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Day and Night

by [Cindy Olsen](#)

I know neither day nor night.

The shipboard chrono shimmers brightly in the dimness of my cabin; it is halfway through my sleep cycle and I have not yet closed my eyes. My mind refuses to close down, intimidating me with furious images that race across neural synapses. But I lay here and wait for sleep to come, passively counting down the seconds until I must rise and return to my duties.

It matters not that I have not slept, nor that I probably will not sleep 'tonight'. Whether I am tired or not, it is a requirement to report for duty. It is easier to work than not, so when I am awake, I work.

The luxury of dividing life into definitive timeparts is alien to me. As is rising with the sun and retiring at night. The memories of these moments haunt the darkness within, blending with other faded ghosts... the warm touch of a summer breeze... the rose-streaked sky of an Alderaani sunset... the bittersweet juice of jiluchen berries dribbling down my chin... laughing at a friend's joke...

I live on a continuum, washed along by the buffeting currents of existence. I am numb to the sharp edges of life the pleasures, the pain.

I sleep.

I eat.

I work.

I simply am.

I am called by the titles of my former position, a fact that has not been so for three long years.

"Princess," they beseech.

"Your Highness," they call.

But never "child", or "friend", or "sweetheart".

My name is like a foreign word. No one has spoken it since they deserted me, left me to float about space on this cadaverous frigate while they dashed off on their dangerous mission...

My three gallant crusaders.

So certain of their success and the ease with which they know it will be achieved. Their confidence is at once inspiring, admirable and... frightening.

Sometimes, I wish I had their faith.

Yet I can't afford to think about them, or what they must accomplish. For once in my life, I am afraid of my mind. Like smiling, beguiling fools, it sends thoughts to torment me, conjuring up emotions that threaten to overwhelm and consume, sucking at my sanity with all the tenacity of a bloodworm.

So I must not remember.

Dream.

Hope.

For here in the dark, in my bed, it is as real to me as if the nightmare is happening again.

The burning, acrid stench.

Orange glare through coughs of steam, staining all it touches in a harsh, unnatural glow. Our faces. Our clothes. Wookiee hair. Their white armour. All except the blackness of the Dark Lord.

There is noise and confusion. Yells and growls of anger, frustration and despair.

This can't be happening. This isn't fair.

Somewhere in the midst of all this I am suddenly drawn into his eyes. I watch myself reflected in them, so small and pathetic.

Then his lips are against mine and he is kissing me with an unfamiliar intensity and warmth, until they break us apart and drag him to the platform.

He is staring at me from where he stands. I can feel the fear lodged deep behind his eyes, but he does not show it, refuses to reveal any weakness to them, even now.

This is all happening too fast.

A surge of emotions sweep through me, confusing me with their force and dredging up memories I had banished to the muddy depths of my mind.

You would prefer another target...a military target...

The bile rises in my throat. I want to do a hundred desperate things at once...rush into his arms and weep foolishly...throw myself at the mercy of Vader and offer myself in his place...wrestle a blaster rifle from a trooper and fight our way out of this chamber...throw my head back and scream like a crazed Devaronian...

Yet I do nothing.

I am frozen to the decking, cannot move out of sheer terror and disbelief at what is happening before my eyes. Again.

Dantooine. They're on Dantooine.

I need to tell him. Need to do something, anything

No! Damn them...and him!

I will not...cannot...think of this again.

I am destroying what minimal rest I have absorbed.

I am better, stronger, than this.

It does me no good.

It does him no good.

If I must remember, remember good times only.

Remember Han.

Han...

My dear, brave Han...

Strange that I seem to have acquired him as 'mine'.

When did this happen?

When we first made love in his cabin enroute Beshin, expressing to each other our long repressed desires with words that can never be spoken?

Buried deep within the asteroid? When he looked into my soul and stole my heart as easily as my kiss?

No, before then. Way before then. Back to our first meeting...

Exhausted from Vader's interrogations, I blindly rush from the safety of my cell, out into the terrifying light and noise of trooper fire. Needless to say, I am not impressed with the reckless and ill-conceived 'rescue plan' on offer.

"Can't get out that way."

I appraise the tall, lanky man who has advised me of the blatantly obvious with a trained diplomat's eye Corellian. Natural leader. Some military training.

