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## THE COURTSHIP OF PRINCESS LEIA - by Jessica Ferroni & Laura Tarzia

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This story is an "alternate" version of Dave Wolverton's novel "The Courtship of Princess Leia". For those that haven't read the book, it is the story of how Han and Leia got married (even though about 80% of the story is about Luke). In the novel, Isolder, a handsome prince from the mysterious and wealthy planet Hapes, appears to challenge Han for Leia's affections. She is seriously considering his offer, but Han kidnaps her and takes her to Dathomir, an isolated planet which he won in a Sabacc game. Isolder of course, gives chase. They all have a nice little adventure on Dathomir, and Isolder falls in love with a girl he meets there, leaving Leia to Han. All in all, we think it's a pretty silly sort of novel. The characterisations are shockingly bad and Wolverton has apparently no idea what the word romance means. So, we decided to write our own version and this is what we came up with. Our story picks up halfway through the novel's third chapter. Leia and Han are in the Falcon arguing about Isolder, who has just arrived and asked Leia to marry him, as well as offering her priceless gifts and the opportunity for Hapes to join the New Republic.

Enjoy.....

"I can't believe this," Leia said. "How could you even think that? If things were so terrible in the Hapes cluster, don't you think we'd see defectors, refugees? Nobody ever leaves."

"Maybe it's because they can't get out," Han said. "Maybe those Hapan patrols don't just keep out the troublemakers."

"That's absurd," Leia said. "You're paranoid."

"Paranoid, huh? What about you, Princess? Have a few baubles and trinkets so blinded you that you can't see straight?"

Leia stared angrily at Han, wondering how she could have ever loved him. Of all the arrogant things to say.

"How can you say that about Isolder? You're just jealous!"

Han glanced at her, eyes wide. "Hey, I wasn't the one who mentioned Isolder here, Sweetheart." His voice softened. "Listen, Leia, all I'm saying is--"

"I don't care what you're saying," Leia told him, hurt. He had no right to be so suspicious of the Hapans! Just when they were finally starting to come out of their shell. The last thing she needed was to have Han mistrust them like he did. "Han," she said gently, "I know you don't trust the Hapans, but I do."

"Oh, that's just great," Han interrupted. "Now I suppose you're going to go off and marry their prince."

"I don't know him that well," Leia started, but she was again interrupted by an increasingly frustrated Corellian,

"So, you're saying if you *did* get to know him better, then you would consider marrying him? What about us, Leia? You and me?"

"Han, all you ever think about is yourself!" Leia shot back, becoming irritated herself. "Think about what this could mean for the New Republic."

"The New Republic?" he asked disbelievingly. "What about you? Is this what you want?"

Leia glared at him. "If you'll excuse me," she said icily, "I have a dinner to attend." She turned her back on him and he watched her go.

*\*You could have handled \_that\_ a little better.\**

The next morning, Leia's door chimed. Han Solo stood there, and he gave her a tired, apologetic smile.

"Leia, can I come in?" he asked. Leia hesitated a brief second. She was still angry at him for being so suspicious, but she realized that after so many years of trusting no one, she couldn't expect Han to just drop the habit overnight. She stepped back and gestured for him to enter.

"Can I get you something?" she asked.

Han shook his head. "No...." He sighed. "Leia, we need to talk."

"Han--" Leia began.

"Leia, listen, I wanted to apologize. You're right, I don't know the Hapans well, but, you don't either, Sweetheart! One week does not count--Leia, think about this," he pleaded.

Leia felt the anger start to grow within her again. How dare he come in here like this? Dinner with Isolder had been wonderful, reminding Leia of the days before she had devoted herself to the Rebellion. It had reminded her of the formal dinner occasions on Alderaan, not so very long ago. Isolder had been polite and charming, and so many things Leia felt Han could never, ever be. Isolder was a prince of many worlds, and Han was....a scoundrel. There were so many reasons, so many people convincing her that she should marry the prince. But Leia knew she still needed time to think.

"Han, did you come here to apologize, or to try and convince me not to marry Isolder?"

"Leia!" Han said, astounded, "You've only known him for two days!"

Leia frowned. "Han, I don't need you to tell me what to do,"

"Leia, I love you," he said quietly, pleadingly. Leia turned away so Han wouldn't see the tears welling in her eyes. She felt horrible at herself for arguing with him. Suddenly Leia felt tired and worn out.

"Han, go away," she said softly. She couldn't bear for him to see her cry, not like this.

"What??" he asked, not sure if he'd heard her correctly.

"Go away," she repeated. Han froze as he was coming to wrap her in a comforting embrace, reassure her that everything would work out.

"Fine," he said, and the pain he couldn't quite conceal came through in his voice. "Fine, you want to marry Isolder, then go ahead. There's

nothing I can do to stop you." His voice hardened and his hazel eyes flashed cold steel. "Goodbye, Leia."

He stalked out the door, leaving her staring after him in shock and disbelief. He didn't care. He felt as if his whole world had just collapsed around him. He had given Leia everything he had, had loved her more than his own life. Now she was telling him to get lost. Would he always be alone? He laughed mirthlessly to himself. Probably. It just wasn't fair.

He barely made it back to his apartment before he slumped into a chair, hurt and angry, and too drained to do anything more for a moment. All the months chasing Zsinj had taken their toll on him; he was so exhausted. Han closed his eyes, willing the pain away, and made a split-second decision. He couldn't argue anymore. Han grabbed his duffel bag from the closet and began stuffing the few belongings in the small rooms into it. Then he paused and glanced around the bare room, tossed his door card into the middle of the room, and headed for the Millennium Falcon.

\* \* \* \*

Han grabbed the box of hydrosplanners from its place on the workbench, and roughly pried up one of the deckplates, the one covering the hyperdrive. After leaving the ship for so long, Han and his Wookiee co-pilot, Chewbacca, had wanted to check over every inch of the ship to make sure she hadn't been damaged by a careless technician.

Han set to work on the hyperdrive. The inspection/repairs *should* only take a few minutes, but nothing, especially the touchy hyperdrive, was ever certain with his beloved Falcon.

Chewbacca was in the overhead compartment, checking the power couplings.

"Chewie?" Han called up hesitantly. The Wookiee's answering growl reverberated from above. Han paused and took a deep breath.

"Chewie, I'm leaving."

Chewbacca growled quickly.

"Yeah, well," Han answered, "We decided to part ways,"

Chewbacca moaned mournfully. He knew his friend wasn't stupid, but he was extremely stubborn. If the Corellian was serious, that meant the Wookiee had a choice to make. He growled a concerned question.

"Aw, Chewie, I'm alright," Han assured him, and himself. "Listen, Chewie, you know, um, you know you don't have to come. You can stay if you want, or go to Kashyyyk...."

Chewbacca responded with a stern bark.

"I know," Han replied, "But you've fulfilled your lifedebt more than once, pal. I mean, I don't want to take this from you. You can stay."

That made up Chewbacca's mind, though he seriously doubted he would have chosen otherwise. The Wookiee's answer echoed throughout the Falcon. Han grinned, welcoming the relief the movement brought. "Sure, Chewie," he answered. So then, Kashyyyk was their first stop, for a visit, then the two would continue on. Han didn't really mind the stop; it would make his co-pilot happy, and Han rather liked seeing Chewbacca's mate, Malla, and his son, Lumpy. Besides, they wouldn't have to decide where to go for awhile yet.

Han sighed, the moment of happiness gone, and the frustration returned.

So what *\*were\** they going to do now? Their credits wouldn't last forever. They certainly couldn't go back to smuggling. Wouldn't that be ironic? General Han Solo, hero of the New Republic, resigns and returns to his old line of work, smuggling. Han smiled at the thought. Oh well. They had awhile to decide, anyway. He would have liked to say goodbye to Luke, though, but the kid was off searching for lost Jedi records or something, and Han was in a hurry to leave. He knew that he just couldn't stay here, knew it wasn't possible. He'd miss them, though. Even Threepio.

