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## Double Vision

by [Bernadette M. Crumb](#)

### PART 1: THE MEETING

Luke cast a glance toward the other seat in the cockpit of the shuttle he was piloting. The dark haired woman leaned forward in her seat, eagerly gazing out the forward viewport as they came out of lightspeed.

"He's not due to get here for a few more hours yet," Luke said. He remembered not to call her Jerella. Her dark brown eyes shone as she looked back at him.

"He could always be early." She absently rubbed at her temple as she turned back to the scene outside the ship. The bruise on her forehead had faded to a light greenish patch over her left eye and the slight disfigurement would be completely gone in a few days.

"Headache?" Luke asked as he sent the shuttle swooping into an orbit around the deserted system's fifth planet.

"Some," she admitted, settling back in the co-pilot's chair. "A bit annoying but not that bad."

Luke set the shuttle into a geosynchronous orbit and set it on autopilot. "Why don't you go back and rest until The Falcon arrives? Winter and I will wake you up as soon as she breaks from hyperspace."

"I take it this is more than a suggestion?" she asked.

"You did have a concussion and the medics said that you needed to avoid stress and excitement until it heals completely." Luke rose and offered his hand to her. "Come on."

After another token bit of resistance to the idea, she made her way to one of the two private cabins in the rear of the courier vessel. As the door closed behind her, Luke took a deep breath and looked at Winter, who had seated herself near the catering unit and was nursing a cup of chai.

"I hope he doesn't come charging in without giving me a chance to explain," he said. "It's going to be hard enough for him to deal with the deception knowing what he's facing when he goes in that room. I'd hate to have to explain it after he's seen Jerella."

"You need to call her Leia now, Luke," Winter reminded him. "Until we get your sister back from the Imperials, we can't risk anyone inadvertently calling Jerella by her real name. Even if she gets her memory back, we need to be in the habit."

Luke nodded and sat down. "I understand. I just hope I can get Han to understand."

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Han reached for the hyperdrive controls and gently pushed them forward, dropping the Millennium Falcon out of hyperspace in a blaze of starlines. Beside him, Chewbacca was back in his usual oversized seat, just returned from helping Lando with a personal business deal on the rim.

"Thanks for getting home just in time, buddy," he told the Wookiee. "Ever since Winter took off more than a month ago... well, it's good to have you back in that seat."

\*\*It's good to be back.\*\* Chewbacca nodded toward the designated rendezvous point, \*\*There's the shuttle. I wonder who we're to be meeting?\*\*\*

"Mon Mothma didn't actually say, but she insisted that I bring the boys. Supposedly Jaina is enroute from the Scoundrel as well--and it's about time she got back to us. But with the kids, I don't want to hope, Chewie, but what if--?" He broke off, unwilling to verbalize his deepest hope.

\*\*Only a bit more patience and you'll find out.\*\*

"Dad?" Anakin's voice sounded from the lounge area. "Are we there yet?"

Han rolled his eyes. It had actually been several years since the kids were in the stage of constantly querying the duration of a voyage, but this time, his youngest son, although now twelve years old, was even more impatient than he was to get to their destination. Yet when questioned about his urgency, Anakin had no real answer to give.

"About ten minutes to match orbits. Try not to kill each other while you wait."

Jacen's voice called forward, "Don't worry dad... we've got the holochess set up and I'm winning."

"The games not over until it's over." Anakin replied and the electronic sounds the holographs made got louder.

Han shook his head with a smile. They were great kids, even considering that he was biased in his judgement. He glanced at the proximity sensors and found only the shuttle that they were approaching in the area. "No sign of Jaina's shuttle?"

\*\*Not yet, but they probably won't arrive until after we do. It's the most sensible thing from a security standpoint.\*\* Chewie adjusted the headset he wore. \*\*I'm getting a coded signal.\*\* He was silent a moment. \*\*It's Luke--and Winter.\*\* The Wookiee switched the audio to the cockpit speaker.

"Hello, Han." Luke's voice was clear but had an overtone of strain in it. "You'd best dock on the underside of us. I'll come over through the top hatch. Han, I need to talk with you privately before anything else."

"Uh, sure. I've got the boys here. Mon Mothma mentioned she'd summoned Jaina too. Is she with you? What's going on?"

"No, she's not due to arrive for another twenty minutes. I'll explain when I cross over. See you in a few minutes." Luke closed the connection from his end, leaving nothing but the hiss of static coming from the speaker.

