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## FIRST LESSON

by Marcia Brin

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is part of the same cycle as "Run Before the Storm" (KESSEL RUN) and "Reap the Whirlwind" (WOOKIEE COMMODE 4), a darker universe based in part on Lucas' thumb-nail bio of Han in SKYWALKING, which also tells us that Wookiees have the Force. From this bio, we know that Han, for example, spent half his childhood with the Wookiees and, therefore, at the least, was exposed to the Force at an early age.

Meaning of course, that his comments to Luke in A NEW HOPE were deliberately misleading. Even with this brief bio, Han's origins remain completely mysterious.

## PART I

KAWARRARABA's house, in which also resided his mate Tallataba, his mate's mother --a Wookiee to walk softly around!--and his two rambunctious offspring, As well as the cubling he had found on a trip to the city, was large, spacious and airy .. Situated on a massive branch of one of the mighty kekuk trees, it seemed more to grow from the tree itself than to be some alien construct simply placed there. In that respect, it symbolized the Wookiees' desire for harmony-with nature and oneness with the world around them.

The newest addition to Kawarraraba's family was carefully attempting to walk entirely around the house on the railing. Han, biting his tongue in concentration and with all the optimism of a seven-and-one-half year old, unconcerned with the

sheer drop to his right to the forest floor, hundreds of feet below and lost in perpetual mist. So intense was his concentration that he did not hear Talla's approach until she had snatched him up and away from the railing. Shaking him slightly, she gave him a sound scolding.

\*That was very foolish, little one. if you fell from here, you would be killed\*  
She spoke carefully. He appeared to have a natural talent for languages and had gained much fluency on Kashyyykese in the six months he lived had with them, but he could still get lost if the speech was too rapid or mumbled.

"I'm not scared," he retorted defiantly.

\*There is a line between courage and foolishness, cubling, and you crossed it. To be without fear is to be insane. If you risk your life simply to prove how brave you are, all you really show is how foolish you are.\*

She could see remorse struggling with his defiance and wondered again at his past, of which he had told them very little. Whatever it was, it had caused him to shutter himself, and-to view the galaxy and its inhabitants with a wild animal's wariness. There had been times during the past six months when she thought he had wanted to open up, only to have him draw back again.

Sighing heavily, she put him down and gave his backside a light tap.

\*Go and clean up, little one. It is almost time for dinner; Kawarraraba will be home soon.\*

Han scampered up the stairs to the second level. There were three rooms, one for the Eldest, a large one for Kaitiatchuk and Bunuwabuck, Ka's and Talla's cubs, and one for him. Appropriately, his was the smallest, but after the previous four years, it seemed huge to him. And unlike that bare cubicle, this room had rapidly taken on a homey feeling. There were craygraph drawings, drawn in a childish hand, hanging on the walls, and various toys scattered about. His preference fluctuated between hard-tech games--he was fascinated by all things mechanical and space-oriented--and large stuffed animals. On the latter, he lavished a a fount of love he let no one else see.

He sat now on the edge of his bed, hugging a huge tauntaun tightly, a very unhappy little boy. Ka and Talla and everyone had been so good to him these past six months. They really did seem to care, and he wanted more than anything to believe that it was true, but he was afraid to. Afraid to care too much; they might really be just like everyone else.

Scrunching up further, he blinked back tears. The four years before Kawarraraba had found him had taught him to be careful of his heart and his emotions. From the moment he had awakened onboard one of the ancient freighters that made up a caravan of space gypsies--the Rhom, as they called themselves--

he had been alone. There were patchy memories of a time before, tinted by the eyes of a very young child; a happy time he had thought, with people who had loved him. They had, too! he thought half-defiantly, half-miserably.

But the Rhom had laughed at him, taunted him. They did not love you; they abandoned you with us. They did not want you anymore than we do. He was a burden, the Rhom had said a useless extra mouth to feed, and worse, a gajo, an outsider. They would set up their colorful carnivals on one planet or another, but would not permit him to attend. They were afraid, he would tell himself, afraid because they had stolen him, afraid the people who loved him would recognize him. And some part of him, growing older, would see this for the truth it was, but he was only a young child, and the jeers, the isolation, the coldness, had done their damage. He had come to doubt his memories--oh, so very, very long ago! So dim and almost forgotten-- to doubt that anyone had ever loved him. Trust, ever the most fragile of emotions, had been mortally wounded.