But he couldn't change anything now.

Han sighed tiredly and threw himself into his work.

Chewbacca knew. The big Wookiee knew exactly the reason Han Solo was leaving. And if he hadn't had more respect for Leia Organa, he would have pulled her arms out of their sockets. Well, not that he would have really, but he was angry at her carelessness. Han had lowered his defenses for her, Chewbacca knew that. Never before had he lowered those carefully maintained walls, for no one, not even Salla Zend. But Salla had only been

a friend--Leia had been so much more to the Corellian. Chewie finished with the power couplings and lowered himself through the hole in the ceiling, landing with a soft thud. Han glanced up from his work as his co-pilot appeared. Chewbacca frowned. Han seemed his normal self, but the Wookiee could detect the fatigue and pain in the pilot's eyes. Chewbacca patted his partner's head with a shaggy arm and replaced his tools in the proper bins.

"Okay, Chewie," Han said, "I think we're about ready." He looked at his first mate seriously. "You don't have to come with me, you know." Chewbacca barked a sarcastic comment.

"Whaddaya mean, `I wouldn't make it out of the system without you'??!" Han demanded. "You, my friend, are having delusions of grandeur," he informed the Wookiee. Chewbacca snorted and growled another comment.

"All right, all right," Han conceded. "You win. This time," he added. Chewbacca woofed happily and motioned for Han to follow him to the cockpit. He was eager to see his family, and just to be flying the Falcon again after so much time away. Han slid into the pilot's chair and pulled on his headset as they quickly ran through the preflight. This accomplished, he called Port Control.

"Control, this is Millennium Falcon requesting liftoff clearance,"

"Millennium Falcon, you are free to go. Clear skies, General. And good luck to you." Han smiled a little at the sound of Wedge Antilles' clear voice. Wedge had been stuck doing an assortment of odd jobs as he tried to reform the legendary Rogue Squadron.

"Thank you, Port Control," he replied, "Acknowledged. Clear skies, Wedge."

From her grand window overlooking the city, Leia Organa watched as the Millennium Falcon lifted off gracefully and disappeared into the heavens above.

Han sat at the tall dinner table with Chewbacca and his family, his long legs dangling just slightly off the floor. The meal wasn't bad at all, some spicy meat and vegetable dish.

At least, Han fervently hoped that was what it was. You never could tell with some of the recipes Chewie had programmed into the Falcon's computer.

The trip to Kashyyyk had been short--about two days--and relatively quiet. Malla had had dinner waiting when they arrived. She had been thrilled to see her husband again, and Han, too. She treated Han as a member of her own close family, and she loved him dearly. And as reluctant as Han may have been to admit it, he loved Chewie's family, too. Malla was the closest thing he could remember to a mother, fussing over him eating his dinner.

After dinner, he decided to go outside for awhile to clear his head. As much as he loved space travel, spending two days straight in the Falcon had him wishing for some fresh air; fortunately, he wasn't afraid of heights.

Han glanced up at the stars, and was filled with a deep sense of longing. Han Solo longed for the freedom of the skies and the call of the stars. It was incurable, it was in his blood.

The Corellian sighed and sank to a seated position, and stayed there far into the morning hours. He missed Leia.

Chewbacca watched his friend from inside, one arm wrapped lovingly around his wife's shoulders. He, too, felt the stars beckoning him. But it was good to be home for awhile.

Lumpawarump stole softly into the living room, where the sound of gentle snoring was emanating from a blanket-covered mound on the couch. Trying carefully to be quiet, he made his way towards the kitchen.

"Morning, Lumpy," the blanket mumbled in the small Wookiee's general direction. Lumpy barked a cheerful good morning and continued on his way, this time a little bit noisier. The pilot stretched his tall frame and brushed the sleep from his eyes, yawning slightly as he did so. Lumpy paused in the kitchen doorway to ask a question.

"Yeah, fine," Han assured him. Han had declined the use of Lumpy's room, saying that between the couch and the Millennium Falcon, he would be just fine.

Later, Han and Chewbacca were seated at the table, sipping something warm from wooden mugs. The two were deep in the process of discussing their next move. They had stayed on Kashyyyk for nearly a month.

"I think we should definitely check in on old Badure," Han was saying. "The New Republic had us running around so much that we haven't kept in contact with a lot of people."

Chewbacca growled his suggestion.

"That's right," Han agreed. "We can't forget her. Oh, and I got a call from Lando the other day, an invitation, sort of. He said he'd heard something about our, er, departure from the New Republic, and asked us to stop in and see what we think of his latest scheme." He grinned wryly at Chewie's moan. "Aw, c'mon, Chewie--how bad can it be?"

Chewie hugged Malla and Lumpy, and then Malla hugged Han--despite his loud protests--lifting him nearly off the floor in her crushing embrace. Han ruffled Lumpy's fur and admonished the young Wookiee to behave himself, then he and his co-pilot entered the Falcon. As Chewbacca watched out the window, Han touched his friend's arm gently.

"You know you can stay, pal. You don't have to come if you'd rather stay. I understand."

Chewbacca's roar rattled the cockpit windows, and Han smiled.

"I am not trying to get rid of you!" he protested. "I just want to be sure you know that you don't have to come."

Chewbacca growled smugly.

"All right, all right," Han said. "I get the point! Let's go."

They accomplished their individual tasks with the skill and speed of much practice, each relying on the other to do their job perfectly. They had agreed, then, to see what Lando Calrissian was cooking up, although Han knew he still wouldn't be able to set eyes on the magnificent Cloud City without feeling just a touch of nervousness.

\* \* \* \*

The comm beeped and Han grinned at Chewbacca, exulting, "Ha! Lucky for you--now don't touch the game! I'll be right back, then I'll finish you off. Told ya I'd win!" he joked triumphantly.

Chewbacca growled and bared his fangs, threatening to tear Han's arms from their sockets.

"Yeah?" Han smirked. "You wouldn't make it out of the system without me!" He slid into the chair in front of the communications board and flicked on the comm.

"Han, old buddy!" came Lando's voice, and Han sighed. It wasn't that he didn't like Lando, but the man could be *\*so\** annoying at times.

"Hey, Lando," he responded. "Invitation still up?"

"Of course," Lando said cheerfully. "You and Chewbacca taking a break from the New Republic?" Han smiled a little at Lando's method of approaching a touchy subject. Lando knew full well of the two's departure from the New Republic. He didn't know *\*why\**, though, and he was itching to find out.

"You could say that," Han replied.

"Is Leia with you?" the gambler asked. Han's shoulders slumped. He'd really hoped Lando wouldn't mention that.

"Don't even ask," he said tiredly.

"Well, you know, you and the Wook are always welcome here, at a discounted rate," Lando said.

"Yeah," Han snorted, "and what happens when you lose the place in a Sabacc game?" he joked. He could hear Lando's sigh over the comm, then dead silence for a moment. A horrible thought struck Han.

"Lando, you *\*didn't\** lose Cloud City in a Sabaac game, did you?"

Lando laughed uneasily.

"Seriously, Han, after my, um, `sudden departure', Lobot took over the City. He's been doing a pretty decent job, and I was thinking I might like

a change of scenery--See, that's where you two come in. I've got this new idea--"

"You lost it in a Sabacc game, didn't you?" Han interrupted. He could almost hear the squirm in Lando's voice.

"No, Han, I didn't....well, sort of," the gambler said, "Now, anyways--"

"Lando...." Han said sternly.

"Han, do we have to go into this?" Lando asked. His sigh sounded over the comm. "Something about paperwork," he mumbled. "I didn't want to mess with it, so I risked the City, planning to lose and walk away with some nice profits."

"And?" Han prodded.

"I ended up with another mining operation. I'm just not as good as I used to be." His tone grew pitiful. "And look at you--settling down, practically rolling in cash....We're just getting old, Han."