Minutes later Chewie lined the Falcon up with the bottom hatch of the Alliance shuttle and docked with it expertly. Han waited impatiently at the upper airlock, his arms crossed and boot tapping until the hatch hissed open and Luke descended, dropping easily from above.

"A private place?"

Han cast a glance up to the now closed hatch. "My cabin. Come on."

Luke waved to the boys and promised to talk to them after he finished talking to their father. Clad in a plain tunic of rusty black, Luke looked very much as he had the first time Han had seen him after awaking in Jabba's palace twenty years before. Han leaned against the frame of the bunk, folded his arms and gazed at his brother in law.

"Mon Mothma implied--"

Luke interrupted him. "I know what it must have sounded like, but no." He shook his head. "Major Treece and his team attempted to get her out, but our intel was wrong and Palpatine returned to Coruscant ahead of schedule. We knew there was a good chance that the team wouldn't be able to do it, despite their best efforts, so," he took a deep breath, "we had a back up plan."

Luke hated seeing the hope die in Han's eyes, and hurriedly explained the situation; how Lt. Jerella was among the refugees fleeing Imperial attack, ending up on Yavin. He described her incredible resemblance to Leia, even to being a Force user. "She volunteered to double for Leia because the New Republic's morale has been beaten so low and we have lost so much. We set up a real rescue attempt, that if it should have succeeded, Jerella would have simply returned to the Jedi Academy to study, and you and Leia would have been reunited."

He looked away from Han momentarily. "So, now, Plan B has been put into effect. Word is already going around the fleet from the crew of Loyola who picked up Jerella from Major Treece, along with the story of the purported rescue."

"So you want me to meet this woman who will be pretending to be my wife in public." Han crossed his arms and shifted his weight., "So that's why the secrecy and needing the whole family here?"

"Yes," Luke nodded.

"So what's the problem? You didn't want to see me alone just to tell me some girl looks a lot like my wife."

"Well, we have a bit of a problem," Luke admitted. "During the faked rescue, Gamma Squad got a bit too enthusiastic in their roleplaying and Jerella got knocked out, concussed, and now -- " he finished uncomfortably, "well, she believes she really is Leia."

"What?!" Han dropped to sit on the edge of his bunk.

"She'd been intensively trained to imitate Leia by Winter. She had a remarkable knack for getting into character, so to speak, and the two medics who are in on the secret believe that the concussion somehow subsumed her real personality below the assumed one of Leia. They do say that she will eventually snap out of it, but if we try to force it, we could cause significant mental trauma to her. So, when she sees you, she really does believe you are her husband. And you'll have to respond as if she really is Leia--not just for public appearances, but off duty too."

"And while this Jerella tries to set up house with me, what's happening with my real wife?" Han asked harshly. "I've held back trying to get her out myself because I do know that I can't beat the Emperor alone, but I won't let the Alliance abandon her."

Luke understood that Han's temper was caused by his shock and worry about Leia and so let it pass. "She isn't being abandoned. We've got three more teams setting up to try to get her out. If only she hadn't been hooked up with Darana--"

He trailed off momentarily, then continued. "We need to explain to the kids about her believing she's Leia. I think they'll give the masquerade a chance, Han. Will you?"

Han was stroking a piece of burgundy and gold printed silk that protruded from beneath one of the pillows on the double bunk. His hazel eyes were shadowed with grief when he raised them to Luke's. "I really don't have a choice, do I? Without me, the masquerade will fail because no one would believe her if they didn't see us as a couple. But," he added warningly, "we're only a couple when other people can see us. And Chewie needs to know the truth too."

"Agreed. Now, I'm going to go out and explain to the boys and Chewie. Jaina should be arriving shortly. I'll ask Chewbacca and Winter to explain it to her as soon as she arrives and before she sees Jerella."

Luke left the cabin and Han returned to his thoughts. He pulled the silk from beneath the pillow and pressed it to his face. It was a caftan of an ornate burgundy and gold pattern Leia had worn the night before she'd been captured by the Imperials. He imagined he could still smell her scent in the folds of the fabric, despite the months that had passed since Port Lansing.

Closing his eyes, he visualized that night, the laughter and the closeness that nearly two decades of marriage brought. He let himself dwell on the mental images for several minutes. Then, steeling himself for the sight of this stranger who awaited him, he stuffed the caftan back under his pillow and headed for the lounge, forcing his face into an expression of expectant pleasure. He caught a glimpse of his reflection in the small mirror on the wall near the doorway and wondered if it would look as faked to this Lt. Jerella, as it did to him.

