

[Back To Index](#)

THE DEPARTURE OF THE JEDI
by ZP Florian

This story was written just for fun and is not an attempt to make money or infringe on any copyrights or trademarks. Only the original ideas contained within the works on this nonprofit web site are the property of their authors, and please do not copy or link these stories to any other website or archive or print without permission of the author.

"Now, that we have acceptable quarters, could you spend a little less time in this decrepit bucket--"

"This decrepit bucket saved our asses a few times," Han growled. "And as much as I love and trust the Alliance, it is still a nice feeling to have the Falcon ready to go at any moment."

Leia sighed. There was something reassuring in the scratched plastisteel walls of the freighter, even if she didn't share Han's distrust in the Alliance and the New Government that they were assembling. Nevertheless, she longed for a home, that she could share with her new husband; and the pleasant flat in the diplomatic district might have been that home, if only Han ... but Han never felt comfortable within the peach-colored walls. She wondered if the Corellian was at all capable of settling down.

Han put down the tool box, and embraced her. "Nice of you to drop by," he whispered.

"Well, if I want to see you, I better come here. I wish you liked that flat."

"I don't think I've ever lived in a flat. It's too ... large."

"Large?" Leia was astonished. "Three rooms?"

"Three large rooms, and all kinds of other rooms, the thing is ten times the size of all the living space in the Falcon." He kissed her. "Let's not

talk about interior design, okay? There are things we'll never understand in each other. How is Luke? I haven't seen him in ages."

"He's on a secret mission."

Han let her go. "What secret mission?"

"A secret mission. Even I don't know what it is. Mon Mothma sent him somewhere."

"Speaking of secrets, is it still a secret that you're related? Yes? And that he was on the Death Star with Vader and the Emperor?"

"It is, and it should be. Han, I've explained it to you a million times. There is no use to tell everybody the incredible details of the whole thing. Half of the people wouldn't believe that Luke could be Vader's son, and still be a decent person. The other half would try to put him into soul-healing, to help him cope with it."

Han shook his head. "And I've explained it to you a million times, that it is only a matter of time, and people will dig into old documents, the Imperial files will be opened, and you'll have to answer unpleasant questions about keeping the whole mess a secret."

Leia put her finger on his lips. "Shh. I'm responsible for handling the Imperial documents. I'll know what to make public. The last thing Luke needs is the stupid publicity about him being Vader's blood and my long-lost brother. You yourself said this whole story is absurd."

"Fine, fine." Han gave in, as usual. "But don't say I didn't warn you. So where is Luke?"

"I really don't know. Well, I know a little. Mon Mothma was very eager to check what the Emperor and Vader had on Pirodor."

"Laboratories," said Han.

"How do you know?"

"Smugglers know a lot, Princess. They have a whole scientific research project going on there, right in the buildings of the old jail. So they sent Luke there? What for?"

"Pirodor is, at least in theory, a free and neutral planet. Though it is entirely unclear who has authority over Pirodor." Leia cast a worried

glance at Han. "For all we know, it could be the last refuge of the Imperials."

"And Luke went there as an ambassador?"

"No. I don't think so. I think Mon Mothma sent him as a...sort of an agent."

Han activated the Falcon's computer. "Pirodor, huh?"

"What are you doing?"

"I'm setting coordinates, what do you think? Just in case I'll have to go there in a hurry. I don't like the sound or the smell of this thing. Not at all. It would be just like real life, for Luke to survive the whole rebellion, then break his neck on some stupid peacetime mission for his beloved New Government."

"You are paranoid," Leia said, sliding her hand under his collar, as he bent over the screen. He made pleased noises, but continued feeding the data into the computer.

General Matte didn't believe his eyes. The young man in the light blue uniform of the maintenance crew was Luke Skywalker. Matte worked long enough on the file of Vader's son to know the face, the fine bone structure, the generous mouth, the high forehead. When the Lord Vader started to search for his offspring, Matte was entrusted with the delicate investigation. The Lord Vader was a very demanding master. Matte spent long days putting together bits of information, from the Tatooine registry, inoculation records, confessions of captured Rebels, spaceport data tapes (was the Lord Vader ever incensed to learn that his Rebel son organized the murder of a known gangster on Tatooine, under the nose of the local authorities!). Matte had a certain admiration for the boy. He knew that Luke had fought with Vader on Bespin and escaped that, too. He had yards of tape from the Bespin security system, showing this fight. Was that the last meeting between father and son? Matte knew that Vader was dead, according to the official statement of the New Government, blown up with the Emperor on the second Death Star over the Endor moon. Vader was dead, and no one would ever be interested in the huge file of Luke Skywalker. No one!