Compounded, ultimately, by their abandonment of him. Though he had hated the Rhom, he had been terrified when they had left him there, alone, in the strange city. Alone. He shivered again at the thought. They had given that last name, Solo (he had clung stubbornly to the first name--or part of it; he dimly remembered it being longer--that he knew to be his) to emphasize his aloneness. Ka and his family had taken him in, and they were warm and caring, trying to make him feel as if he belonged, and he wanted to believe, but, well, maybe it was all a lie, and they were laughing at him, too, behind smiling masks, at him and his aloneness.

But, something inside cried, I want to believe them, and he hated the Rhom even more for making it so hard for him to do so.

It was the one thing the Rhom had taught him how to hate.

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It was a warm evening and the windows were open permitting the smells and night sounds of the forest to drift in. Han loved this time of day, when the temperatures cooled and the air became drier and more crisp. To him, the forest always seemed more alive now. And there were the stars, ice-diamonds against the velvety blackness. If he reached out, he could almost touch them. Someday he would. They called to him with a siren's song.

Special, too, was that Ka's family would gather around. It was a time for lessons and tales that always seemed to have a lesson attached, and for questions and answers. At first he had sat apart, but they had worked to bring him in and now he simply took a place in the circle as if it were his right.

Maybe it was. Maybe that was what they were trying to tell him.

Maybe someday he would believe it, and chill his fear that they, too, would abandon him.

Ka was talking about the Force, his rumbling basso a counterpoint to the forest sounds. \*It is the voice of the universe, and it sings of the harmony and unity of all things. We are part of a vast community, and we draw strength from it. As we seek union with it, so do we pattern our society after it. Family, clan, honor family, world-clan, these are the life-blood of the People. One can travel far, but the ties will never diminish.\*

He gestured to the forest beyond. \*We strive to maintain a harmony with the world that nurtured us.- This is part of the meaning of Life Day, to renew our ties with the life around us. All have the force in some way or another. We of the People know its softer side. Some, though, their Talent is of the lightening, to be wielded in the defense of all.\*

Ka glanced at Han, who shifted uneasily. The young human had the uncertain feeling that Ka knew about his 'flashes,' his seeing things happening elsewhere or, even more, yet to happen. It was a talent that would have stood him in good stead with the Rhom, but by the time he was old enough to understand that it was some strange--and more than a little bit scary--ability he had, he had hated the Rhom too much to want to be a part of them, and he had kept his silence.

Perhaps his talent, too, was part of the Force that Ka talked about, and nothing to be afraid of. Perhaps Ka could help him to understand it, use it. Han glanced around, listening to the lessons, the tales, the laughter, wishing to speak at last but not knowing how any longer.

He was only seven-and-one-half years old, but he felt like one of the old people in the holovids. Eldest was telling an animated tale, but all he could hear was the sound of some distant part of him, weeping.

The forest acted as a living muffler, so they could make as much noise as they liked without fear of disturbing anyone. Han's natural agility and greater maneuverability enabled him to keep up with the larger Wookiee cubs.

The youngsters had generally accepted him from the time Ka and Talla had taken him in, but there were some whose elders remembered too clearly the slavers, many of whom had been human. He had had trouble with their cubs, until Bunu, as befitted the eldest cub of the family, had given fang -challenge . The others had backed down and, with time, most of the troublesome ones had forgotten their elders' grievances and had come to like Han.

A few, though, had never become his friends. Wabba was the worst, the rare Wookiee equivalent of a human bully. He and a small group of cubs who followed him delighted in teasing, or pulling pranks on Han whenever Bunu was not there. It was for this reason that Han had not been pleased to see Wabba and his entourage show up. He had been quietly playing with several cubs who lived nearby, but he knew Wabba would be up to some trouble.

Right now, Wabba was leading them deeper into the forest. It was rapidly becoming unknown territory to him. Ka had never permitted him to wander too far afield, and right now he felt a twinge of guilt at going off like this. He was sure, though, that if he left now, he would never hear the end of it from Wabba and his followers. He was equally sure that Wabba was choosing an especially difficult path for them, hoping that the human's shorter legs and lesser stamina would force him to drop out, but Han was determined to keep up.