He stepped into the lounge and swallowed hard. Despite the warning he'd been given, it was impossible not to think that the woman embracing his sons was his wife. He'd expected a superficial similarity, like he'd seen in other public relations impersonators. He hadn't expected the perfection of face and form and movement that confronted him. His voice almost failed him as he moved to meet her.

"Leia--" Her small frame fit perfectly in his arms as she abandoned the boys to fly into his automatic embrace. Burying his face in her braided hair, he let himself pretend, just for a moment, that it really was Leia.

## Part 2: REFLECTIONS

Two weeks later--

Leia paused in brushing out her long hair, gazing at her reflection in the dressing table mirror with a slight frown. There was no gray in the dark locks, and although her features were certainly no longer the baby face of her late teens and early twenties, maturity had brought forth no disfigurement. She lay down the hairbrush and stood, running her hands down the sides of her torso, sliding down over the silk of her high necked robe.

Three children and, save for a few stretch marks on tummy, hips and thighs, her figure was all any woman of her age could ask for. So why, in the two weeks since she'd been reunited with her husband had he still not come to her bed?

Leia flung a lock of hair back over her shoulder and stared irritably at herself. There always seemed to be a reason for Han not to return to their quarters on the cruiser until after she'd fallen asleep--and he was almost always awake before she was in the morning. Why? Had she in those months she couldn't remember done something to cause him to form a disgust of her? Was that possible? Who knew what she could have done while under the control of the Emperor and his Sith?

She shuddered and pushed the thought away as she whirled and crossed the stateroom to the wardrobe. The modest robe dropped to the floor at her feet as she opened her lingerie drawer.

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Han ignored the heavy sound of Chewie's footsteps in the cockpit accessway of the Falcon. His hands were full of wires and hydrolines as he yet again tinkered with his beloved ship.

\*\*Have you any idea how late it is?\*

"Yeah, I know what time it is." Han didn't look up from the tangle in his fingers.

\*\*She's back in your quarters now. The meetings are over.\*\*

"And I know she's waiting for me. That's why I'm here."

\*\*You should be up there, keeping the masquerade viable.\*\*

Han began sorting out the multicolored lines and shook his head. "She looks too much like Leia, Chewie. She even smells like Leia! I can't handle being that close

to her. I..." He paused uncomfortably, "I'm attracted to her, dammit, and it's bloody hard."

Chewie laughed briefly and Han glared at him.

"Oh, shut up! That wasn't what I meant!" He dropped the wires onto the floor and held his head in his hands. "It's been more than half a year since I held my wife in my arms--and I'm not going to betray our marriage with a woman whose resemblance to her is beyond uncanny. It would be more honest to visit a bordello and pay someone."

\*\*People are starting to whisper about a division between the two of you. That you haven't really forgiven her for agreeing to go with the Emperor to save Jaina. They expect to see more affection between you.\*\*

"I can't, Chewie! If I hug Jerella in public to make people believe, I'm being totally unfair to her, building her hopes. If only she didn't believe that she's Leia!"

Chewbacca was silent for a moment then reached for the wires Han had dropped. \*\*Let me finish this up. You go to her. And in about ten minutes I'll send someone to fetch you down here as there's a problem with the ship that needs to be fixed immediately before we arrive at Charos.\*\* He cast a sidewise glance at Han. \*Think you can handle her for ten minutes?\*

"Very funny!" Han stood and let Chewie take his place. "I've got your promise, ten minutes."

\*\*Ten minutes.\*\*

Muttering to himself, Han reluctantly headed down the ramp into the docking bay of the Alliance cruiser, and strode toward the lifts to the VIP quarters.

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Leia smiled at her reflection. Her hair flowed shining down her back, a dark foil for the royal blue gauze gown that skimmed her contours. The neckline was far lower than anything she generally wore in the daytime, and the lace trimmed hem only came low enough on her thighs to hide the silvery patches that were her badges of successful childbirth. The sleeveless robe she wore over the night-gown was floor length but of a sheerer fabric, the length making her look taller than she really was in her bare feet.

She started as a knock sounded on her door, and she turned to face it, unconsciously reaching out with her senses to identify the caller. "Come in, Jaina." She pulled the robe about herself and sat down at the dressing table again.

"Mom?" The teenager paused as she saw how the older woman was dressed.  
"Wow!"

Leia smiled. "Yeah, wow! I didn't even know I still had this. Your father gave it to me the year before you were born."

Jaina glanced down, apparently a bit embarrassed at finding her middle aged mother was still a sexual being. "I just wanted to say goodnight."