Mercenary, most likely smuggler. A mouth as quick as his draw. And drop-dead gorgeous.

He would roll his eyes and screw up his mouth to one side if he heard me describe him like that. For though he is many things, and has himself suggested otherwise, Han has no pretensions about himself. He acknowledges himself as a "simple kinda guy, just tryin' to survive in the galaxy."

Yet he knows how I feel about him. He has caught me watching him, admiring those lean, muscular lines when I thought no one would notice. The somehow ruggedly-handsome face, once-broken nose, scarred chin and all. And that easy smile that slips up the right side of his face...

And I have told him. Three words. Three simple words that have revealed far too much about myself. Words that were spoken in haste and with regret. Words that should have been spoken long before. Words he did not return...

I rue the time we have wasted since our first meeting, since he rounded on my criticism of his jailbreak and suggested I return to my cell. Perhaps that was when he became "mine" and I "his", for since then we have been linked.

Squandering precious moments...entangling them in arguments and anger, encrypting true emotions in sarcasm and spite...yet linked, inexorably and magically linked.

Despite my efforts, not one day has passed in the three years since that meeting that I have not thought of him. Now, there is little else besides Han that fills my mind.

Notwithstanding our struggles to deny our mutual attraction and affection, our destinies forced us to confront what was truly happening between us. Strange, but perhaps I should be grateful for what has happened since our defeat at Hoth. If he had not dragged me from the ruined command centre, forced me to leave... no, for even then if I had made it to my transport as originally intended, I would not have admitted more than a passing thought of thanks for his assistance; just another rescue to add up to his tally.

That's about fifty-two you owe me, Princess.

It is almost as if I have the Empire to thank for what has transpired between us. And the Falcon, that cantankerous old bucket of bolts and her temperamental hyperdrive.

Or is it something more?

It's this stupid shirt I'm wearing. His shirt. That's why I can't sleep.

Why I insist on wearing it is beyond me. It is a childish, symbolic gesture, one I should not even entertain contemplating, yet here I am doing it...again.

Sometimes I imagine I can still smell him in the fabric of this shirt. Like I could when I wore it the first time.

But I know I am deluding myself. The cleaning unit has long since erased what trace of Han was left.

This shirt is all that I have left of those times. Of the moment we finally surrendered, gave in to each other, our needs, our wants, our desires.

This shirt, and my memories.

Sweet memories...

... I lean into the curve of the acceleration couch, legs pulled up in front of me, purportedly studying the data reader angled against my thighs a very un-princess-like pose but I feel decidedly "un-princess-like". I still wear the shirt I took from Han's closet when the valet unit's drying program failed, leaving my uniform sopping wet. The outfit has long since dried, however I continue to wear his shirt, the tails tucked around my pulled up knees and bare feet. My only concession to a sense of order is the single braid capturing my unruly hair. Occasionally my head slips down inside the collar of the shirt, and I inhale the heady aroma of his scent mixing with mine.

Facts and images of Bespin and Cloud City scroll across the reader's screen, but I doubt I have absorbed any information about the place we will arrive at in 12 days time. I specifically wanted to prepare myself for what lay ahead, which is why I am supposedly studying the Falcon's encyclopaedic database. But in reality, I have been watching Han for the last few hours. He has been conducting minor maintenance within the forward compartment, and I have been covertly watching his every movement.

We have hardly spoken since the beginning of this "day" cycle, since we tentatively awoke in each other's arms and hesitantly went our separate ways. Last night, Han forced me to confront what I felt for him, and I realised it is more than friendship between us, more than anything I have ever felt for another man. Regretfully, my inexperience and uncertainty refrained me from exploring my feelings for him on a physical level. Instead we talked, laughed, reminisced, came to understand each other better. Reluctant to end this time, we were then content to share his bunk, to sleep and nothing more.

It seemed strange to share a bed with another being. Not uncomfortable or unnerving, but inexplicably consoling and familiar.

Sharing his bunk, our sleep, the night, has changed everything. There is a palpable difference to our relationship. I have been on edge since rising from his arms this "morning". A rawness jangles my nerves. A hunger gnaws at the pit in my stomach. I cannot concentrate on anything for more than a few seconds. If I did not know better, I would say that I am sick, and perhaps I am.