Matte shook his head and smiled. Such information was valuable. In the right hands, at the right time, such information could become a powerful weapon against the New Government. It could even ensure that Pirodor remained a neutral and free planet. It could buy the future of Matte and everyone else in the research complex.

He checked on the maintenance workers. Their new mechanic was listed as Luke Lars, and his fake ID was very good. Matte was a meticulous man: he ran a retinal check, too. Then he called the young man into his office, and politely asked him to sit down.

He had seen the face a million times in pictures. Now, as the intense blue eyes measured him, he felt uneasy. Should he tangle with Vader's son? But then, there was so much the boy didn't know.

"Your name is not Luke Lars," Matte stated. "You are Luke Skywalker, the son of Darth Vader. Pirodor Research ran the checks on you at the request of the Lord Vader. We still have every bit of data ever collected."

The boy leaned back in his chair and waited patiently for Matte to continue.

"I presume you've come here to check us out for the New Government. I know they'd want to shut us down. Or worse. I'd be put on trial for crimes against humanity." Matte rose. "Of course I'd like to avoid this. Just as you'd like to avoid being associated with the Dark Lord. The New Government uses your image very differently. You are the peasant hero, of Jedi blood. I think you'd hate to show yourself as you really are: the son of the Sith Lord, spawn of dark powers. Your New Government would not like that either. The people of the galaxy would not like to know that it was not the Good Light of Freedom that defeated the Darkness, but the desperate fight between a Sith Lord and his son that caused the fall of the Emperor--"

"Playing with words won't change the facts," Luke replied softly.

"No, but it can change the minds of many people. The Alliance secretly used Vader's son to defeat Vader? How do you think such a line sounds? Alliance used the tension within the family of the Dark Lord to break the power of the Sith? then kept the identity of Vader's son secret? Do you know how this sounds?"

The young Jedi sighed. "What are you driving at, General Matte?"

"I want Pirodor intact. Independent. Exempt from post-war harassment. I want all my co-workers free from prosecution. In exchange, I agree to keep your secret. I'd even let you keep your file. Erase it from our computers." Matte leaned on the desk, looking straight into the calm blue eyes. "Can we understand each other?"

"No. You may do anything you want with your files, and I'll do what I want with my information about Pirodor. The New Government will investigate, prosecute and judge as they see fit."

"And what about your secret? Can you be sure that the new leaders of our galaxy won't agree with me? Whose idea was it to keep your identity hidden? Was it your whim, or is it policy?"

Luke remembered his long discussions with Leia. He'd wanted to reveal the truth and she talked him out of it, using exactly the same arguments as Matte. He felt trapped.

Matte continued. "Shall I contact Mon Mothma? Or will you agree that you'll help us? With your Jedi powers, you can convince the New Government to leave Pirodor alone. A small matter, in exchange for your safety."

Luke did not answer.

"You refuse? I am sure Mon Mothma will be much more receptive to the idea. You have no experience in the matters of Governments. Right now, nothing is more important than the image of the new leaders."

Luke bit his lips. Matte used the same words Leia had.

"Do you know what will happen if I must talk to Mon Mothma? Instead of a hero, you'll become a burden. You'll be the dark stain on their pure white cloak. They'll get rid of you before the rumors start. A dead hero is a wonderful asset."

"You think the Alliance is as corrupt as the Imperials," Luke said.

"Oh, no. They are not corrupt. They'll hate to kill you. Some of them might even shed tears." Matte grinned. "But this is real politics, not idealism. They have a Galaxy to run. A new order to build. They owe this to the people. Nothing can stand in their way-and you do!"

"No," Luke said. still calm. "You do. Your blackmail, your scheming. You."

"And? Are you going to kill me? Are you capable of cold-blooded murder to defend your secret? No. I know that. You aren't going to kill me, because

then you'd have to lie about why you did it. You are not a liar, Skywalker. You are a Jedi. I have nothing to fear from you" Matte sat down, and looked at the boy with something resembling pity. "Now will you deliver my message to Mon Mothma, or do I have to detain you and contact her myself"

"Detaining me would change nothing."