"I thought you'd still be out on the Falcon working with your father." Leia hugged her daughter, amazed to find herself looking up at the girl.

"Aw, Dad chased me out an hour ago." Jaina grinned. "He said he wanted to know where the modifications were himself and not have to worry if I was on board or not to tell him what changes I'd made."

They laughed together and Jaina moved for the door. At the portal she paused. "Mom? I really missed you. I'm so glad you got home safely." Then she ducked through the door, leaving Leia alone again.

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Han entered their suite through the living room and ducked into the guest fresher to clean up his greasy hands. He also admitted to himself that he was buying himself time.

Unhappily, he looked at his reflection in the mirror. When he'd heard that Leia had been rescued, his universe had come to life again, only to be shattered minutes later, when Luke had privately informed him that the woman was a double with the unfortunate delusion that she really was the princess. The kids were taking it better than he was. The masquerade was almost a game to them. They had no problems in treating the Jedi Jerella as if she really were their mother.

And that was part of the problem. She was perfect. Each mannerism, each movement, the way she framed her words. It would be so easy to go into the bedroom and slip into the fantasy that the woman he loved was waiting for him. Too easy.

With a curse, he filled the sink with cold water and plunged his head into it. The shock didn't really do any good. He flipped his dripping hair off of his forehead and grabbed a towel, muttering to himself. "I've got to be insane to have agreed to do this."

The craziness of the plan didn't mitigate the need to show the fragmented Alliance that their Princess was back and that in this particular area they'd beaten

the Emperor. Although the Princess was merely an impersonator--the image was already making a difference in the morale of the battered worlds. Even Han could admit that.

Finally, realizing he could stall no longer, he headed for the bedroom, where she was waiting.

The lights were lowered to a soft, romantic glow when the door slipped open before him. She sat with her back to him, brushing out her long hair. Han swallowed as he met her eyes in the mirror's reflection. It's not really her! he told himself as she stood up and turned, the long robe falling away to reveal the sexy nightgown that had been his gift more than fifteen years ago. He was frozen in place as she pressed herself against him and reached up to draw his mouth down to hers.

Even as their lips touched there came an insistent buzzing that would not stop. Dazed, it took Han a few moments to register the noise. "Who is it?" he called, frantically hoping it was the summons he'd asked Chewie to send. He could feel himself responding to the ardor of the woman in his arms and the desire it raised horrified him even as it seduced him.

"Han! Let me in!" The voice over the annunciator was Lando's and the urgency in his voice sounded real. "Dammit, Han, there's a fire on the Falcon! Chewie needs you there!"

A fire? Han tore his lips away from the woman who he wished really was his wife and whirled for the door. "I'm coming!" Chewie, I asked you to claim a problem needed me, not to set the ship on fire!

As he barreled through the living room, he barely gave the door time to open before he was through it, almost running down Lando. "What the hell happened? She was fine when I left her."

"Don't ask me," Lando responded as he ran at Han's side to the lift that would carry them to the hangar bay. "He called me, saying that the intercoms to your quarters had been shut down and to get you down there right away." He slumped against the wall of the lift car as it sealed about them and smirked at Han. "Too bad for the interruption, old buddy."

"What are you talking about?" Han glared at Calrissian.

"Well, it's obvious that you two were otherwise occupied when I banged on your door." Lando pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and handed it to Han. "I see Leia's branded you again."

Han turned toward the reflective doors and groaned. Not only were there several clear lipstick marks on his jaw and mouth, Leia had somehow managed to get his shirt open to the waist, and he'd not had a clue. He scrubbed the make-up from his face and refastened his shirt without looking at Lando. For sure he was going to be the focus of shipboard scuttlebutt in the morning. Well, isn't that what you wanted? For people to believe that you and she really were happily back together again?

Chewie was yelling at the cruiser's deck officer and brandishing a fire extinguisher. The Alliance Star Fleet lieutenant obviously had no clue of the meaning of the Wookiee invective being launched at him, but it was equally obvious that he was nervous of the irate being. The Wookiee barked a final insult at the young man as he saw Han come charging into the bay with Lando on his heels. To Han he snapped, **\*\*You need to keep your mind on your work instead of on your wife.\*\*** He turned and led the way up the ramp, still carrying the extinguisher.

The pungent stench of burned plastics and leather filled the air as they moved into the cockpit. Han's heart sank. The rewiring he'd been working on was a smoldering mess. The back of his pilot's seat was scorched and darkened and the residual foam from the fire extinguisher crackled on the cockpit surfaces. Han stooped down and poked gingerly at the wires. He closed his eyes in disgust with himself as he traced out the cause of the fire. It had been his own fault. He'd misconnected two power feeds and built in a short circuit. Now he had to deal not only with a rightfully irate woman in his quarters, but a real emergency on his ship too.