My mind is filled with Han.

I have no logical excuse for sitting here at the holochess table; my study could be conducted quite easily and comfortably back in his cabin. But then I wouldn't be able to watch him, and this I feel compelled to do.

Chewbacca is aware that something has occurred between us. He is giving us a wide orbit, choosing chores that remove him as far from us as possible. Even Threepio seems to have the sense to remain on watch in the cockpit.

So I read a few sentences on the screen, then let my gaze wander across the compartment to where he is working. He is wearing a pair of faded shipboard trousers that have seen better days and a charcoal-coloured short-sleeved undershirt. As he has moved about his duties, I have viewed him from every angle

upright, biceps flexing as he tightened a valve; flat on his back with one long leg curled under the other, cursing in Low Corelli at some problem he found; kneeling, head buried in circuitry and components, his rump pointed tantalisingly towards me; hanging down into the engine pit, legs wrapped around a supporting beam, undershirt riding up across his flat abdomen and marvelled at how these clothes have highlighted his strong physique, defining the clean lines of his body in shades of grey.

I wonder if he knows how seductive he looks at the moment, or is it just me who is captivated by the sight of Han Solo in old work-stained clothes, tousled hair, greasy lubricants smeared across his face and arms. I suspect it is just me.

He is sitting at the control station now, back towards me, verifying the success of his repairs. From the squareness of his shoulders and the angle of his head, I can tell he is satisfied with his work. I imagine that a rather smug and appealing smile has settled across his features, the one I used to find gratefully annoying.

My next concern is more immediate and unusually, disturbingly trivial shortly he will be finished and, if he leaves the hold, I will have to find another excuse to be near him.

I am caught openly staring when he unexpectedly spins around in his seat to face me. The speed with which my eyes return to the reader is not only obvious, it betrays my previous actions.

The pulse pounds in my brain as I hear him rise from the station and move towards me. The sound of his boots on the deckplates echo in my ears. It takes an eternity for him to traverse the short distance between us. For some unfathomable reason, I am stupidly afraid of what will happen next.

Then he is in front of me, and I can see the edge of his leg past the data reader's screen. Two work-roughened hands, grimy with sweat and grease, gently cup my cheeks and raise my face to his. The kiss he bestows on my lips is warm and brief, and our eyes only meet as he pulls away. He smiles at the questioning look on my face.

"You looked like you could use a good kiss," he explains, parodying the argument we had in the corridors of Hoth Base.

The smile I return is meek, and I drop my head slightly, forcing him to release me from his grasp. Avoiding that intense stare of his, my eyes avert. My mind is in a turmoil as I grapple for an appropriate response or action. I am lost at what to do.

Gauging my uncertainty, Han pulls away. Silently, he stands above me, and I can sense his confusion as clearly as if it is mine. I hear his mouth open as if to speak, then, with a sigh, he closes it again.

"I think I'll get cleaned up," he finally says.

He swipes a finger affectionately down my nose, and strides off towards the crew quarters.

When he is gone, I angrily slap the reader down on the circular table, and toss my braid back over my shoulder.

This is ridiculous!

It's not as if I'm some mild-mannered farm girl on her first visit to a big city. I was a member of the Imperial Senate. I was...am a member of the Royal House of Alderaan. I am a leader in the Rebel Alliance. I'm used to being in control of things. I'm used to making decisions, and making the right ones at that!

I'm used to getting what I want. And what I want is Han Solo.

Now that sounds like the old Leia.

I decide to grant him some time to have a cycle in the refresher. After all, I'd prefer him clean. Plus, in the meantime, it will help me garner a bit more courage. So, I sit here on the couch, impatiently tapping my fingers on the holochess table, trying to guess how long is long enough.

Something tells me the time is right.

On my way to his cabin I have the sense to stop in at the now-empty refresher cubicle, just to quickly check my appearance.

Damn you, Solo, I think when I see the smudges of dirt and grease he has deliberately left on my cheeks and nose. But should I really have expected anything different?

Chuckling to myself ruefully, I wipe away the evidence of his joke. On impulse I release my hair from its single braid.