Han snorted. "Lando, I'm thirty-four. You're thirty-five. That's not old. Quit feeling sorry for yourself."

That actually brought a laugh from Lando. "You're right, Han. Sorry. It's just those old days--before we were respectable--seem like so long ago. You remember Tanaab?"

Han smiled. That one had been close. Han himself had almost lost his life that day. Only quick thinking and piloting by Calrissian had gotten them out of that one.

"Yeah, Lando. I remember."

Cloud City rose before the Falcon, a majestic spiral against the seething red backdrop of the sky. They got landing clearance with no trouble this time--which didn't help Han's nervousness any--and were guided to a platform by a pair of identical Cloud Cars. Lando Calrissian was waiting when they departed the Falcon, and he laughed at Solo's apparent unease.

"Calm down, Han. No tricks this time, I promise."

Han frowned, and Lando slapped him on the back good-naturedly.

"Come on," he said, "let's go get a drink. My techs can get the Falcon refueled, so it'll be ready when you two leave."

Han glanced at Lando, slightly uneasy. "You seem like you want to get rid of us already," he said. Lando looked nervous.

"Didn't you know? Han, you have a price on your head that's worth more than the whole Cloud City and the Tibanna Gas inside! What did you do this time?"

Han ignored the question. "That's what you're concerned about?"

Lando nodded worriedly.

"That's nothing new, Lando, believe me," Han assured him. He paused, then abruptly switched subjects. "If you lost the City in a Sabacc game, how come you're still here?"

Lando waved his hand carelessly. "Repo procedures take time, Han." Lando grew serious. "Han, is it true?" he asked the silent Corellian, "Did you resign your commission?"

Han stared straight ahead, avoiding Lando's stern gaze. "Yeah, it's true. I couldn't have stayed if I'd wanted to,"

"But what about Leia?" Lando asked. "You two had a real future going for you."

Han just stared ahead, refusing to answer. Beside him, Chewbacca remained quiet.

They walked in silence for a few moments, then Lando gratefully announced,

"Here we are." He indicated a doorway. "Best Ufen Wine on Cloud City." Han grimaced at the mention of Lando's favorite drink, a concoction that could knock a Bantha out with its clinging sweetness. Chewbacca voiced his displeasure at the drink.

"Sure, Lando," Han responded half-heartedly. "Whatever."

Lando led them to a booth in the rear and seated himself with a flourish. After they had placed their orders, he looked sternly at Han.

"All right, Han. What happened with Leia? I've never seen you look so depressed. You've been happier surrounded by a dozen trigger-happy Imps," he chided. "And you wouldn't have just resigned like that--you and Leia have had arguments before,"

Han sighed. "I suppose you've heard of Hapes?"

"Of course I have," Lando said. "Who hasn't?"

A half an hour and two glasses of Ufen Wine later, Lando stared somberly at the Corellian across him. Han hadn't touched his drink yet, his usual spiced Corellian Ale, he just stared at the amber liquid as he spoke tonelessly of Leia and Isolder.

"Han," Lando said, "I'm sorry. If I'd have known...."

Han waved a hand dismissively. "Don't worry about it." Lando stood and yawned, and checked his wrist chrono.

"Listen, I have to finish up some work before I turn in. You want me to show you where your rooms are?"

Chewbacca growled an affirmative, but Han shook his head.

"Nah, I'd like to finish my drink first. If you tell me where it is, I can find it." Chewbacca barked a question.

"No," Solo told him, "I'll be fine. Go ahead. I still have to get my duffel off the Falcon." Chewbacca growled insistently

"Yes, Chewie," Han calmed his friend. "Listen, if I don't show up in half an hour, I'll be at the Falcon, okay? Listen, this bounty thing is nothing to worry about. It's not like this is the first time, Chewbacca."

Chewbacca nodded reluctantly. Lando gave Han directions to his room, and the two started off, leaving Han alone with his drink. He drained the rest of it and left the cantina. Cloud City looked magnificent at night, Han thought as he strolled quickly to the landing platforms. He pressed the code into the pad by the door and walked through the arch to where the Falcon was resting gently on her landing struts. He unlocked the ship and entered his small personal quarters, grabbing the duffel from his bed and slinging it over his shoulder.

Han paused as he was leaving the tiny room, and turned back to the bed. He reached into the alcove by the pillow and pulled out a small holo of Leia Organa, and looked at it for a moment. His eyes burned, perhaps with tears, as he returned the holo to its place. As he locked up the Falcon, he heard a noise behind him. His hand snaked down slowly toward his gunbelt, just in case.

The cold muzzle of a blaster gently touched the nape of his neck, freezing the movement.

"Don't move, Solo," a voice hissed in his ear. Han shuddered a little at the voice. It was the voice that had haunted him since the fateful mission to Ord Mantell. The voice he remembered in his nightmares.

Shirr Tayin.

"Tayin, Jabba's dead, and so's Vader. I'm not worth anything anymore." Han hoped he sounded convincing, but after what Lando had mentioned about a bounty, he wasn't sure talking would help. Tayin laughed, and Han shivered. That laugh, the laugh that had grated over Han's ears as Tayin had held Leia with a gun pressed to her head, offering to trade her for Han.

"You have forgotten Warlord Zsinj so soon, Solo?"

Han swore softly under his breath. This was bad. If Tayin managed to get Han to Zsinj, Han was as good as dead. It was times like this when he regretted speaking without thinking. Speaking without thinking was something he did quite often, and when he did, it usually got him into trouble. Zsinj hadn't exactly been pleased with his flippant, "Kiss my Wookiee!" remark.

Tayin relieved Han of his weapons, including his boot knife, and Han swore again, mostly for lack of a better plan at the moment. Tayin shoved Han toward the door.

"Move," he ordered. But before they could make it any further, the door hissed open and Chewbacca and Lando entered. The Wookiee had gotten worried about his partner when Han had failed to return in the allotted time. He knew Han could take care of himself, but upon learning of the enormous bounty on Han's head by Zsinj, he had demanded to be taken to the Falcon. As adept as he was at most everything else, the Wookiee had a poor sense of direction. Tayin quickly relocated the muzzle of his gun from Han's neck to his temple so the two could see it clearly.

"Freeze," he instructed them. "One step, and I'll blow his brains out."

Chewbacca and Lando froze obediently, sharing a helpless look. They were too late.

"Good," Tayin said approvingly. "Now lay down your weapons, and kick them over here."

As Chewbacca and Lando complied, Han thought fleetingly of Leia. She would probably be making wedding preparations by now, getting ready to marry Isolder. The thought suddenly made Han furious.

Tayin frowned as he felt Solo stiffen beside him. He could feel the anger radiating out from the man, and suddenly in one swift movement Solo had dropped and lashed out at him, causing Tayin's blaster to fire uselessly into the air as they fell. Tayin cursed at himself for being distracted by the other two. Solo was on top of him instantly, wrestling for the blaster. As he saw Han kick out at the bounty hunter, Chewbacca scooped up his bowcaster, angling frantically for a clear shot. Lando paged for help as Chewie howled a warning to Han, but the Corellian either didn't hear or didn't care. He was too busy swinging at Tayin. The bounty hunter's leather outfit prevented Han from doing any serious damage, but he managed to knock the blaster from Tayin's hand and it skittered across the ground. Lando looked at Chewie.

"What the hell is he doing?" he yelled above the noise.

Chewbacca roared a reply. Han wasn't thinking clearly, and that meant trouble.

"Freeze!" Lando shouted, waving his small blaster. Neither Han nor Tayin heard him. Chewbacca ran toward Tayin to pull him off his partner as Lando watched, unsure of what to do. Wait a minute, Tayin looked like he had a....

"Han!!" Lando yelled, "Look out! He's got a knife!"

Han hesitated for a second, confused. He could hear Lando yelling about something, but couldn't make out the words.

Tayin felt Solo's attack lessen slightly as the pilot tried to comprehend the other man's words. The bounty hunter took advantage of Solo's momentary distraction, and pulled the knife fully out of its wrist sheath.