Leia stamped to her closet and pulled out one of her concealing gowns that Han had once jokingly referred to as her "ice princess" outfit. She twisted her hair up in a severe style and jabbed in the pins in quick, angry movements. Her dark eyes flashed with anger and frustration as she watched her image change in the mirror from the sensual woman to the proper and correct lady of Alderaan she used when involved in official duties.

Then, even as the façade of years of practice slipped into place, it struck her that until he'd heard it was a fire on the Falcon, Han had not been resisting her advances. She paused, with her hands on the ornately twisted knot on the top of her head, then plucked loose the pins to let it cascade down again with a new smile.

He hadn't resisted!

### **Part 3: AFTER BARRATA**

The planet Barrata was a hyperspace jump behind them and the Commanding Officer of the New Hope had notified the passengers in the VIP cabins that they'd be coming out in the Bostia System within the hour.

Han continued the conversation that had been interrupted by the call. "I can't believe I actually let Jaina stay with Treece to go visit the Scoundrel and then to meet us at the talks. I swore I never wanted to see his face again six months ago. I guess even I can change my mind about the guy. How many more speeches before we arrive at Port Lansing?" he asked Winter as he closed the connection with the bridge of the transport.

The aide looked up from where she'd been conferring over the schedule of events for Bostia Base with Leia. "Four. Today's on Bostia, then two more tomorrow. The first on board the ASD Resistance and the second at the fighter base at the capital of Arasana III, with a ceremonial dinner to follow at the planetary governor's palace. The fourth will be at the main refugee camp on Tycemia. A good portion of the evacuees from Yavin went there and not all of them have been able to return yet."

Leia tapped the schedule on her lap and commented, "I'm not so sure about the security measures on Asarana. They've got a parade scheduled. The last time I was involved in a pass in review, someone took a pot shot at me. I'm willing to risk standing at a podium while giving a speech, but to stand out in the open on a reviewing stand for two hours while Governor Urik shows off--" She cut off abruptly, hunching over and clutching at her head with a gasp.

Han leaped across the intervening space, and, inadvertently shoving Winter out of the way, grasped her by the shoulders. "Leia! What's wrong?"

"Pain--sudden, horrible pain suddenly cut off," she uncurled, her eyes wide and distant. "I felt terror--but too much of it--more than one person. Something horrible has happened." Her eyes came back into focus and she took a deep ragged breath. She put her hands on Han's and drew them with hers into her lap, fingers intertwined.

But this time, Han's eyes had gone distant as a memory was triggered.

More than twenty years ago, he'd been heading for the lounge from the cockpit after barely beating an Imperial Star Destroyer into hyperspace. He could overhear his passengers' voices as he moved along the short corridor "--as if millions of voices were crying out in pain and terror--and were suddenly silenced."

No, he thought desperately. We've destroyed two of those monstrosities already. Surely if another had been built, intel would have found out about it!

"I'm all right now," Leia swallowed and looked at Winter. "I'll ask Luke about it when we get to Lansing. And I'll check with the medics, just in case it's more from my head injury--although why something would flare up four months later, I have no idea. Now, back to the schedule."

Han left them to their conference and headed for the bridge of the transport. He wished that Chewie was around, but the Wookiee had taken off in the Falcon with Lando the week before on a minor mission. Lately, it seemed that his co-pilot had been away more than he'd been with the family. Ever since that odd conversation they'd had a few weeks after the Masquerade had begun...

He made his way to the bridge observation window and stared out at hyperspace. He waved off Captain Brecker when the Commanding Officer began to approach him, and remembered...

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\*\*She smells like Leia!\*\* Chewbacca insisted for the fourth time in less than an hour.\*\*

"You're imagining things. Hand me that hydrospanner." Han ducked under the navigation console and began to re-route some cables around the new navicom module.

\*\*I know what your wife smells like, Han. Eight months doesn't destroy that sort of memory in me. And in the two days I've been around this--Jerella--I scent nothing but Leia.\*\*

"So she wears the same perfume. It's all part of the masquerade." He cursed as the spanner slipped and he barked his knuckles on the panel. He shoved himself out from under the ledge and stared at his partner. "Look Chewie, I wish more than anything that she really is Leia. You should know that. But Luke insisted that she isn't--that she's Jerella. And he should know, being a Jedi."