"Not quite true. You see, for my purposes, you are worth more alive than dead. It is in my interest that your friends should not find an easy way to get rid of you."

"I don't believe they would even think of it." Luke was confident. "I think they would reveal the truth."

"Why don't you stay here and wait to see what happens? Continue your work as you please. I will not hinder you. And as soon as I have any information, I'll let you know. As a Jedi, you can sense if I lie. You have my word."

Luke nodded. "All right. You give me access to your computers, and let me walk freely on Pirodor, and you have my word that I'll stay until you contact the New Government."

"I'm glad to see that you are willing to give time to this matter." Matte smiled. "Feel free to take off this uniform and wear Jedi black, or Alliance khaki, as you please."

"Han!"

The Corellian turned and buried his face in the pillow. "Lemme sleep."

"Han, wake up. You were right. You'll need the Falcon. Now."

This worked. Han Solo was out of bed and wide awake in a second. "What?"

"Luke is in trouble on Pirodor. Mon Mothma told me. She is sending Damar Tion to get him out. I told her you are ready to fly there, and she agreed. You'll take Tion right now. She has all the details. She'll be waiting for you at the Falcon."

Han was dressing already. "I'd be happier with Chewie." He pulled on his boots. "But Tion will do. She is good. I've seen her in action." He tightened his gunbelt. "I'll get your brother back."

"Hush, don't say brother, someone might hear." Leia kissed her husband. "Be careful. Don't get into trouble. Let Damar handle it. This is not going to be a fight this is undercover work. Not your specialty."

"Sweetheart, everything is my specialty."

"Please, Han, promise me to stay out of it."

The Corellian grabbed his jacket and headed for the door. "See you, little wife," he said.

"Han, promise!"

He yelled back from the elevator. "NO!"

Damar Tion was in her forties, tall and strong. She wore the nondescript clothes of a nondescript person: she could have been a traveling salesperson, a war widow. or a tax collector. Han knew her better. He grinned at her. "Now, what are the plans?"

She turned back. "We're landing on Pirodor with a cargo of tirorni flour. It's in the hold already. You are going to deliver the flour to the marketplace. Here's your ID, here is the paperwork for the cargo, and here is the bill of lading; this is your customer. This is all legal, the man is actually expecting the stuff. While you're doing the delivery, I'll get Luke out."

"How?"

"You have no need to know," she replied this time without her customary grin.

Han toyed with his blaster, polishing away at a nonexistent stain. He was offended, and tried hard not to show it. He failed. "Listen, I hate this official style, and you know it. I have been in tight spots before, and I owe my life to Luke several times over, just like all of us. Without him, you'd have been

dead on Yavin. I'd still be in carbon freeze without him. If there's rescuing to do, I want to be in on it."

"Sorry." Damar attempted a grin. "I have my orders. There will be no shooting, and no fighting. Not your stuff, General Pirate."

Han kept polishing the blaster.

"I talked to them," Matte said to Luke. The Jedi was at the computer, compiling compromising mission data about Pirodor Research. No one tried to stop him. Matte took a look at the files and shrugged.

Luke finished copying the last file on the screen, then turned to Matte, trying to anticipate the news.

"Nothing yet," Matte continued. "They asked for some time to review the situation. I gave them two weeks. Generous? I think so. And I doubled the security in this building,. I am asking you to stay inside."

"I don't think this is necessary. I gave my word--"

"Oh, I know. It is not you I am trying to keep in: I am trying to keep them out. I am sure they'll try to arrange your untimely but extremely convenient death. Double bonus. They'll lose the connection to the Dark Lord, and they can blame your death on Pirodor Research. They can get rid of both of us in one fell swoop. Do you think they can resist such temptation?"

Luke stood up. "If no one tries to kill me in two weeks?"

"Then I shall apologize." Matte bowed. "And admit that your New Government is something I've never believed exists: honest people with power to rule. If there is such a thing, I shall confess my crimes, submit to prosecution, maybe even change my loyalties and let Pirodor Research serve the Alliance. Instead of nerve poisons, we shall manufacture beauty lotions."

