem to lack the ideal freedom fighter - one that is not too afraid to take action but not so impulsive that he sacrifices himself uselessly."

Graffen nodded in tired agreement, then glanced past her and pointed. "Your companion doesn't seem to have too much trouble taking action."

Leia turned just in time to see Han haul the smaller senator Fro'vil he'd been talking to completely off the ground and snarl something threatening at him. Leia felt her mouth drop open. "Oh, Han," she said, exasperated . . . then found she had to laugh. She shook her head and turned back to Graffen. "Forgive him. He's Corellian, and he comes from a rough background."

"I don't doubt it," Graffen said. He looked at her curiously. "How did you become acquainted with the likes of him, anyway?"

"In typical Corellian fashion - a gallant but ill-planned rescue mission aboard the Death Star."

"Han Solo?" Graffen said, the light of recognition dawning in his eyes. "That's Han Solo?"

"Yes." Leia frowned. "Why?"

Graffen harrumphed deep in his throat - that specialized kind of disapproving cough that only the Imperials and royalty could pull off - and straightened his shoulders. "Well," he said. "I've heard a lot about this Captain Solo, and I must say that most of it was negative. However, I chose not to believe it considering I respect you, princess, and know that you would only consider the courtship of someone as civilized as yourself, and -"

"I beg your pardon?"

" - to all appearances, this Captain Solo seems to be a typical low-life, so, frankly, Princess Leia, my opinion of you has -"

"What?" Leia interrupted. "Hold on. What are you talking about?"

Graffen looked confused. "Why, your pairing to Han Solo, of course."

Leia looked at him blankly.

Graffen waved an arm uncomfortably. "It's been the object of much speculation since you arrived here in his ship. Everybody knows about it, Princess."

"Really?" Leia asked sarcastically. "Well, that's funny, because I seemed to have missed that particular relationship all together."

"I . . . oh. Well, I must say, that's a relief. It seems that Captain Solo -"

"Captain Solo is a kind and brave man," Leia interrupted Graffen firmly. "I wouldn't want anyone more as my bodyguard and travelling companion, and I'll ask you to refrain from insulting him further before I say something that you'll regret later."

Graffen looked at her vacantly, his mouth working as he tried to come up with something to say. Leia smiled politely at him.

"Thank you for the lovely conversation," she said, "but I seem to have had my fill of ugly rumours. If you'll excuse me." She turned and started towards Han before any of them could answer, determined to salvage her and Han's dignity by stopping him from killing someone before the night ended.

\* \* \*

Han looked around as he felt a light touch on his shoulder. It was Leia. He frowned. "Hey," he said, levering himself away from the wall he'd been leaning against. "You okay?"

Leia smiled at him. "I'm fine," she said. "But we need to talk."

"Okay." He looked around for a safe place to discuss whatever it was she wanted to discuss with him. "You dance?"

"I - what?"

"C'mon." He grabbed her hand and led her on to the dance floor. The band was playing a soft waltz that Han faintly recognised as being Pevurian. "You know this one?"

"Yes . . ."

"That's good," Han said, not giving Leia a chance to act on her doubts. "Because I sure as hell don't." He stood for a second, then took Leia's hand in her own, placed the other at the small of her back. Almost reluctantly, Leia started moving, leading him in the dance. Han remembered some of the formal dance training from his 'Imperial gentleman' days and followed as best he could. They danced in silence for a few moments.

"You learn quickly," Leia said finally.

"Thanks," Han said, pleased. "So. What did you want to talk to me about?"

"Did you know about that rumour that you and me are . . ."

"Madly in love?" Han supplied with a chuckle. "Yeah, that one caught me off guard a little myself."

"Senator Graffen read me the riot act for slumming it." Leia's lip twisted and she looked at him. Han didn't reply. He didn't have to - she could see the soft hurt in his eyes.

"Ah," he said after a moment.

She leaned in a little closer. "I told him where to stick it," she whispered.

Han grinned and squeezed her hand. "That's my girl," he murmured. "And, by the way, if I'm a two bit bar-hack, you're a sexless icy spinster."

"Fro'vil?"

"Yup. Want me to kick his ass?"

Leia grinned. "Thanks, but no thanks. If I got offended anytime anyone here insulted me I'd never be able to get out of bed in the mornings."

"Damn," Han said in mock disappointment.

"Unhappy? Did you want to start a brawl?"

"Mmm." He smiled down at her, found himself looking into her eyes. "To tell the truth, I was kinda lookin' forward to bodyguardin' you," he murmured, and the rumbling of his voice made her knees tremble. Suddenly, she became aware of him, more completely than she ever had before. She could feel his strength in the touch of his hands, in the movement of his feet, the light trace of his breath. He flooded into her senses, and it overwhelmed her.

Instinctively, Leia wrapped her arms around him, rested her head on his chest. Han paused, startled. "Hey, what's this?" he asked.

Leia only held him, and didn't answer. Bemused, Han wrapped his arms around her waist. "Leia?"

No answer.

"Princess?"

"You feel safe," Leia said simply.

Han didn't know what to say to that, so he just held her lightly. He chuckled into her hair. "What a way to convince the old bastards that we're not interested in each other, huh?" he said, and Leia laughed softly. The vibration of her voice against his chest caused a sharp pang in his heart. A fierce protectiveness welled up inside of him, and he held her tighter.

They danced in silence for a long time, oblivious to who saw them.

Eventually, Han took a deep breath and opened his eyes. He glanced around the room, then down at Leia, at her beautiful face, and stared in wonder at the simple elegance of the hand he held in his own.

"It's a pity we're totally incompatible," Han whispered, as if talking to himself. "Otherwise I really think we coulda had something going."

Leia didn't answer.

**end**

[Back To Index](#)