Han jumped back as he saw the glint of metal in Tayin's hand, and the slash that would have pierced his heart only sliced across his ribs. Han

gasped in pain and staggered to his feet, eyes searching for the dropped blaster. He dove for it, gaining another slash almost fully across the length of his shoulder blades. Han snatched the blaster up, turned, and fired. Tayin dropped with a howl, clutching his leg. Han was instantly on his feet, ignoring the burning pain from his wounds, and hauled Tayin upright, pressing the blaster to the man's temple and pushing him roughly against the wall.

"I don't like bounty hunters," he said darkly. The doors hissed open and Lando's belated security team entered. They pried a glaring Han away from Tayin and cuffed the bounty hunter. Lando could have sworn he saw Tayin smirking as he was led away. He dismissed the thought as he reached Han and Chewbacca. Chewbacca was bellowing accusedly at Han, who was leaning heavily against the wall to keep his balance.

"Han, that was a damn stupid thing to do! What the hell were you thinking?" Lando asked disbelievingly. Han shrugged tiredly, his muscles already aching. The knife wounds burned where he had had been slashed, and the blood was seeping through his shirt. Lando frowned.

"We'd better have those taken care of," he said, concern edging into his voice. His friend did not look well.

As they started for the medcenter, Han suddenly stiffened and froze, gasping slightly. Chewbacca growled, concerned.

"Han?" Lando asked worriedly, "are you okay?" Han didn't answer, still staring ahead glassily, breathing hard. Then a shudder ran through him and he staggered backwards, only just managing to right himself before the Wookiee grabbed him.

"Ch-Chewie..." he whispered. "I -" He squeezed his eyes shut and put a hand to his head, then before anybody knew what was happening, folded to the ground in a heap, just barely missing cracking his head on the hard permacrete as Chewbacca reached out his long arms to catch his now-unconscious friend. He laid Han down gently on the ground. Han's face had gone white and he lay, unmoving, as Chewbacca examined the knife wounds on his ribs. They had swollen and colored to a darkish purple hue. Without a sound, Chewbacca picked up Solo as if he were a child, and ambled off quickly. Lando paused a brief second, stooping to grab Tayin's knife where it lay, forgotten, beside the Falcon.

Han Solo could feel nothing, could see nothing, except a distant memory, as distant as his beautiful Leia....

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I could feel Leia tense beside me, and I knew the disgust showed on my face. I think it was at that moment I decided that, if I lived through this, I would stick with the Rebellion.

"Looks like you fixed us real good," I spat. "My \*friend\*--" With the last ounce of strength I could muster, I threw myself at Calrissian. My fist connected with his face, sending him to the ground, then a flash of blinding pain streaked across my vision as a Stormtrooper's laser rifle slammed into my back. I heard Lando shout something, but I was too stunned to move. I could barely breathe.

"I'm sorry I can't do more, but I've got my own problems," Lando was muttering. I pulled together my strength for one last retort.

"Yeah, you're a real hero," I said with as much sarcasm as I could manage.

As Calrissian and the troopers left, Leia and Chewie helped me off the floor. Leia smiled gently.

"You certainly have a way with people," she chided. I tried a smile, to let her know everything was going to be okay, but I think I was trying to reassure myself, too.

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They watched silently as the medics worked frantically to save Han's life. Even from behind the clear barrier that protected them from risk of infection, Lando could see the paleness of the Corellian's face. The medics had been working for what seemed like hours, but until they were sure what they were up against, there was no way to know how to treat it. They could only try to keep him alive until it was determined the exact kind of poison on Tayin's knife blade.

A tall, tired-looking medic entered from a side door and Chewbacca growled a worried question.

"How bad is it?" Lando asked. She sighed and motioned them to resume their seats. She herself remained standing, and pushed a stray lock of her long reddish hair back over her shoulder as she took a deep breath and formulated an answer.

"We've stabilized him. But we can't do much else until we get the tech's report. Even then, there's still a chance we won't be able to help him."

Chewbacca keened mournfully and Lando pressed,

"There's nothing at all you can do?"

She frowned. "I'm afraid not. Not until we have more to go on."

Lando and Chewbacca continued to wait until, at a polite suggestion from the medic that they leave, they decided to try the cantina again. It was fairly early in the morning, and the skies were just beginning to lighten. Lando felt a pang of regret at losing Cloud City.

"C'mon, Chewbacca," he said dejectedly. "Let's get something to eat."

Chewbacca whuffed protestingly.

"Chewie," Lando said, unconsciously using Han's nickname for the big Wookiee, "we can't do anything for Han anymore. We're just going to have to wait and see what happens."

Chewbacca reluctantly agreed, and the two entered the cantina, which to their relief, was open. They ordered a meal and grabbed a seat near the back. Halfway through their breakfast, they were paged by the tall medic. Her voice did not sound hopeful. They took the trip at a run, and met her in the waiting room. She hurriedly introduced herself as Helen Dayin, and gestured them to follow her into her office. After they were seated, Helen sighed and explained,

"The poison on the knife blade is an extremely rare kind, called Tyan. Tyan invades the entire system, causing difficulty in breathing, coldness, and eventually, death." She laid a hand on Lando's arm. "We have no known cure. I'm sorry."

At that, Chewbacca growled furiously. Helen gave him a saddened look and continued,

"Best case, Captain Solo will live, but," she waved in the direction of the intensive care room, "that's all he'd ever be. In that instance, it would be better just to let him go. Chewbacca, as per standard procedure, we've done a search for Captain Solo's relatives. Sadly, we were unable to locate any. Because of your lifedebt, should the need arise, the choice will be yours."

"That's it, then?" Lando asked disbelievingly. "Han's going to die?"

"Yes," Helen said quietly. "I'm sorry," she repeated. "We'll do everything we can, but," she told them softly, "I think we're going to lose him."

Leia Organa paced her room quickly, the thoughts jumbled together in her head. It had been more than a month, and Han had still not come back. She absently wondered why it should matter to her. She had all but told him to get out of her life. He had, and now she regretted her harsh words more than anything. She was no longer so sure she wanted to marry Isolder. Come to think of it, she hadn't been certain in the first place. He had been kind, and charming, yes, but there was just something about him that annoyed her for some reason she couldn't fathom. She frowned. Han Solo's habit of trusting no one must have rubbed off on her. And deep in the back of her mind, a voice said,

\*You like me because I'm a scoundrel\*

Leia sighed.

The clear signal of her door chimes wafted through the room.

"Oh, go away," she grumbled, but she went to answer the door anyway. Maybe Han--\*Stop it, Leia!\* she commanded herself sternly. Han was gone and that was that. No time to dwell on the past, only time to think of the future.

Isolder stood at the door.

Leia groaned inwardly. She didn't feel like thinking of the future much right now. She had seen much of him this past month, but something was still holding her back.

"Hello," she said dully. Isolder frowned.

"What's wrong, Leia?" he asked. Leia sighed softly.

"It's nothing, really," she mumbled.

"Just imagine, Leia," he comforted, "Soon you will be Queen Mother of all Hapes, and I will be by your side."

Leia mustered a smile. She really didn't feel like talking right now. \*You like me because I'm a scoundrel\* "Oh, shut up," she mumbled to the voice in her head.

"Excuse me?" Isolder asked.

"Not you," Leia said hastily. "Isolder, I think I need some more time to consider this--I haven't agreed to anything yet, you know."

Isolder nodded slowly. "Of course, Leia. My apologies. I did not mean to push you."

Leia smiled slightly. "Thank you for understanding."

After he had left, she sank onto the couch and pulled a pillow onto her lap, twisting it with her hands. The chime sounded again.

\*What now?\* she thought. She pressed the pad and the door slid open to reveal Threkin Horm, president of the Alderaanian council.

"Good evening, Leia," he said smoothly. Leia grimaced, but quickly covered it up with a smile. Just what she needed right now.