Tiromi flour had never been delivered faster. Han was driving out of the marketplace as soon as the last sack was taken. The cargo carrier he drove was the fastest he could rent. He reached Pirodor Research at sundown. He

checked back to the Falcon, just in case Tion was already back there with Luke, but the ship was empty. In any case, he set his comlink to beep if anyone opened the Falcon's door.

Pirodor Research was huge, and Han had no idea where to look for Tion and Luke. He felt foolish to come here without any information, grumbling and growling about Leia not trusting him and Darnar not trusting him. Of course, he sighed, I do not trust anyone either, that's why I am here.

He drove slowly on the main road, circling the institute, trusting his luck to run into either Damar or Luke or both. Damar might need help, he thought; he had never seen a rescue without blasterplay.

And there was some.

On the roof of a flat building, too far to reach, just close enough to distinguish some matchstick figures against the orange sky, someone was running. Another followed. about thirty paces behind, and then, a whole group. The group was firing blue stun shots at the two runners. The first of them turned, and shot back: those were shots to kill. Some of the stunners fell: then a red beam from the blaster of the first runner caught the second one in the back. He seemed to hesitate, then slowly, gracefully, collapse. Han watched with terror. More firing, more running, then the battle moved onto another level, out of Han's sight. He drove around slowly, trying to see it, and at the next turn of the road, he spotted a small transport parked under the trees. It was the same one Tion had rented.

Han did not want to see more. He tuned his vehicle and drove back to the Falcon. By the time Tion got back, he was seated, belted in and ready to lift off.

Tion walked in, tired and sweaty. "Sorry," she said. "I am sorry. You were right ... you were right. I couldn't do it. They shot him."

Han said nothing. "We almost made it." Tion collapsed into the navigator's seat. "Almost made it."

"What happened? Where is Luke?"

"Dead." Han looked at the Princess with a curious expression. The color left her face, and she started to cry without a sound.

"Damar said he was shot while they were trying to escape." Han's voice was flat. "She said she was sorry."

Leia reached out for him, to seek comfort in his touch but Han took a quick step backwards.

"Don't," Han said. "Just tell me one thing: did you know?"

"Know what?"

"Did you know Damar was going to kill him?"

"Are you crazy?"

Han shrugged. "I don't know and I don't care. She shot him, and it's no use to say it was a mistake or something. I can tell a stun shot from a kill shot, and I've seen her shooting. She wouldn't shoot anyone by mistake. She got him in the back, clear and plain. She doesn't know that I know, and I don't give a kraat. All I want to know is: did you? Were you in on this? and why? Why would we send our best agent to pretend a rescue and kill him? Is it because you were afraid someone would find out he is your brother, and you are your father's daughter?"

Leia tried to see any emotion on Han's face, but there was nothing but cold hatred. She turned away. "Can you believe I'd get him killed?" she whispered.

"I don't know what to believe. There was a time when I believed my eyes. Then I learned to believe people. I wanna get back to my old habits. From now on, Leia, I am what I used to be. Han Solo, free spacer."

The door slammed shut behind him. Leia stood there, forcing back a scream. The only thing she could think of was that he didn't call her "sweetheart."

"Hi, Damar."

She was surprised to see the Corellian waiting for her in her own quarters. He had a blaster trained on her.

"Hi, Damar," he repeated. "I saw you kill Luke."

"Han, you..." But he was already shooting.

"The Millennium Falcon left port, Princess."

"Leia, Damar Tion was found dead in her room. Murdered."

She heard them talk, and could not answer. She waved them away. "Alone ... please..."

Would you consider going back to the old days?"

"Growfh auf hroom, Hankho."

"I might get even drunker, pal. So? Wanna get back to work? Han Solo, free trader, at your service. Just like the old days."

"Awg haum?"

"Nothing. Just the sky falling down Don't ask."

Chewie put his huge arms around the pilot. "Gruwh houmba, arghw..."

The Corellian was crying.

Soft colors. Floating images. Muffled noises. Cloth under his fingertips ... a bed? Green expanse over his head. Ceiling.

"He's coming to."

This was a sentence he understood. He tried to focus on the speaker. It was a droid. He turned his head. A man stood at the other side of the bed. Matte.

"So. I don't have to apologize after all." Luke raised a weak hand.