The hatch to his cabin is open; a smuggler who shares his life with a tramp freighter and a Wookiee has little need for modesty. My courage falters, and I stop at the entrance. His back is to me as he dresses near the closet. He is wearing grey, figure-hugging shorts, and for a moment I overcome my hesitancy and simply admire his body. The soft fabric of his shorts reveal firm thighs and backside, lean hips, and nestles around a narrow waist. His shoulders are broad, strong, and the muscles stretch as he shrugs on a white shirt.

I am entranced at the thought of being held in his arms, caressed by his hands, pulled up against his chest and kissed like I've never kissed before. It is these unfamiliar urges that push me on.

He momentarily checks his actions, head cocks slightly to one side as if listening, but he fluidly returns to settling the shirt across his back. The belief that he is aware of my presence is confirmed when he casually turns around. My heart trips, then escalates its rhythm as I hold lightly onto the hatchway rim for support. Half-dressed, he watches me curiously, arms hanging loosely by his side.

My nervousness is beyond reason and belies my years of diplomatic training and experience as a senator. Again, it is as if I am a fresh young girl, inexperienced in

the ways of love, who is offering her innocence to a sensual man of the galaxy. When I realise how true this is, I become annoyed with my passive reaction and step into his cabin.

Almost imperceptibly, his breathing quickens, and, through the unfastened halves of the front of his shirt, I notice his chest rise with each breath. He offers no other clues to his expectations, nor guidelines as to what I should do next.

For long, aching moments, we stare at each other. We have reached an impasse in our complex relationship, yet another piece to the facades with which we barricade our feelings. Who will be the first to act, to reveal themselves to the other?

No, I realise, that's not fair.

Han's intentions have been as obvious as his unsuccessful attempt to seduce me not 20 hours ago in this cabin. Then, I rejected his advances, but not his companionship, and we slept in each other's arms, as innocently as one can with a smuggler.

Now, he is wary of my intentions. Doesn't want to get burnt twice. Perhaps doesn't wish to push me into something he is uncertain I am ready for. But I am ready. I want this. I want him. So I suppose this is up to me. I must be the one to act.

As these thoughts cross my mind, a flush of embarrassment and anticipation reddens my cheeks and I avert my eyes. At these strangest of moments, the words of my father, Bail Organa, come to assist me: The longest journey begins with the smallest step.

I pivot on bare feet, palm the hatch shut, and turn back towards him, raising my gaze to his. He has not moved. He is waiting for me to explain myself, to him and to me. The silence in the cabin is unbearable. When I speak, I stumble over my words.

"I-I don't know what I'm doing here," I offer, listening to the half-truth/half-lie of my statement.

He hears it also.

"Don't know, huh?"

His eyes twinkle with mischief and the easy, lopsided grin appears. His bemusement is infectious, makes me see the absurdity of the situation, and a slight smile tugs at my lips.

"Don't smirk at me like that, Han Solo," I half-jokingly reprove. "You know what I mean."

He nods in consideration. "Sure, I know what you mean." The hazel of his eyes deepens to an intense gold as his smile fades. "You wanna talk to me about your chances of converting Cloud City over to the Rebellion."

If he didn't exude such an air of sensuality and wasn't slowly moving towards me, I might believe his serious tone.

"Or maybe discuss the finer points of H-K ion drive maintenance. You certainly seemed interested in what I was doin' earlier."

So he has been aware of the interest I have been taking in him. If I wasn't so nervous at the moment, I might be annoyed with him.

He is standing right in front of me, close, towering above me. I am exhilarated by his presence. My senses are invigorated, tingle with anticipation.

"Or maybe... maybe you think you might want to make love to me." The back of his hand reaches towards my cheek, a callused finger delicately strokes a lock of hair behind my ear. "Is that closer?"

... closer... closer than I have ever allowed another being...

His breath caresses my lips as his mouth hovers above mine, waiting. His eyes beckon, entice, promise.

"Yes." My whisper is almost a plea.

His kiss captures me, carries me along a dizzying surge of primordial emotions. But he is restrained in his actions, more gentle and caring than I ever dreamed possible. His hot, delicious mouth grazes across my cheek, nibbles at my earlobe. My knees weaken and he steps closer as I instinctively clasp at his arms. My mouth opens involuntarily and I can't suppress a sigh as his breath whispers into my ear. His cheek presses against mine as his lips move down the side of my neck, past the loose collar of my shirt and to the base of my throat. The pulse flickers at my neck, in my wrists, and deep within my loins. His eyes return to mine, smiles encouragingly. Large fingers unfasten the front of my shirt...