\*\*Maybe Jedi can't smell as well as I can.\*\* the Wookiee growled.

"I don't want to hear it, Chewie. If you've got a problem with this, go talk to Luke and tell him about it. I can't handle having my hopes raised and then dashed anymore." He rubbed his forehead and surreptitiously wiped his eyes before sliding back under the panel.

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Han shook his head. Another thing to damn the Emperor for... the fracturing of a close special friendship...

His thoughts were interrupted as the ship burst out into realspace. The communications officer suddenly cried out. "Captain!"

Out of habit, Han turned toward the officer--in time to see Becker stiffen as he leaned over the screen. "What is it?" He hurried over to peer over the officer's shoulder.

"The Imperials have destroyed Barrata. A transmission from a ship that managed to get out..." His dark complexion was waxy as he faced Solo fully. "They've built another Death Star."

Han grasped the edge of the console for support as horror made his knees weak. "Jaina!"

## **PART 4: THE POOL**

Leia took one look at the proposed schedule that Winter handed her and sighed. As usual, it was packed, with hardly time to eat between meetings and conferences, much less spend any quality time with her family. From the formal dinner that opened the political negotiations that evening, until midday three days later, every moment was accounted for.

"Winter, do I have to be anywhere until the dinner tonight?" She glanced up at the white-haired aide.

"Actually, no. I felt it wise to give us plenty of time to unpack and get settled in before we have to be 'on show' so to speak."

"And do you need to be anywhere until it's time to get ready?" As the aide hesitated, Leia pressed her advantage. "Be honest. You really don't." She turned toward the wardrobe and rummaged through one of the drawers. "They've got a lovely hot tub on the rec level that I've never, ever gotten the chance to try out. We're going down there now, before someone shows up with something I just have to do." She pulled her swimsuit out of the drawer and grinned. "I've had this for years, it's about time I used it!"

"Well, I suppose you're right," Winter conceded. "It's going to be a busy weekend. We may as well relax while we can." She pulled out her own bathing suit, which Leia hadn't known she'd brought.

Solo entered the suite that had been assigned to their party. He'd purposefully delayed his departure from their quarters on board the transport, making the excuse that he wanted to check up on the status of Chewie's mission first. He'd arrived on the bridge just in time to get a transmission from Treece and Jaina, reporting their escape from Barratta, and their expected arrival time at Port Lansing later that evening.

Han wasn't surprised to find that Leia and Winter were not in the suite. He'd assumed that the pair would be immediately sucked into the official business of the gathering, leaving him on his own save for things specific to his calling.

He tossed his jacket on the bed and loosened his collar. While he had the chance, he intended to swim out his frustrations. Maybe the exercise in a cold pool would rid him of his excess energy--and his desire--at least temporarily.

"I feel like I'm playing hooky," Leia confessed as the two women made their way to the ladies' locker room next to the pool area.

"Nonsense," Winter retorted. "You're not neglecting any of your duties. And if you don't have any time to relax, you won't be able to cope as well with the stress of

your position here." The tall woman permitted herself a tiny smile. "Besides, who do you think slipped that suit into your traveling case?"

Leia smiled at her friend and pulled the door to the locker room open. Minutes later, feeling very short in her bare feet and turquoise and violet two piece suit, she pulled the pins from her hair and shook her head as it cascaded down past her waist.

"Ahhhhhhhh!"

Winter closed her locker and shook her own head. "I will never understand how you can carry all that weight piled up like you do," she said with the air of much repetition. Her own white, knee-length hair contrasted with her own pale green and turquoise wrapped suit.

"Because when it's down I look even shorter than I am!" Leia grabbed a pair of towels from the shelf and headed out into the humid steaminess of the pool chamber itself. Her nose wrinkled at the chlorinated smell, then she shrugged, pausing to dip her toe into the full-sized pool. She jerked it out with a mock shiver. "That's too cold for my taste!" Her smile broadened as she crossed the few feet to the edge of the whirlpool. The quiescent water, framed by large pots of greenery and various chairs and benches, steamed gently. Tossing the towels on a nearby chair, Leia stepped down into the pool, sighing as the warmth of the water penetrated her feet. "Would you hit the air, Winter?" she grinned apologetically at her friend and aide. "I should have done it before getting in."

Winter gave a mock bow and said, with a touch of mischief in her voice, "Certainly, my lady. Your servant always." She arranged the dials accordingly, set down her towels and joined Leia in the pool, which was starting to bubble and churn. "Hindsight is ever perfect," she added.