They continued in this manner for a while before Wabba called a halt. Han sank down gratefully. He was bone-tired and hungry and thoroughly lost. It had been dumb to go along with Wabba, and Ka would have every right to be angry. Wabba was at the far end of the branch, whispering with his cohorts and casting glances in Han's direction. The latter was too tired to care about whatever it was the cub was up to.' It was very comfortable sitting against the tree trunk, and if he just closed his eyes ...

He awoke with a start and momentary disorientation. Where was he? The memory of the afternoon's events filtered back. Now the forest was cloaked in darkness. How late was it? Ka would be furious. He peered into the night. Where was everyone else?

Han called out their names and was answered with silence. Some sort of joke, no doubt, keeping silent to frighten him. He reluctantly admitted to himself that it was working, at least a little. Cautiously--it was very dark--he groped his way around the massive branch, whispering the cubs' names and stopping occasionally to feel around in the blackness. The moons were not visible this time of the month, and nothing broke the darkness. Granted, they would have been poor aids at best, since little of their light was able to filter any distance down into the dense growth, but right now, however little, it would have been welcome.

After a while, Han gave up and sank down against the trunk. There was no longer any doubt in his mind. He was absolutely, totally, positively alone. Panic erupted as the realization sank home. The night was scary enough -- especially on Kashyyyk where there were some nasty nocturnal denizens, But this, this was his worst fear realized.

Alone. Abandoned. As before. Twice before, the Rhom mocked.

Always to be left alone. The night seemed suddenly darker, more menacing, and really was just a little boy. A little boy that nobody wanted.

With a small sob, he began to run, blindly, driven by his hurt and- fear. Massive leaves slapped against him as he fled. The sounds of the night bayed at his heels, and ominous shadows reached for him. Suddenly exhausted, he collapsed, gasping for breath, too tired to move. He curled against the bole of the tree, rocking back and forth, wondering if there was something wrong with him. Yet softly, in the back of his mind, a voice that noted he had been deserted by cubs who had never liked him, that Ka and Tala had never closed him out. If anything, he had held back, afraid they hurt him.

Confused, he gave up. He only knew that he didn't want to be alone anymore; he wanted Ka and Talla. He sniffled and made a sound suspiciously like crying. It was only a small sob, though, since he was only a small and it was a very large and dark forest.

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Han was running, running, but it was no use. It was gaining on him and he couldn't get away from it, no matter how hard he tried. If he could only find Ka, Ka would protect him. But it was getting closer and he called out Ka's name desperately. Suddenly, faintly, from a great distance, he thought he heard his name. The sound echoed and he wasn't sure from which direction the call had come, but it shivered and backed away. He cried out again and was rewarded with another response, closer this time. He could place the sound now and he raced toward it. Afraid Ka would stop calling him, he repeatedly shouted the Wookiee's name and he ran, lungs bursting, toward the voice. Ka would protect him, would keep that formless, fathomless shadow at bay.

Just don't go away , Ka, he pleaded. Don't leave me! Ka --- !

"Ka!" he screamed and sat up. He realized that, tired in every pore, he had fallen asleep. It was all a dream, Ka's coming for him. No one was coming for him; he was all alone, as the Rhom had said.

Han ran a sleeve across his nose, feeling very sorry for himself. The dream lingered; he could still hear his name being called. Then he gave a start. He did hear his name! Off in the distance, but coming closer. He could make out Ka's basso rumble amidst other voices, and jumped to his feet.'

"Here! I'm here, Ka!" He could make out lights now, heading his way. Behind his happiness at being rescued, uncertainty warred with hope. Ka had come. Maybe ...

Then Ka was bursting from the darkness and Han consigned his uncertainty to the disintegrator. He hurled himself into Ka's massive arms, half-crying and half-laughing. "You didn't leave me, too," he whispered fiercely, over and over again into Ka's ear.

Startled, Ka, who had been making soothing noises and patting Han's back, turned to stare at the human child. "Cubling, what is this nonsense? How could you not think I would come? You are family. And," he gestured at the other Wookiees, "you are Clan."