I recall his sudden inhalation in pleasure and passion as the shirt drops from my shoulders. The gratifying, empowering feeling of standing naked in front of him, knowing that I am the cause of the desire burning in his eyes, the heat rising from his skin, the want boiling through his veins.

Undressing him proves to be my undoing. As I reveal every part of him, I am entranced by his body. The firm muscles, bulge of veins and tendons beneath the skin, the latent strength that lies within, the promise of thirst to be quenched, hunger to be appeased.

I am bewitched. I ache for him to hold me, to love me.

He smiles again, kind and caring. Whatever apprehension I have disappears as our fingers entwine intuitively. We walk as equals to his bunk...

The rest... the rest is a glorious mess of the sixteen times we made love in that cabin. Becoming acquainted with his body, and with mine. Learning how to touch, to stroke, to kiss. Learning how to love, and how to be loved. Discovering Han and myself.

I have vivid recollections of that flight to Bepin. Images so substantial I sometimes awake, gasping at their intensity...

... I sit above him, my legs straddling his narrow hips, gently rocking. The exquisite touch of his hardness inside me is intoxicating; he seems to have been made especially and specifically to fit within me. His hands slide up my thighs, my hips, the side of my ribs, then tenderly cup my breasts. He throbs within me and I squeeze him in return with muscles that until recently I never knew I had.

A dreamy smile melts across his features and I sigh contentedly. My hands stroke his chest, fingers weaving through his chest hairs, brushing across his nipples. Emotions and levels of pleasure play across his expressive face. I cannot resist the urge to lean down and kiss him deeply, run my hands through his hair, my hips continuing to move. Gasping with desire, I throw my head back and revel in the pure sensations radiating throughout my body. Ahead, I sense a point of sexual fulfilment which I yearn to reach. My thrusting hip movements increase as I focus on this apogee. The fervour forces me on and up, until an undeniable surge sweeps through me. I cry out with pure pleasure as I gracefully pitch forward onto his chest, my hair falling across his face. His arms wrap around my shoulders as I tremble with ecstasy, pant with exertion. My mind and body are overwhelmed by the strength of the sensations they have generated; all I can think is how incredibly beautiful and spiritual it all feels.

Unexpectedly, he chuckles in my ear, kisses my cheek. Confused by his reaction, I lever myself up on his chest so I can look at his face. His hazel eyes shine with delight and his lopsided grin encourages me to swipe the scar across his chin in rebuke.

A touch defensively I ask, "What's so funny?"

He unsuccessfully tries to curb his grin. "I was just thinkin'," he explains. "This is the first time I've ever been ravished by a princess."

Uncharacteristically, I see the humour in his joke. But two can play at this. "I'll have you know," I advise him mock righteously, "this is a first for me, too."

"Naaahh," he drawls dismissively, but I nod my head in protest. His eyebrows raise as if considering this new piece of information. "Well then," he amends, "you're a natural."

I smile at him ruefully, run a finger down his cheek. "I think I've had a good teacher."

"The best, sweetheart," he tells me with a wicked grin. "The best."

How could I not agree...

... he is above me and within me, twitching with anticipation. His cheek presses against mine, nuzzling my ear, my neck. The passion radiates from him and his mouth finds mine. The kiss is hot, desperate. Breathlessly, we part.

He wants me. His urge is as uncontrollable as is my feeling of being enveloped in his absolute need for me. I lean up, kiss the base of his neck, the bulge of his larynx, to evoke an ardent moan.

He drives himself into my body, deeper, faster as I run my fingers through his hair, down the back of his neck, over his broad shoulders. He kisses me again deeply, and I responded to his demanding tongue with equal eagerness. His arms pull me towards him as if drawing me into his body as much as seeking to enter mine...

... and then there is the tranquillity that surrounds us after we make love. The gentle caresses of gratitude, happiness, accord. His warmth enfolding me, holding me, falling asleep with his body cradling mine...