"Hello, Threkin. How are you this evening?" she asked politely. "Fine, my dear," he answered.

"Please, come in," Leia requested, trying to keep a pleasant smile on her face. "What can I do for you?"

Threkin laughed. "Oh, I'm here to offer my services to you, Leia. What with all the preparations for your upcoming marriage to Prince Isolder--"

"I haven't agreed to anything yet--" she began, but he cut her off.

"Now, Leia, you know what this could mean for the New Republic," he chided. "And just think what a fine husband Prince Isolder would make." He smiled knowingly. "He'd be much more deserving of you than General Solo, you know."

"Now, just a minute!" Leia said angrily. "You have no right to talk about Han that way! He given alot to the New Republic."

"Yes, but what does he have to offer \*you\*?" Horm asked. "Wealth? You know as well as I do Solo is nowhere near as wealthy as the Prince."

"Material goods have nothing to do with this!" Leia protested.

"But Leia," Threkin replied, "What possible good can your marrying General Solo do for the New Republic? And besides," he added, "Solo isn't around anymore. Rumor has it that you two had a nasty argument because the good general simply did not want you to marry Prince Isolder." He smiled placatingly at Leia.

"Get out," she said, her voice shaking.

"Now, Leia," Threkin admonished.

"Get out!" she shouted.

"I understand your need to be alone," Threkin said generously. For half an instant, Leia actually considered pushing Horm's repulsor chair out the door, but then years of diplomatic training took over.

"You're right, Threkin," she said. "Please, forgive me for my outburst. I have had a long day, as you know."

"Of course, Leia," he told her. "Why don't you get some sleep? Things will look brighter in the morning."

Leia nodded. "Yes, that's a good idea. Thank you, I will." She escorted him to the door, then decided to follow his advice. She changed into her nightgown and slipped beneath the soft covers.

Once again in her life, Leia felt alone.

\*Oh, Han, I need you....\*

Han, not Isolder. Han, who, with his lopsided grin and teasing hazel eyes, could make her smile, even after the particularly greuling meetings.

A silent tear slipped down Leia's cheek. But Threkin was right, too. What was she going to do?

\*Han, where are you?\*

"Calm down, Chewbacca!" Lando shouted above the Wookiee's mournful howling. "The medics are working on it. There's still some hope, Chewie,"

he finished quietly. "We can try to contact Luke. Maybe his Force talent can help."

Chewbacca barked his agreement. If the young Jedi could help save Han's life, they needed to find him. And fast. Dayin still not look hopeful, but let them use the comm in her office. Lando placed a call through to Coruscant.

"Can I help you, sir?" the holo operator asked in its politely metallic tones.

"I'm looking for Luke Skywalker, the Jedi," Calrissian said.

After a moment of silence over the line, the droid returned.

"I'm sorry, sir, Commander Skywalker has left no number or location where he can be reached."

"Are you positive you can't find him?" Lando persisted.

"I'm sorry, sir," the droid repeated. Lando signed off in frustration. But...There was one person who might just know where Luke was.

The sound of the holo vid signaling in an incoming call woke Leia from a restless sleep. She groaned and dragged herself out of bed, muttering to herself in annoyance as she glanced at the numbers on the bedside chrono, glowing brightly in the darkened room. If this was Han calling to tell her he was sorry, she swore she'd kill him herself. It was all very well for him, used to gallivanting around the galaxy at all hours of the night, but the more civilized needed their sleep.... Wait a minute. She *wanted* it to be Han, didn't she? Even this late at night? No. Yes? Yes. Leia clenched her fists.

*\*I don't believe this!\** she thought. Han was gone. It had been too long. *\*Get over it, Leia,\** she told herself sternly. She was irritated at herself for dwelling on the past. Again.

But who else would call at this hour? She mentally shrugged. Perhaps it was daytime wherever the caller was. She hurriedly threw a robe over her nightgown and ran a hand through her long hair.

She pressed the button on the console, putting the call through. Leia blinked. An image of Lando Calrissian flickered onto the screen. His face looked drawn and tired, but he managed a smile for her.

"Leia, how you doin'?"

At any other time, she would have appreciated the call, but at this hour, his attempt at cheerfulness irritated her.

"Isn't it a little early for a chat, Lando?" she asked wryly. Lando, sensing her mood, got straight to the point.

"Leia, I know it's late....early....whatever, on Coruscant, but what I need to tell you is urgent. I, I thought you'd want to know."

Leia felt uneasy as she asked, "What is it? The Empire? Zsinj?"

Lando shook his head and sighed, then looked up to meet her concerned gaze.

"Leia...." He paused, tried again. "Leia, Han and Chewie dropped by a few days ago, and...." He took a breath and continued all in a rush. "There was a bounty hunter here and well....What I'm trying to say, Leia, is....you know how Han is about bounty hunters...."

"Lando," Leia practically shouted. "What is it?" \*What happened to Han?\* she screamed mentally.

"Leia, Han got into a fight with him, and things didn't turn out very well." There. He'd said it. He hadn't thought it would be so difficult.

Leia's heart felt as though it were being constricted and her stomach tightened with fear.

"He's not...Oh Lando, no. Han can't be..."

Lando held up a reassuring hand. "No, no. He's still alive. But I don't know for how long. The bounty hunter, Tayin, had a poisoned knife and Han took some nasty slashes. The meds can't do much for him, so we were hoping maybe Luke could help, but we haven't been able to contact him."

"Shirr Tayin?" she whispered. She could still see the look of silent fear in Han's eyes as he reasoned with Tayin to set Leia free, in exchange for himself. Bounty hunters didn't usually make Han nervous, but he had been out of tricks that time. The only way for Han to save Leia's life was

to trade for himself. He had come so close to death, then, and now he was dying again. It was her fault. Leia brushed Ord Mantell aside and concentrated on reaching Luke. Nothing. Her abilities weren't strong enough for such a distance.

"Lando, I'm not as strong in the Force as Luke, but maybe I can help." She had to be able to help. At the very least, she had to be there if he died. She had to let him know she still loved him. "I'll be there as soon as I can," she promised.

Leia signed off and collapsed into a chair.

Oh, Han.

She reached out and tried to touch Luke's mind again, but still there was nothing. The feeling of emptiness welled up inside her, too powerful to control, and she started sobbing softly.

"Oh, Han," she whispered, "I'm sorry." But what about Isolder? Quickly she dressed and plaited her hair as she reviewed what she would say to the prince. Wait. The New Republic needed her to marry Isolder. But it would be wrong for her to marry him only for his wealth. And besides, she couldn't really see herself ruling as a Queen Mother over so many worlds. She would be content to remain here on Coruscant, with Han.

If he lived through this.

If he could forgive her.

If Isolder could understand.

Leia pushed the ifs out of her head and concentrated on a course of action. Regretting the late time, but knowing it must be done, Leia placed a call to Isolder and arranged for him to meet her. Then she began throwing whatever she would need into a travel bag.

Isolder arrived exactly on time, and Leia absently wondered what a useful trait it must be to look like you hadn't just been woken up in the middle of the night. She took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry about the time, but it is a matter of some importance." Isolder frowned. "Is everything alright, Leia?" he asked.

Leia started to speak, but her voice caught. After a moment, she tried again. "No, no, it's not. Isolder, I'm sorry. I can't marry you," she managed. Isolder looked as though she'd just punched him in the stomach.

"Leia, what's wrong?"

Leia brushed at her eyes, willing away the tears that were threatening to spill down her cheeks. "It's Han. He's been hurt, badly. Tyan poisoning. I need to go to him. Oh, Isolder, I'm sorry. I'm sorry that you had to come all the way out here for nothing."

"Leia, I don't understand," Isolder said. Leia straightened her shoulders, determined to go through with this.