Leia stepped deeper into the water and her brown hair floated about her like a huge dark flower on the water's surface. Grasping the side of the pool, she lifted her feet and tipped her head back until only her face was above the bubbling surface.

"Ahhhhhh."

Winter lay back upon the marvelously hot surface and extended her long legs across the pool, floating with her eyes closed and arms outstretched upon the buoying jets. "Mmmmmmm. Just what the princess' aide ordered," she said contentedly. "I'll have to program this kind of relaxation into your schedule more often." She arched her back, ducking her head briefly under the water and slicking back her hair.

"I can't believe I've left it this long to get down here." Leia kicked her feet and moved over to the underwater bench. Sitting up against one of the water jets, the high-pressure flow bubbled up against the back of her neck and she stretched her arms along the edge of the pool. "I've got an excellent idea! Why not hold the conferences right here? It's warm and relaxing and might even get the crankiest of representatives to calm down." She grinned again, the overspray from the water jet beaded on her face, the droplets clinging to her dark eyelashes.

Winter raised her head, her eyes open wide. "While that would probably be most pleasing to any of the Mon Calamarian delegates, I doubt that the Emperor would care for the effect of heavy, moist air on his royal robes. "Of course," she added, "he could wear a swimsuit instead."

Leia almost choked, laughing as the image of the wizened, wrinkled emperor in swimming gear presented itself. She hit the water's surface, sending a spray to splash Winter, in retaliation.

Winter smiled and glided back to sit on the ledge of the tub, kicking her legs, apparently idly, until she accurately aimed a splash back at the laughing Leia, soaking her hair and face further.

As Leia moved to avoid the water, still laughing, the door leading from the men's locker room clicked open. Curious to see who was entering, still snickering at the ludicrous mental image, she turned toward the sound.

Her laughter died as her brown eyes met hazel ones.

Winter was instantly focused and ready for anything, although only someone who knew her very well would have noticed the change. Her muscles relaxed with an identical smoothness as she identified the intruder. "Hello, Captain Solo," she said, gracefully breaking the awkward silence. Leia unconsciously licked her lower lip as she took in his appearance. A towel was draped across his bare shoulders. Her gaze followed the line of the towel toward the close-fitting brown swim trunks he wore, and tore her eyes away, blushing as she realized that she was gawking publicly at his physique. "Han."

Solo looked frankly stunned as he took in the sight of her with streaming wet hair and swimsuit clinging to her breasts amid the frothing water of the whirlpool. He opened his mouth, coughed suddenly, then choked out, "Leia! I--er--wasn't expecting to see you down here." He dropped his towel onto a convenient bench and unconsciously stepped toward the hot tub. "I thought you'd be up dealing with the Diplomatic Embassy people."

Leia glanced back at Han, sinking deeper into the water until her shoulders were submerged again. Her lips twitched into a smile. "I'm playing truant," she declared.

"No," Winter corrected her. "You're not. You're following orders--mine. You needed some time to relax and prepare for all the tensions of this weekend, and you swallowed my bait like a ganglefish."

Leia splashed water at Winter and made a face. "You could have picked a more attractive comparison!"

"A more 'diplomatic' one?" The aide smiled. "I thought we were taking a break from diplomacy."

"Leia." Han stooped down, closer to her eye level, but still out of reach. "I've got good news. We got a communication from Treece. He and Jaina made it off of Barratta all right. They had to detour around the Imperial units accompanying that new Death Star, but they should be here by the time the banquet starts tonight."

"Oh, thank the Force!" Leia closed her eyes as the relief washed through her. She'd purposefully not dwelt on her daughter's possible fate since the word of the destruction of Barratta reached them, but with the news, a knot of tension between her shoulders dissolved away with the fear. She opened her eyes, flashing Han a brilliant smile.

Solo smiled back at her and leaned closer--then abruptly halted as he remembered who she really was supposed to be. "I'm going to do some laps," he blurted out and sprang up to dive into the deep end of the large pool.

Leia cringed at the sound of the splash, remembering the chill of the water therein. "When it gets too cold, there's plenty of room over here!" She gazed longingly at his muscular figure cutting through the water.

Unseen by the Princess, Winter sighed and gave Leia a gentle look of sympathy for her frustration. She knew exactly why Han was reacting the way he was, but it was something in which she could not interfere. She wished that she could tell him of her beliefs about Leia, but she still needed to confirm her suspicions with Luke Skywalker. The couple would have to work it out between themselves.