It is only when finally given the opportunity to explore one another, to freely give and receive pleasure, that we grow to know and understand each other. Our scope for showing tenderness and care in private ebbs to our lives outside his cabin. The arguments and anger are gone. There is a playfulness in our banter, and we realise the strength and depth of our friendship. We do not hide our displays of affection the simplicity of holding hands, sitting in his lap, openly embracing. I personally have a weakness for patting him fondly on the behind,

while Han takes great delight in emphasising our height difference by kissing my forehead.

Underlying it all, however, is the unspoken knowledge that it will not last. For eventually we arrive at Bespin.

The love we share that night in Cloud City is more poignant than any time before. Although assigned separate sleeping quarters, there is no doubt we need just one room. We are 'old' lovers by now, and our love is familiar, unconstrained, but not casual. Slow, luxurious, savouring. Memorising the shape of each other, the textures, scents, tastes. As if saying goodbye...

The moonlight from Bespin's twin satellites drifts through the glassine window, bathing us in its blue-white glow. We lay naked at the end of the bed, sheets rumpled around us, pillows on the floor. After 12 days sharing his bunk and cabin, we have more than taken advantage of the relatively gigantic bed and suite; I wiggle my feet appreciatively.

Han is flat on his back, chest rising quickly, breathing with exertion, eyes closed in complete relaxation 'recovering', as he calls it. Pressed up against him, I am on my side, my head propped up on one hand as the other plays idly with the hairs on his chest. I have grown to love watching him like this, lying naked in front of me, a sheen of perspiration glazing his face and body. I have always appreciated the sight of him, from a basic physical point of view, but when I look at him like this, something twinges within my breast and all I can think is how beautiful he is.

This is what making love with Han means to me; more than the physical act, as pleasurable that may be, it is the intimacy and togetherness that I love. When I feel closest to him. When we are a part of each other.

We lay in silence for long, peaceful moments, relishing the sensations the soft mattress; the coolness of the bed clothes; the pleasant weariness in our bones; the air tinged with the scent of love.

My fingers trace along his clavicle, down his right bicep. I burnish the fascinating scar of an old blaster wound and again wonder when he will tell me the story of how he received it. With a shudder I realise, Perhaps never. A darkness on the periphery of my vision causes me to quickly glance around the room, but there is nothing to be seen. I have been unsettled since the Falcon entered Bespin's system. I had thought hoped a night with Han would ease my tension, but it has not. Something is not right, and, I hate to think it, I have a bad feeling about this place...

I glance down at Han again, as if he has called my name. There is a noticeable shift in the atmosphere between us; something intangible has changed. A slight

chill in the air causes me to shiver, and I move closer to him, seeking solace in his body heat. His breathing is softer, shallow, and he stares up at the ceiling, eyes focussed beyond the decorative mouldings. The muscles in his jaw clench, but I continue stroking his arm. There is something on his mind. Something he doesn't want to talk about, yet feels he must. I dread the moment he will speak.

"Y'know I have to leave," he says quietly. The words sink through me, knocking against the walls of my chest and settling deep in my stomach. Since we have become lovers, I have refused to think of his departure, the moment when he leaves me. However the logic is obvious; he will never be free until he has repaid his debt to the Huttese crime lord. Above all, I fear for his safety. Yet the thought that he will not be with me, and that he may not return, competes with my concern for his life. I do not know which nightmare is more horrible that he will die, or that he will choose not to return.

I touch the back of his hand to show him I understand. "I know."

I search his face, but he continues to avoid my gaze.

"I don't know if I'll be back." His tone is deceptively indifferent, yet I know him well enough to hear the facade. "I can't promise anything."

This is a new game we are playing, one we have ignored until now. It is both dangerous and addictive. But it is time we sorted out where we are headed. I have a question that needs to be voiced but for which I do not want to hear an answer.

In the stillness of the room, my voice is calm and clear. "Do you want to come back?"

"Do you want me to come back?"

His ill-thought response deserves no reply. The movement of the mattress as I roll from his side causes his head to turn questioningly. I rise quickly, anxious for him not to sweep me back into his embrace, and yet yearning for him to do exactly that. But he does not.

Jaw clenched tightly, I gather my gown from the floor. As I slip my arms into the light fabric, I glance back to where he still lays. He has shifted onto his side, his arm angled out towards me, face half-hidden by the line of his shoulder, as if he unsuccessfully reached for me, his actions arrested by either my swiftness, my fury, or his second thoughts. His eyes gaze down at the sheets, then close disconsolately. I turn and leave him and our suite, ensuring the door closes behind me with a conclusive whoosh.