"Isolder," she said, "It would be wrong for me to marry you only for your wealth, for your worlds. I can't do it; it goes against everything I believe in. I could never be Queen Mother. And....General Solo means very much to me, though sometimes I don't act like it. I hope you understand," she finished softly.

Isolder nodded slowly, but his eyes were cold. "Oh, yes, Leia. I understand. I understand that this....That this whole thing was just a big lie!"

Leia jumped as he raised his voice. She hadn't thought he was capable of shouting.

"Isolder....I--I'm sorry...." she began, but he cut her off.

"You know," he fumed, "I thought that maybe, just maybe, you might have wanted to marry me because you loved me. Because you cared for me."

Leia felt the tears threaten once more. It seemed that all she had been doing lately was hurting people!

"Isolder, I do. I do care for you. It's just that....Han is....Isolder, I care for you as a friend, but Han is special to me."

Isolder's mouth twisted into a sour smile.

"Ah, yes. General Solo. Now, there's something I don't understand. What you can see in that scruffy-looking, arrogant space bum, I really don't know!"

Leia just stared at him, openmouthed. How *\*dare\** he say those things about Han? Her eyes flashed steel as she glared furiously at the prince.

"You take that back, you son of a slime-devil," she snarled. "Han is the bravest, most wonderful man in the universe and if you so much as \*think\* bad things about him, I'll....I'll...."

Isolder glared back. "My opinion remains the same, and I intend to make it publicly known."

Leia had had enough. With all her strength, she slapped Isolder across the face.

"Get out of here," she said, her voice shaking with rage. Isolder's eyes registered shock, and he suddenly seemed to realize just how upset Leia was.

"Leia--I--I'm sorry," he stammered, "I was out of line...." She ignored him and shoved him towards the door. She had thought about marrying this creep?? Why had she made herself do this instead of just leaving?

"Out now!" she told him, "I never want to see you again, ever!"

Turning, Isolder retreated out into the hallway and the door closed behind him. A passing technician looked at him strangely as the prince banged his head against the wall, muttering curses at himself. Isolder sighed. He should have seen it coming, should have noticed how Leia seemed to withdraw after General Solo's abrupt departure. Should never have hoped that material goods could have drawn Leia away from the one thing she truly loved. And now that Solo was dying, instead of helping her, he had made things worse.

Feeling very ashamed, Isolder started back towards his rooms.

\* \* \* \*

Leia pressed the door chimes outside Mon Mothma's office, thankful that the Chief of State hadn't returned to her quarters yet. Leia didn't think Mon Mothma would've been too enthusiastic about being woken up in the middle of the night.

"Come in." Mon Mothma's clear voice reached Leia through the intercom, and the door opened.

"Leia," said the Chief of State with some surprise as Leia entered.  
"What can I do for you?"

Leia decided to get straight to the point. Every moment she wasted was one more moment Han had to hang on without her.

"I need to leave for awhile," she said firmly. "Just for a few weeks at the most."

Mon Mothma shook her head apologetically. "Leia, I'm sorry. You know how busy everyone is at the moment. I just can't spare you right now."

Leia thought of Han, steeled herself. Hoped she wouldn't have to choose between the New Republic and the one she loved.

"I know we're busy. But I *have* to go. I *am* going."

Mon Mothma frowned, but Leia rushed on. "I realize you need me here, but there's someone who needs me more. And....I don't think I could stay here even if I wanted to."

The Chief of State sighed resignedly, understanding.

"General Solo?"

Leia nodded, whispering, "He was in a fight with a bounty hunter and got Tyan poisoning from the bounty hunter's knife. Lando called me and said that Han is dying."

Mon Mothma shook her head, her eyes compassionate.

"Leia, I'm sorry about Han. I think I know how you feel about him. But....maybe it would be better just to let him go. No one has ever recovered from Tyan poisoning before."

Leia shook her head emphatically. "No!" she exclaimed. "Even if he...If he doesn't make it, I want him to know that I was there for him. That I do love him. I have to go, and that's final."

"But Isolder???"

"I'm not marrying Isolder," Leia said shortly. "I'm going to Bespin to be with Han."

-----

Shirr Tayin was pleased.

He ignored the confines of the cell, focusing only on his escape and collection of the reward for Han Solo. Solo would be totally beyond recovery in a matter of days, and Tayin would be handsomely rewarded by the Warlord Zsinj. He smiled grimly.

Things were working out perfectly.

-----

I got a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when the Stormtroopers entered again. My back was throbbing, a persistent reminder of the last time I had made my opinion of the whole matter known. Of course, I hadn't been so naive to think they'd just let us go, especially with Fett practically drooling down Vader's neck for the bounty out on me by that scumbag Hutt, but I had hoped for a little more time to formulate a plan.

I'd taken off my jacket and rolled up my sleeves against the oppressive heat in the room, but my body chilled and my blood turned to ice when they snapped the manacles around my wrists.

"What are you doing?" Leia snapped, hiding her sudden fear with a sharp question. The troopers didn't answer, and for an instant, I actually considered making a break for it then and there. If it had been just me and Chewie, I definitely would have. Everyone knows troopers don't have the greatest aim in the galaxy. But there was also Leia to think about. So we waited.

We were led to a room where I'd heard they carbonfroze the Tibanna gas that was mined here for shipment. I had a very bad feeling about this. My heart sank as I asked Calrissian with as much sarcasm as I could muster out of my fear,

"What's going on, \*buddy\*?"

Lando actually looked regretful as he replied,

"You're being put into carbonfreeze."

Leia and I looked at each other in horror. I swore to myself if I lived through this, Calrissian and I would settle the score. Dimly, as if from far away, I heard Chewbacca roar and realized what was happening. I

broke away from the troopers and rushed over to Chewie, trying to calm the Wookiee.

"Stop, Chewie, stop! Do you hear me? Stop!" I yelled over See Threepio's cries. "Chewie! Chewie, this won't help me," I shouted at him. The droid's anguished wailing quieted as Chewbacca calmed.

"Yes, stop, please!" Threepio told the Wookiee. "I'm not ready to die."

Neither am I, I thought silently. I stared at the big Wookiee, who had been my only friend for many years.

"Save your strength," I said. "There'll be another time." I glanced at Leia. "The princess--you have to take care of her. You hear me? Huh?"

Chewie rumbled a promise, and I patted his arm reassuringly. Then I turned to Leia. I leaned down and kissed her best I could, wanting to hold her, comfort her, but unable to. The troopers pulled us apart and the Ugnauts undid the manacles and prepared the chamber.

-----

Leia paced restlessly as she spoke to the director of outgoing flights. One of these days, she would get herself a ship. She had just always relied on Han and Falcon to get her where she needed to be.

Mon Mothma had agreed to let her go, but she would need to find her own transportation. So far, nothing was headed so far as Bespin, and Leia was getting desperate. A hand touched her on the shoulder and she gasped and jerked around. Wedge Antilles held up a hand.

"It's alright, Leia. It's just me."

"Wedge, what are you doing here this late?" she asked as she tried to calm her racing heart. He yawned slightly and scrubbed a hand through his dark hair.

"I just got back," he replied, sounding frustrated. "We can't find a trace of Zsinj anywhere! After Han took out his Super Star Destroyer, the man just disappeared. Now all we have to do is wait until he gets another one!" Wedge paused, then asked a question that was obviously on his mind. "Leia, what are you doing up here at this time of night? You need a ship for something?"

"Yes, I do. I need to get to Bespin right away."

"Bespin?" Wedge asked incredulously. "That's a long haul. Diplomatic mission?"

Wedge's brown eyes grew somber as Leia explained everything. Then he gently squeezed her hand and said,

"Princess, you've found yourself a pilot."

Isolder had been staring at his terminal screen for a very long time. After punching in his private access number and gaining entrance to the private Hapan files, he had waited, waited to see if he would, if he could, do this for Leia, and for Han Solo.

He finally typed in a request: Access all files known on the cure of Tyan poisoning.