"I am?" Han asked in a wondering tone. Seeing the confirmation in Ka's eyes, he buried his face in the Wookiee's fur. Slowly at first, then ever more rapidly, Han poured out the story of his time with the Rhom, his loneliness, his fears. By the time he was finished, Ka was rumbling with anger.

"The Rhom are kreeshwarra," he snarled the Wookiee epithet, "and they have no honor. Though," admitted the ever-honest Wookiee, "they have a sense of Clan." Then he shifted Han in his arms so that they were face to face.

"The Rhom are what they are, but as for those who were your people, trust your memories, not the taunts of the Rhom." He ruffled the child's hair with one hand. "That is the hardest, is it not, cubling? Learning to trust again. You can trust us--and you must trust yourself. Too much will be wasted if you doubt yourself."

"You know about those things...Han hesitated, then asked, "They aren't bad, are they?"

Ka laughed. "No, cubling, all of the People share in the Force, though our Talent is different from yours. Would you like to learn about it?"

Han nodded eagerly. Ka rumbled laughter again. "Good. We will start when we get home--where Bunnu will be very pleased to tell you all about the punishment meted out to Wabba for his action."

Han didn't even hear the last part. He was too busy thinking about how nice a word "home" was.

## PART II

Krakis was a cold planet. All of the year. Not uninhabited, though, having been settled by hardy colonists almost two hundred years earlier. While one could hardly call it a garden spot, massive deposits of rhyllium made it considerably more attractive. The bulk of the habitations were underground, out of the strong winds and unconcerned with monster snowfalls.

On the surface, the planet was an intermitting vista of white, incapable of supporting organic life. "Plants," if thus they could be called, were actually crystalline structures that "produced" crystalline flowers. Nothing flew in the air or crawled on the earth. Krakis was very cold.

Han, on the other hand, was warmer than he would like. It was Krakis' summer, during which the winds moderated, the temperatures rose to a blistering minus ten degrees and the sun had been known to shine from time to time. Still, there was snow, and that was enough for Talla. Wookiees had no problem with heat or cold, but humans, well, everyone knew how fragile humans were. And a child, to boot.

So, knowing that Han had been promised that he could accompany Ka and representatives of the other Clans on their journey to Krakis to negotiate for a new supply contract of rhyllium, Talla had purchased large amounts of warm clothing for him. The end result was that Han, wearing layer upon layer of thermal and heavily insulated clothing topped by a fur-lined parka and mittens over gloves, stood a greater chance of suffocating than of freezing. He looked as if he could be entered in a barrel-rolling contest as one of the barrels, and he was uncomfortably warm.

It would never occur to him to complain, however, a holdover from his days with Rhom, when a complaint would be rewarded with a backhand slap. Not that he expected anything like that now. The last year, since the incident with Wabba, had been heaven. He was truly a part of Ka's family and of Ka's Clan. He had even received a Clan totem, but not yet a Clan name, which did not come until he was older. All Wookiees received a Clan name at a certain age, in addition to the personal name given to them by their parents. It would be used at formal gatherings and the only name given to strangers.

Wabba, thoroughly chastened by the stiff punishment he had received from the Clan elders, and threatened with dire bodily harm by Bunu, had studiously avoided Han since the incident, which pleased Han no end. And now that he was starting to assert himself, he was finding out that he often ended up the leader of the day's activities. Humans had more vivid imaginations than did

Wookiees, and Han could generally be counted on to come up with new and exciting games to play,

There was only one kreebag in the tar pit, so to speak. Ka, Talla and the Eldest, all had tried to give him some basic instruction in the Force-- only the simplest things; humans, because of their more volatile natures, usually did not begin serious training until the beginning of their teens-- but to no avail. The main problem was that, in order to share in the Force, the user had to open himself, had to let the barrier down. Han had spent too much of his short life maintaining those barriers to let go that easily. He was simply afraid to do so, though he would have died before admitting it to anyone.

He had tried, but he always drew back. It was like some great abyss that yawned before him, and everyone told him there was a bridge but he just couldn't believe it. If only he would test that bridge just once ... But, up to now, he had not been able to push himself out onto it.