"Don't try to speak. You will recover. Pirodor Research knows a few things about raising the dead. Oh, not literally. Prompt surgery and lots of bacta. You now have not only an artificial hand, but a biomechanical heart as well. The shot was extremely accurate. I am sure they are convinced you're dead. Just rest."

The Jedi watched Matte leave, then continued to stare at the ceiling.

Matte was restless. Should he tell the New Government that the Jedi was alive? or should he wait until they accused Pirodor of the murder? If the Jedi would cooperate, he'd make a fine witness for the defense at any trial! The corpse walks in! Instant acquittal. Too much publicity, though. Think, think, he urged himself.

"Just a moment of your time," a voice startled him.

He whirled about and saw a tall Corellian, and an even taller Wookiee training blasters on him. The Corellian was swaying slightly.

"You have something that has no value for you," he said. "I want it. I'm willing to pay for it."

Matte tried to reach for his cornlink, but the Corellian stopped him with a hard look.

"I might be drunk," he growled, "but my partner here is quite sober. Don't do anything foolish. I want Skywalker's body."

An involuntary smile twisted Matte's mouth. "What for?"

"My business."

"Tell me what for, and I'll consider your offer."

"I want to give him a decent burial."

Matte tried to place the man. "Of course," he said. "Han Solo, captain of the ... hm, Centennial Turkey? Or are you another messenger of the New Government?"

The Corellian answered with a short obscenity.

"A decent burial. I presume you mean a Corellian burial.

"What is it to you?"

Matte sighed. This was getting complicated, and altogether too emotional. He did not like anything threatening his cynical logic. "A true friend," he said slowly. "My Stars, a true friend. Skywalker might have been at

least partially right. But you see, I am not in the position to dispose of his body. He isn't dead."

"Leia, we must talk. I understand you are hurt. You've lost a friend, and a husband. But this is not entirely a personal matter. There are other considerations. We have reason to think that Han killed Damar. His disappearance seems to support this suspicion. Please, try to answer a few questions: did he say anything about Darnar?"

Leia shook her head. She had never been so confused in her whole life, but now nothing made sense. She knew that if she kept silent any longer, she might lose her sanity. "I need help," she whispered. "Something happened...I don't understand. Han said Damar killed Luke."

"Nonsense." Mon Mothma was firm and gentle. She got hold of Leia's pale hand. "Leia, think, why would Damar do such a thing?"

"Han thought it was because ... I wanted it. That I wanted Luke killed ... because he was ... he was my brother."

Mon Mothma dropped Leia's hand as if it were a snake. "Your brother! What, are you Vader's as well?"

Something cleared up in Leia's tortured mind. "How did you know he was Vader's son? How did you know? Since when?" What Han had said suddenly made sense. His actions, his emotions. His accusations.

Mon Mothma started to pace up and down. "Leia, we know. We received the information from Pirodor. The Research Center has a whole file on him. They said nothing about you ... they don't know about you. Look, now that he is dead..."

"Han's alive. And I'm alive. Are we next?" Leia rose from her chair. "Too late now! Can you eliminate Pirodor? Han? Me? How many witnesses would you silence?"

"Leia, please! You know very well what it would do to the New Government if the Galaxy learned about Luke being HIS son! Pirodor was blackmailing us."

Looking at the older woman, Leia forced herself to remain calm. There had to be a way out -- all was not lost. Han was still out there; Han would believe her. Wouldn't he?

"I am sorry," Leia managed to say. "I must think. Of course, I understand. I am just ... worried."

"Yes, Yes ... How about a vacation? Some restful place."

"Can I leave tomorrow? I need...a change.." She was almost proud of herself. Trembling and outraged, she could do what she had never done: play helpless. Mon Mothma helped her to bed. Leia even said thank you.

She left the house at midnight. Finding Han would be difficult, but not impossible. Where did he go? In so much pain, where would he turn? Kashyyyk? Most probably.

The public transportation was slow and crowded. On Kashyyyk, she learned that Han had been there, and left with Chewie on the Falcon. Where to? No one knew for sure. Chewie's wife remembered that Han talked of returning, and said something about a Corellian funeral: Chewie showed him a suitable burial place. Leia knew enough of Corellian burial customs. It had to be a cave. For Han himself or for Luke? Could Han be crazy enough to do this? If he was crazy enough to kill Damar? Corellian. Gone to Pirador for the body?