"How is he now?" Leia asked. The small group consisting of herself, Wedge, See Threepio, Chewbacca, Lando, and a medic who had introduced herself as Dr. Dayin, were sitting in a small room in the medcenter. The newcomers had been briefed on the poison and the current situation, and now Leia was anxious to see Han. Dayin answered her question.

"Not good," she replied. "but he's not getting any worse at the moment."

Leia didn't hesitate. "Can I see him? I may be able to help."

Dayin looked tired, but slightly hopeful as she replied,

"He's unconscious, but if there is anything you can do, we'd certainly be willing to try." She led Leia to a room a few doors from her office. Dayin opened the door, and gestured for her to go in.

"If you need me, just call," she said softly.

Leia slowly approached the medical bed as the door closed quietly behind her. Han was surrounded by the tubes and monitors that were struggling to keep him alive. A medical droid rested in the corner. Han's face looked normal, though pale, but Leia knew that the deadly poison that had invaded his system was there. The knife wounds on his chest and shoulders had been

bandaged. Leia touched his forehead gently, probing with the fullest of her abilities. He had to be there somewhere.

\*Come on, Han. I know you're there....You have to be....\*  
Nothing. His mind was too clouded. Leia sighed, frustrated, and continued trying.

-----

"I love you!" she called. This can't be happening!

"I know," I replied. I gazed at them slowly, wondering if this was the last view I would ever have of them. Chewbacca watched sadly, arms twitching, eager to do something, anything, except watch what was about to happen. Sorry, pal. This time you can't help me. Even Goldenrod was silent. I spared a look for Lando. He was watching, too, with something that almost passed for regret. And Leia, my beautiful Leia. I tried to give her a smile to let her know I would be okay. I always came out okay.

I tried to be brave, for her, but inside I was scared. Scared I would never see the stars again, scared of losing all that I had just found. Scared of dying.

Those were the thoughts racing through my head as I felt the platform stop its descent. Almost instantly the temperature began to drop. I was cold. But I would be brave for my beautiful Leia. A blast of steam rose up from beneath me and I looked up, squeezing my eyes shut tight against the pain. Leia's words echoed in my mind.

I love you.

I love you.

I love you.

I know.

As the metal poured in around me, I screamed.

-----

At the sound of Han's scream, Leia bolted upright in her chair, where she was seated across from his medical bed. Han apparently was in the grip of some nightmare: sweat clung to his forehead and he groaned softly. His terrified scream echoed in her mind and ears. All traces of sleep vanished, she demanded of Helen, who had just entered,

"What's going on?"

Dayin examined Han's now-still form as she replied hurriedly, "It's the effect of the Tyan. As long as the poison remains, this is going to happen every few hours. This is the second time today."

Leia asked, horrified, "What is it? What are they?"

"I don't know," the doctor answered tiredly.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" Leia said. Helen shook her head.

"No," she said briefly. She checked the readouts, sighing. "He's okay, now. Why don't you get some sleep?" she suggested gently. Leia's frown was interrupted by a yawn.

"Maybe," she said hesitantly. "Can you have a cot brought in? I'd like to stay close in case it happens again." Helen smiled wearily.

"Sure."

As she waited, Leia concentrated once more on Han's mind. She had to reach him. She had to try. This time, his mind wasn't so clouded as before. If she only looked a little harder....

\*Han?\* Come on, Han. I know you're there! Leia thought, pleading. You have to be!

She sensed a dim light in the recesses of his mind, and looked toward it.

\*Han, where are you--\*

(Leia?)

Leia gasped with joy. She had found him. He was there.

\*Yes,\* she replied. His voice echoed in her mind.

(No. You're on Coruscant, getting ready to marry Isolder....aren't you? Or is that another dream?...Leia?) His thoughts were jumbled, confused. Leia soothed him with her mind.

\*No, Han,\* she thought back, \*I'm here, with you. Han, I love you.\*

(Leia? No, but the New Republic needs you to marry Isolder,) he argued. (I thought you wanted to marry Isolder....?)

\*No, Han, it's okay. Oh, Han, please forgive me. Please, you have to get well. I love you, Nerfherder,\* she repeated. She grasped his hand in both of hers. His eyes opened slowly, and he fixed a pain-glazed hazel stare at her. He looked at her in confusion, unsure of whether he had been hallucinating before. When he spoke, his voice came out in a moan.

"Leia?" he asked hoarsely.

"You hang on," she told him, ignoring the tears. "You hang in there so I can marry you, okay? I can't marry you if you die, Han. Please don't die on me."

"Leia." His voice was little more than a whisper as he fought to stay conscious, but it instantly stopped her flood of words. "You're really here," She squeezed his hand.

"Yes, I'm really here, Han. I'm going to stay right here."

He managed a small smile before he slipped back into unconsciousness.

The next time, Leia was awake when the poison struck his system again. She held his cold hand tightly and brushed the hair back from his forehead, murmuring soothing words, projecting calming thoughts to him with the fullest of her abilities. Hesitantly, she tried to touch his mind with her own. Together, they rode the storm of memories.

Despite Leia's and the medics best efforts, Han continued to slip. That night, Leia was awakened by Helen shaking her roughly by the shoulder and calling her name. The room was brightly lit, in contrast to when she had fallen asleep. Leia squinted, yawned, not quite remembering where she was.

"What? What is it?" Leia groaned sleepily. Helen's voice was laced with concern.

"It's Captain Solo. He's getting worse. I-I think." She stopped, gulped. "Just get up."

Leia was awake instantly and out of her makeshift cot, bolting to Han's bedside before Helen could say another word. The monitors around the bed were bleeping erratically and Leia grabbed Han's hand tightly in one of her own.

"I'm here, Han," she said softly, hoping he would hear her. She'd been shocked at his condition before, but it was nothing compared to the deep fear she now felt for him. His face was white, eyes closed, his teeth gritted tightly together against the pain. He was breathing in deep, shuddering gasps and he shivered violently, even though the room was warm.

"Oh, Helen," Leia breathed as Dayin came up behind her. "There's \*got\* to be something you can do. I can't bear to see him like this."

Helen sadly shook her head. "We've done everything we can," she sighed. "I'm sorry, Leia."

Leia shook her head, unable to speak. Han's breathing suddenly faltered, and he choked, clutching Leia's hand. Leia's heart seemed to leap into her throat.

"Han? Han, no. No, don't do this, Han," she cried, panicking, the tears starting to roll down her cheeks. \*This can't be happening\*. "HANI!" she cried. He coughed, and sucked in another breath, and groaned softly. Leia felt weak with temporary relief as she reached over to gently smooth the hair back from his forehead.

"Please don't leave me, Nerfherder," she whispered hopelessly. "I need you to get well. Chewie needs you to get well, and Luke and Lando and Wedge, too. We all love you, Han. Please, don't give up on us."

She realized that she had unconsciously tried to reach him again, trying to tell him with her thoughts what her words had failed to do.

\*Han?\*

(Leia. Leia, I can't do this.) His thoughts were weak, all failing strength focused on breathing.

\*Yes, you can,\* Leia told him desperately.

(No...It hurts too much....Can't breathe....)

\*Han, please. Hang on.\*

(I'm trying, Leia.....) His groggy thoughts jerked away from her as pain stabbed through his body.

Leia broke contact with tears running down her face. She looked to Dayin, who shook her head sorrowfully.

"I'm so sorry. We're losing him." Leia looked at Han. They had been through so much together. She couldn't believe it would end this way. And it was her fault. All her fault. Dayin walked slowly to the door and Leia could hear her speaking softly to Chewie, Wedge, and Lando, who had been waiting outside. Dimly, as though in a daze, Leia heard Chewie's anguished howl.

And suddenly there was a new voice outside the room, muffled so she couldn't tell who it was. The door hissed and Leia heard heavy footsteps behind her. She kept her eyes fixed on Han's white face, as though trying to keep him alive by her own willpower, his cold hand clutched tightly between her own. He moaned softly, shivering.