Aloud she agreed. "Plenty of room indeed." She stood, stretching with pleasure before she moved up the steps to the tile surrounding the pool. "I've got some schedules up in the suite to work on. But you--" she pointed at Leia, "--are not to come up to the room for at least another standard hour." The timer on the whirlpool completed its cycle and the water stilled. "You know you won't get another chance to just relax and be yourself for the course of the conferences. Take advantage of it while you can." She turned toward the larger pool and raised her voice. "And that goes for you, too, Captain!" she added.

Solo shot her a glare then ducked under the surface of the water to head back toward the opposite end of the lap lane in which he swam.

Leia opened her mouth to protest, then glanced over at the main pool. She smiled again and settled back onto the bench of the tub. "I promise I won't be up there in less than an hour."

"Good girl." Winter grabbed her own towels, reset the dials on the hot tub, and whisked out of the room.

Leia sat silently, watching Han stroke through the water, as the whirlpool ran through its fifteen minute cycle, just enjoying the sight of him. When the jets turned off, she climbed out, but didn't reset the controls. Water streamed down her body from the mass of her long hair and she stood on the tile decking between the two pools, tilting her head to one side, wringing it out. Beads of water glistened on her pale skin, trickling along the slopes of her breasts and down the curve of her hips where the brief bikini bottom tied in a flirty bow.

Han, caught at the near end of a lap, tread water, unable to tear his eyes from her neat form. A water droplet quivered briefly on the tie at the center of her top, then trickled down her abdomen, catching momentarily in her naval. He followed its path hungrily, absorbing the view, until he caught sight of a silvery irregular mark just below Leia's belly button. He blinked and looked again. It was still there--a stretch mark. And not just any, but the one he'd laughingly kissed and called her 'beauty mark' when Leia complained about the scarring left on her body by her pregnancies, the day before she'd been taken by the Empire. There was no way Jerella could have had an identical mark. No way at all. He stopped kicking his feet in shock at the revelation that this really was his wife and not her doppelganger, and swallowed a mouthful of heavily chlorinated water before he grabbed at the pool's edge. Coughing and sputtering, he hauled himself up onto the tiles, slicking his dripping hair back from his forehead.

Startled by his choking, Leia straightened, flipping her hair back over her shoulders, and turned fully toward him. The move exposed more of her body to his view and he recognized three more stretch marks before she grabbed one of her towels from the chair she'd set them on. "Here. Let me help."

She knelt down by his side and blotted off his wet face, until he seized her hand, pulled the towel away and drew her fingers to his lips. She froze as he kissed first her knuckles, then turned the hand over and began to caress the palm, never taking his eyes from hers. Tentatively, she reached out to touch his face, fearful of another rejection like those she'd received time and again over the past five months.

Her fingertips stroked his cheekbone and the scar on his chin, then wove through his hair as Han abruptly pulled her onto his lap, holding her close. Her own lips were hungry on his, and their embrace tightened as they re-explored each other's touch; hands stroking shoulders, back and hips.

The door to the accessway opened unnoticed. "Hey! This is a public pool!" came a shout from the far end of the chamber, "Get a room!"

Startled by the interruption, Leia jumped--and succeeded only in losing her balance and falling backwards into the pool, inadvertently pulling Han in with her. She involuntarily shrieked at the shock of the cold water on her heated skin, flailing wildly until her hand caught the edge of the pool. Her face was flaming with embarrassment as she clung there, blinking water out of her eyes. Han bobbed up beside her, equally flushed, long strands of her hair draped across his shoulders. They stared at each other momentarily, then as one, began to laugh, until the room echoed with it.

Han climbed out of the pool, pulled Leia up next to him and handed her the discarded towel to drape about her wet suit, before grinning at the young men who had interrupted them. "Not a bad idea. Not a bad idea at all."

Five minutes later, Leia met him by the pool entranceway, her wet hair twisted up in a toweling turban and wearing a burgundy robe. She reached up and touched his face again. "Not a bad idea? Isn't that a bit of an understatement, Flyboy?"

"Well, it *was* a public pool, Your Worship."

She leaned against him as they walked to the lift to the residential levels. "Say that again."

"What? That it's a public pool?"

"No, the 'Your Worship.'"

"I thought you didn't like me calling you that, Your Worship," Han teased as the empty lift car arrived and he keyed it to their floor.

"I've changed my mind." She sobered a bit. "I missed it. Oh, Han, I missed YOU." She turned her face up to his and drew his head down.

"Me too, sweetheart, me too." He broke off the kiss with a grin, "Think we could ditch the banquet tonight?"

***THE END***

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