It really was getting very warm inside all those clothes. Now that they were inside, maybe Ka would let him take some of them off. Han tugged at Ka's hand. "Can I get out of some of my clothes? I'm hot."

Ka chuckled. \*Perhaps Talla overdid it a little, cubling. Here, let me help you.\* The Wookiee reached down and opened the jacket, which Han privately thought was a good thing; he was so stuffed with clothes he couldn't have reached it himself. Seeing that things were going so well--the pile of clothes was growing larger--Han decided to push a little further. "And can I go around by myself? I won't get in anyone's way. Please?"

Ka was no more proof against a pleading eight-and-one-half year old than were most people. With a slight smile, and a stern admonition not to go too far and not to bother anyone, he gave Han the requested permission to wander.

That was all he needed to hear. He scampered off before Ka had a chance to change his mind. For the next hour, he wandered through the underground city. Fascinated as he was by all things mechanical, he listened wide-eyed as various technicians, pleased by his enthusiastic attention, explained the workings of the great machines that were the lifeblood of the city.

He came across a class of children around his own age. When a short recess was called, a number of the children, as curious about him as he was about them, came over to him. Han was a little shy, his dealings with human children having been limited, but his was basically an outgoing personality, and he was soon chatting away.

Kashzyyk fascinated them the most. They, like several generations before them, had spent their entire lives on, or rather, under a planet of snow and ice. Han

was more than willing to tell the other children about his home, where the sun shone more often than not and where you went out all year round without protective clothing. A world where green was the dominant color--this brought murmurs from the others; green was almost unknown to them--and which teemed with life, plant and animal. Descriptions of flowers and tales of water that fell from the heavens unfrozen held the children enthralled. They were not precisely sure they would want to live in such a crazy place, but it was definitely exciting to hear about it. It was, therefore, with great reluctance that they said goodbye when they were called back to class.

Han waved at them cheerfully and continued his exploration. Drawn as always by the lure of space, he headed for the underground landing bay. Getting somewhat turned around, he ended up coming in from the freight side. Several piles of crates and boxes blocked his view. As he started around them, he heard a voice that stopped him cold. A voice from his past. "You are sure there will be no one to bother us?"

Han dropped down behind some of the boxes, breathing as heavily as if he had run a great distance. He glanced down at his hands; they were trembling, and he was angry at himself for feeling this way. Kalavo was the headman of the Rhom clan with which Han had lived. What was he--they, since Han was sure the rest of the clan had to be with him--doing here? Whatever it was, it would profit the Rhom, but not Krakis. The Rhom believed that the outside galaxy existed solely for the Rhom to feed off.

Gaje si dilo. All outsiders are fools. or so the Rhom held, and they acted on their belief. They did not hold jobs, not because they were lazy, but because the gaje had been placed here to provide for the Rhom. if the gaje were hurt in the process, well, that was just too bad, wasn't it?

Receiving a grunt of affirmation from the person to whom Kalavo was speaking, the Rhom continued. "Good. Then we 'can make the switch undetected You will be paid when it is all completed."

Han could almost sense the hesitation in the other. Perhaps we could leave them some. They ... without them, they might die."

"Yekke buliasa nashti beshes pe done grastende."

"What? "

"'With one behind, one cannot ride two beasts of burden.' You cannot do what is best for them and what is best for you. You wish to escape this ice- ball, and with enough credits to make your way. So, with the switch, we both will profit. Perhaps we will even end up selling their own property back to them, heh?"

Kalavo's tone carried a trace of scorn. "They are dile, fools."

Han bit his lip. He had to get help. Ka would be able to deal with Kalavo, whatever it was that the Rhom was after. They were nice people, the Krakii, and Han did not want them getting hurt.

He started to back away toward the door when his foot came down on the edge of a small trans-cart. It moved slightly beneath him and, losing his balance, he tumbled backward against a pile of boxes, which crashed noisily to the floor. Stealth no longer a concern, Han scrambled to his feet for the dash to the door but a hand shot out and grasped his shoulder. The grip was painfully tight and all Han's wriggling availed him nothing.

Kalavo gave a low chuckle. "Well, well, is this not amusing? Our little gaje. The urme, the evil spirits, were playing with you, yes? The other man came into Han's line of sight. He was light of build and nervous of manner. "What do we do now? He could get us into real trouble."