The apartment's main lounge area is dark and quiet. Outside the broad bay window, the city lights glimmer in as many hues and shades as Bepin's sunset. Chewie is either minding the Falcon or searching for Threepio. Either way, the apartment is empty except for the two of us. For a moment I consider retreating to one of the other bedrooms and set the door lock. But that won't give Han the opportunity to follow, to apologise, to explain what he really feels. So I stalk around the room's circumference to the window. Cross my arms across my chest. Stare out at the lights. And wait.

Standing there alone in the room's coolness, I recognise my actions for what they are: inappropriate, over-emotional and even slightly childish. But I do not yield. I have a right to act this way I am in the right in my opinion, anyway. We have established enough of a relationship that I feel entitled to behave this way.

The hair rises on the back of my neck and I shudder at the freshness of the air temperature. The tiled floor is ice against my bare feet; there must be a problem with the room's thermostat. No matter...

Time seems to loiter, as if it has been slowed down by the preternatural chill. The shivering has tensed the muscles in my neck and shoulders. I wish Han were here to rub away the tightness. His large, warm hands unknotting the stress I carry. What will I do when he leaves? How can I face a night alone in my bed, by myself? I have grown to love seeing his face as my eyes close, and waking to find his body still wrapped around mine, the stubble on his chin scraping my shoulder.

He's not coming. I consider that perhaps he has fallen asleep. Or doesn't care.

My thoughts become tangled, unshaped and desperate. When I hear the door to our suite open, I am so grateful that I almost rush into his arms without further hesitation or recrimination. However the time I spent as a member of the Imperial Senate has not been wasted; I stand my moral high ground.

"Leia?"

His voice carries a lilting, questioning timbre, as if trying to comprehend my actions. I hunch my shoulders against his presence, pull my arms tighter across my chest. He sighs loudly. I hypothesise what he's thinking: You wanna play this game, huh? I can't imagine him wanting to abide by these rules. Not a smuggler, a mercenary. Not Han Solo. But he again proves me wrong. He moves to my side, stands there solemnly and looks at me. I continue facing the window, not really looking at anything, more likely making sure I don't look at him. Out the corner of my eye, I can barely discern his features; his face is shrouded in shadows.

"Leia."

His tone is now gentle, almost solicitous. For some unexplainable reason, a deep sorrow floods my senses, drapes oppressively around my heart. Tears pool in my eyes, splash down my cheeks. I bite my lip to vainly stop myself from trembling, stop the tears flowing. I suddenly realise what I have known all along.

I've lost him. He's gone.

With a muffled sigh of anguish, he pulls me into his arms. I lock my arms around his back, bury my face in his chest as he holds me in this comforting embrace, his cheek pressed against the top of my head. I don't want to think of anything except the warmth of his skin against mine, the softness of his lips on my forehead, the musky scent of him permeating my being.

He's gone. As good as gone...

We spend one more night together before they take him away from me. In the holding cell after Vader has sprung his trap. The Sith Lord is "concerned" enough about Han's health to grant him some time to recover from the torture before subjecting him to the experiment of the carbon freezing chamber.

Myself? I have not been harmed physically, for Vader is well aware of my resistance to any mind probes or physical suffering. No, I have endured far worse. For I have been forced to watch them torture Han.

... even now, at such distance, the holo-vid images of Han strapped to the scan grid, screaming in agony, are etched deep across my soul...

The last night we share is relatively quiet and subdued compared to our recent nocturnal activities. Han sleeps for most of it, exhausted from the abuse his body has withstood. Lifelessly stretched out above me, he lays on the hard sleeping pallet while I sit on the floor, reclining against the wall, watching him and daring to hope.

Chewbacca has long since ceased his restless pacing. He sits opposite me, his blue eyes flicking anxiously between Han and myself. He mutters the occasional word of consolation and encouragement. Even though I don't understand Wookiee, I can hear the forced comfort in his inflection.

I have no desire to sleep, however my mind insists I let go long enough to induce a light doze. I awake with a start as an arm slips around my shoulders. My head snaps up in alarm.

"Shh, easy," Han whispers.