"He hates you," Malla said to her using the seldom needed translator. "What have you done? I heard him talk to Chewbacca. He called you a hwinrat."

"He doesn't know the truth. I don't know how I can make him believe me." Leia sat down on a wooden chair. It was made for Wookiees; she looked very small in it. "He thinks I played a part in killing Luke. He has ... certain reasons to think so. But it is not true. Malla, he might never believe me."

"He is broken, little human. I've seen it in him. He put all his faith in you. I don't think he wants to live. He said it was his fault, for trusting you and the others. That if he weren't a fool, Luke would still be alive." The red Wookiee sighed. "Hankho is hurt. I just hope you are telling the truth."

"I am Leia Organa of Alderaan. My natural father was Darth Vader, Lord of the Sith. My twin brother was Luke Skywalker, the hero of the Rebellion, the last of the Jedi. We tried to keep out ancestry a secret, leaning about it was a shock for both of us. I thought it was better if no one knew. This was a mistake I made: a mistake I am trying to correct. My

brother was assassinated by the New Government, because someone tried to blackmail the Alliance with the secret of his identity."

The message was short: the holo of the small woman spoke quietly, her face showed no emotion. Four hundred holocubes containing this recording were sent to all the major information centers of the Galaxy. Within two days, no one was talking about anything else. Some demanded an investigation: some agreed with the New Government, others were outraged. The holocubes started a storm, and endless discussion of Vader's heritage, the Jedi, the Government and the unbelievable identity of Luke Skywalker. The Government had its own version: Luke's death was the fault of Pirodor, Han turned into an insane murderer, which caused Leia Organa to have a nervous breakdown. And whoever finds them should report to the authorities, so they can receive proper psychiatric treatment...

Leia Organa didn't care. She waited on Kashyyyk, very patiently, very quietly, for Han Solo to return. She knew he would; the message was meant for him, and no one else.

Matte was still wondering what he should do with the Jedi and the Corellian, who now insisted on staying in the sickroom with a drawn blaster to guard his friend's life, when the holocube message reached Pirador, effectively shattering his blackmail efforts. After watching the message four times, Matte walked into the sickroom and shook the dozing pilot.

"Wake up," he said. "I have no reason to keep you here any longer. Take your Jedi and go. I am going to leave, too. The best thing I can do is to disappear somewhere. After what happened, the New Government will be out to get you, and this little attempt on your friend's life will seem a lighthearted joke compared to what will come."

"What happened?" Han yawned, rubbing his tired eyes.

"Come with me, I'll show you."

Matte had to admit the Corellian's reaction to the message was at least as interesting to see as his reaction to Luke's being alive. Maybe more so. Han's face lit up, but his hands were trembling so hard, he nearly dropped the blaster.

"Is she your wife?" Matte inquired. "You must love her very much. I think I am beginning to envy you. Even if the whole New Government is after your hides."

"Matte, for an Imperial loyalist, you're pretty decent," Han declared. "If you ever have trouble forging a new identity and finding a new job somewhere, remember that a smuggler can always use a deck hand."

"I will remember," Matte said, feeling strangely flattered. "Now get out of my Institute."

"Where are we going?" Luke asked, when Chewie carried him into the Falcon and deposited him on a bunk.

"Home," Han answered easily. "For a while at least. Leia is waiting: and she doesn't even know that you are still alive. Boy, she'll be happy."

"How do you know where she is?"

"On that holo, she was standing in front of a... cave. I know the place, it is on Kashyyyk."

"What cave?"

"Uhh, some cave." Han shrugged. "I wanted to bury you there, Corellian style."

Luke gave him a sleepy smile. "I think we should have a picnic there."

"She might not appreciate the humor of it," Han sighed.

"She'll have no choice. Besides, it's my cave, I'll do what I please in it. Kenobi lived in a cave, too." The Jedi was half asleep but tried to keep talking. "I could...train her as a Jedi ... better still ... you make her lots of babies ... Jedis: four or five sets of twins... I've been ... wondering...does smuggling pay enough to support a Jedi school?"

"If you think I'd be crazy enough to work my ass off for your magic show, you're mistaken, brother!" Han laughed. "And you're not getting any of my sons into it either."

But his protest was no use; the young Jedi was already asleep.

END

[Back To Index](#)