"Leia?" Prince Isolder's voice said tentatively from behind her. Leia turned, startled and angry.

"What are *you* doing here?"

Isolder met her tear-filled eyes. "I can help Han," he said quietly. Leia laughed sharply.

"I don't think so."

Isolder shuffled his feet. "Some years ago, a Hapan doctor discovered a cure for Tyan poisoning, among other things. We chose to keep it a secret from the rest of the galaxy. You must understand....there are many things we don't let out."

Leia turned her back on him, back to Han, despair filling her heart. "Well that's a nice piece of information, Isolder. But how is it possibly going to help Han? He's...He hasn't got that long."

Isolder drew a small bag from a pouch at his side. "I have some of the medicine here," he muttered. "I'm sorry I didn't come sooner, but I..." He broke off and thrust the bag at Leia. "Take it. Mix a spoonful with a glass of water and give it to him."

Leia stared at the small bag for a moment, then up at Isolder.

"Thank you, Isolder," she whispered, then she yelled "Helen!"

Dayin came running in, concern filling her eyes. Leia didn't give her time to ask questions.

"Get me a glass of water and a spoon," she said, "Please, Helen, hurry!"

A puzzled Helen quickly did as she asked. With trembling hands, Leia mixed a spoonful of the powdery substance in the bag with the water, creating a greenish-yellow liquid. She held the glass to Han's mouth, gently lifting his head.

"Drink this, Han. Oh, please. Please drink it."

He managed to sip a small amount and swallowed weakly.

"A little more," Leia encouraged. "Come on, you're going to be okay, Han. You have to drink this." She breathed a silent prayer of thanks. There was hope, now.

Han's condition improved over the night. The four friends and Helen took shifts by his bedside, should anything go wrong. The small bag of Hapan medicine was almost gone, and some color had returned to Han's face. A day later, Helen informed the small group that Han would indeed recover. Tears of joy shone in Leia's eyes as she sat at his bedside and held his hand warmly.

"Leia," he said softly, "I love you, you know."

She smiled through her tears. "I know," she teased.

## Four Weeks Later

Han Solo had never been so nervous in all his life. He stood in front of the mirror in his apartment, fiddling with the collar of his uncomfortable New Republic uniform. He wore the suit only when he absolutely had to, mainly because it was so damn prickly!

Han squirmed and resisted the urge to rip off the uniform and stamp on it. He finally got the collar to sit right, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Han stared at himself in the mirror, trying to calm the anxious fluttering in his stomach.

"Well, Han," he said to his reflection. "Your last hour as a single man. Enjoy it while you can." He absently reached up to trace the scar across his shoulders, fervently hoping he had made the right decision for Leia and himself.

Chewbacca and Luke Skywalker entered at that moment, looking neat and tidy and very pleased with themselves. Chewbacca was freshly washed and brushed, and Luke wore his Jedi robes.

"So, how's it going with the groom?" Luke asked, smiling. Han scowled.

"I hate this uniform. What's got you two so pleased with yourselves?"

Luke and Chewbacca exchanged glances.

"Oh, nothing." Luke was smirking now, and Han was starting to get annoyed. He had never once seen Luke smirk before--did Jedi \*do\* that??--and he rolled his eyes. It was so obvious they were up to something.

"Right," he muttered sarcastically, walking to the bed and sitting down. He bit his lip. He couldn't recall ever being so nervous about doing anything before. Not a smuggling run, not barging into the Death Star....

He jumped up and started to pace. Luke grinned. Their friend's nervousness was painfully obvious. Luke felt lighthearted in a way that he hadn't since the carefree summers on a far away backwater planet, racing his friend Biggs through Beggar's Canyon. Luke knew that Han would protect Leia with his life, and to know that his sister would be well-cared for lightened his worries.

Luke had returned to Coruscant two standard weeks ago, and had been requested to join Leia at Cloud City. When he had arrived, Han and Leia had been discussing their future, and what would be the best for both of them. Leia had worked things out with Isolder, and he had agreed that Hapes would join the New Republic.

Rogue Squadron had nailed both Zsinj and Tayin after the bounty hunter had escaped from the Cloud City prison and attempted to contact the warlord. Both were safely in custody.

None of that seemed to have much effect on Han, however, who was still pacing, glancing nervously at the wall chrono every few seconds.

"Han, relax," Luke finally said. Han frowned, and sat back down on the edge of the bed.

"Sorry," he mumbled, but he didn't sound very apologetic. "I just....I just want to be sure this is the right thing to do, Luke."

"Han," Luke said, "What do you think?"

Han stopped for a minute, and smiled softly. "I think it is."

Han tugged at his collar one final time, glancing around quickly at the masses of people. Mon Mothma was smiling, pleased things had turned out so well. Threkin Horm sat beside her in his repulsor chair, trying to keep a pleasant face pasted on. Han resisted the urge to smirk in his direction. Prince Isolder was holding a flower on his lap; a purple arralute. He smiled at Han, who found himself returning the grin. Wedge Antilles and Rogue Squadron were at attention. Wedge winked at Han, and gestured toward the back of the room. Then there was a murmuring and sighing throughout the guests as the doors at the far end of the room opened and the bride appeared. The people stood as Leia entered, led by Luke, who had been asked by the two to give the bride away. Han heard Chewbacca, the best man, rumble proudly behind him.

Han watched Leia proceed down the aisle through a daze. She looked stunning, in a long white dress that seemed to glow in the soft light, contrasting with her dark hair, which had been braided with pearls and cascaded down her back. Han gulped. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life. He stood tall as she approached, not wanting her to see how nervous he really was.

Leia and Luke came level with Han, and Luke gave him Leia's hand. Her fingers squeezed his, and he realized that she was just as nervous as he was. Imagine that. He squeezed back as they both turned to face the officiator.

Leia sighed with relief when the formalities were over. She had been worried sick walking up the aisle. Han had looked so dashing and \*military\*, that she had felt like she hardly knew him. But now the hard part was over and she was Leia Organa Solo at last. She sat close to Han at the celebration party, her eyes never leaving her new husband for a second. \*Husband.\* It seemed so strange to think of herself as Han's wife. She didn't \*feel\* any different, but her life was changed forever.

Leia glanced around at the beautifully decorated hall, feeling lighthearted and full of excitement. Happy couples were dancing, a blur of color contrasting with the gleaming whiteness of the walls. Several long tables were scattered with the remnants of the wedding feast and a huge pile of gifts awaited the two. Leia and Han had found out what Luke and Chewbacca had been smirking about. The two of them and Lando had handed Leia a hastily wrapped parcel. She unwrapped it gently as they all watched, and she gasped at the necklace fashioned from Kitarran crystals, priceless and matchless in its beauty. She hugged them all warmly, then turned to Han. He had removed his troublesome collar and unbuttoned the first few buttons of his uniform jacket.

"That was nice of them, wasn't it?" he said. No wonder they had been so excited.

"Yes," Leia answered quietly. He grinned lopsidedly, the grin she so loved.

"A dance, Your Worship?"

Leia frowned at that. "'Your Worship'?" she exclaimed indignantly, then stopped, suddenly realizing that the name didn't really bother her. In fact, she rather liked it.

"I'd love to, Nerfherder," she consented with a smile, giving him her hand. He took it and swept her onto the dance floor, grinning at Luke and Lando as they passed. Luke had consented himself to watch the party, but Lando was desperately searching in vain for a dance partner. Han laughed

and pulled Leia into his arms and hugged her close. Leia felt happier than she had ever been in all her life.

Han held his wife tightly, wanting to dance here with her for all eternity. She seemed so small, so fragile in his arms. The joy he felt at this moment outshone all the others in his life and Han realized at that moment, that this \*was\* the first joy, real joy, he had known in a long time.

And at that moment, there was nowhere in the universe Han or Leia would have rather been, than in each other's arms.

The End.

Now wasn't that more like it?? :) Eat your heart out, Wolverton!

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