Relief washes over me and I tenderly touch his face. His eyes are dark, skin pallid but he smiles his lopsided smile and adjusts his hold around me. His comforting presence lifts my spirits.

"Hi," he casually says.

My smile, like my voice, is small but appreciative. "Hi. How are you feeling?"

He shrugs dismissively. "A bit stiff, but that's the way you like me, right?"

I shake my head at his quip but smile again; his ability to find humour at the most difficult of times is one of the reasons that attracted me to him from the start.

"You should get some rest," I suggest, indicating the bunk with a tilt of my chin.

His arm slips down to my waist and he snuggles up closer. "I thought you might be lonely down here."

Despite the enjoyable feeling of his body nudged against mine, I am concerned he needs to recuperate. "I'm fine, Han. Really. I don't need any comforting."

As he rests his head on my shoulder, my arm gathers around his back. I brush the hair from his forehead, graze my lips across his brow.

"Well I do," he says softly.

I hold him closer, close my eyes against the pool of tears, and will away the shivering. Before long, his breathing slows and deepens. I disturb him momentarily to gently roll his head from my shoulder to my lap. On his side, face turned towards me, he nestles closer, arms placed loosely around my waist. His eyes flicker shut again as I push my fingers lightly through his hair, enjoying the intimacy of this sensual caress.

Eyes still closed, he quietly tells me, "Princess. Don't give in. No matter what happens. Okay?"

My throat tightens at the implications and meaning of his words. When I do not respond, he looks up at me, touches my arm imploringly.

"Will you do what I ask, just for once?" The sincerity in his voice is disturbing.

My lips form into a grim line. I stare into those incredible hazel eyes, watch the harsh cell lighting spark off flecks of gold, green and chestnut. Words cannot express what I feel for this man, this complex paradox of everything I admire and disdain. Yet now is the time words should be spoken. For if not now, then when.

I love you, Han. I always have. But you know that, don't you?

I nod my head.

"Don't humour me, Leia," he gently reprimands. "Or I'll come back and haunt you."

I turn my head from his inappropriate expression, don't want to think of what lies before us, but look back when he speaks again.

"Promise me you won't."

I swallow and nod. "I promise."

I have no holos to remind me of him. He did not like to have his image taken an old habit of one who lives on the wrong side of the law. But I have one memory that I carry with me constantly, that stands out from all the others. One that I stop to look at when I need reminding of the promise I pledged...

... sunrise... the last we will see together...

Naked, he stands near the window of our suite in Cloud City, gazing out at the pod car traffic that sweeps by. The dappled tibanna-laced colours of the sky illumine his face in profile, define the firm muscles of his body in gold and bronze. The serene touch of a smile turns the corners of his mouth. I call his name, and he turns towards me, his face beaming brilliantly in response.

"Hey, beautiful," he calls.

Laughing, and with a bound that sends body parts jangling comically, he launches himself back into our bed, and captures me in an embrace that can mean only one thing.

I just wish he'd told me.

... forty-three minutes until my chrono alarm activates.

I must have fallen asleep.

Part of me wants to rise now, attend to my duties early, leave the dreams and the memories behind. It wouldn't be a first; in fact, I suspect they are beginning to expect it from me. I'm afraid I've become a predictable, cheerless workaholic.

Han always believed in living life for the moment, to its fullest. He would not be impressed with what I am doing to myself. Sometimes I do think he has kept his threat to come back and "haunt" me. I imagine him pointing that finger of his in

my face and lecturing me as effectively as I've been known to lecture him. But then, if he was here to lecture me, I would have no reason to leave bed so early.

"To hell with the datawork, Princess," he says with a slight twitch of a grin. "I've got a more interesting proposition to put to you."

Wouldn't that send the tongues wagging "The Princess won't be in today. She has decided to stay in bed with her smuggler boyfriend."

Mmm... sounds like a nice idea...

... the warm caress of his skin...

... will it matter if I lay here a while longer...

... knees hooked behind mine...

... close my eyes and drift for a few minutes...

... stomach and chest moulded up my back...

... relax... reach out... touch the tendrils of his spirit...

... his breath whispering through my hair...

... and maybe... maybe...

... a kiss as gentle as a summer breeze tickles my neck...

I love you, Leia.

I know.

end

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