"Which he will not do. I threw him away once, so I shall simply do so again. Into the snow."

Kalavo's companion started at that. "But, but he'll die out there! You can't do this!" He backed away. "I don't want any part of this!"

"Don't be a fool," Kalavo snarled. "I will not throw everything away for this one." He shook Han for emphasis. "If you have not the stomach for it, then leave."

The Kraki did not need a second invitation to disappear. Kalavo, disdainful of Han's struggling, carried him to a small speeder and threw him into the back seat. A powerful backhand slap knocked Han into one of the side windows, leaving his head ringing and his vision blurred. He hardly noticed when Kalavo requested clearance out of the hanger or when their speeder slipped into the wintry world beyond.

Han had no idea how far they travelled before Kalavo brought the vehicle to an abrupt halt. The Rhom turned and smiled at his captive. "They say little boys like to play in the snow. Shall we see?" He reached over the seat, grabbed Han and, pulling him forward, tossed him out the door he had opened. "Have fun." With a wolfish grin, he closed the wingdoor, shutting out the wind, the snow, and Han.

Han remembered how much he had hated Kalavo all those years. If there was one thing the Rhom had taught him, it was the value of a good curse. The

malediction was powered with all Han's pent-up anger, exactly as he had heard old Pivli do it. Perhaps it would have no effect, but it was worth doing as a release for his feelings.

The speeder zoomed off and he was alone in the endless whiteness. Bitter cold slashed through his clothing. Young as he was, he knew he had to do something, but what?

It suddenly seemed to him that behind the wind he could hear the Eldest's voice. "It is your shield, the Force. Wrap yourself in it." A shield" perhaps, but one he had been afraid to reach out to. Too many years of keeping himself to himself. Now, though, now there was no choice. If he could just reach out...

He closed his eyes; there was no more time. As he had done with the Eldest, he let his mind float free. Immediately there was the familiar tug of the Force, like a strong current in a river. He sailed on it, in it, thrilled as always by its touch. If only he weren't so afraid to let go, to give some control over to something else.

There, there it was ahead. The wall. His barrier. He had always been stopped by it, but not this time. Suddenly angry with himself and his fears, he hurled his thought forward like a spear, for the heart of the wall. There was a moment's resistance, but the barrier could not hold against his suddenly overwhelming desire to bring it down. It shattered into an infinity of pieces. And then it was before him, the glittering golden web of the Force, festooned from end to end with the countless colored gems, the essences of the Force-talented. A great song played along the strands of the web. Delighted, he danced before it, warmed by its welcome, wondering how he could ever have been afraid to take the plunge.

Cocooned by the Force, he felt warm and comforted, but a voice back in his mind pointed out that his body on Krakis was not as well off. This all had taken but seconds and now, following the urging of the Force, he was racing downward, past walls of ice. Strangely, it began to get warmer. At last, he reached a point where the ice melted completely. Beneath him now was a mountain of fire. What had his edu-tape called them? Volcanoes, that was it. The surface of the planet was littered with them.

Somewhat uncertainly, he reached out with the Force and drew the heat to him. It appeared as a column rising upward beneath him as he retreated toward the surface. He slipped back, the heat now enveloping him. In seconds he was toasty warm, from head to toe. He kept his eyes tightly shut, to avoid anything that might break his concentration.

To his surprise, he found that he could "see" the world around him anyway. It lacked the colors that he knew with his eyes open, but gained new ones: The

heat, invisible to the eye normally, became a plume of orange-red; the ice took on a hue that he could only label as cold. Characteristics became colors.

Ka had told him many times that he should put more trust in the Force than in his eyes, but he had not understood. Besides, his past had made him a cynic at eight years of age, and he trusted only what he could see. Now it finally made sense. Should the situation ever arise in the future, he would know there was sight beyond his eyes.

As he concentrated to hold the warmth, he thought he could hear Ka's voice, calling his name. Listening carefully, he realized it was Ka, but it was drifting on the Force, undimmed by Krakis' heavy winds. He called back the same way, feeling rather pleased with himself.

It seemed hours before he felt himself lifted up. He opened his eyes to see Ka, smiling broadly at him. The Wookiee held Han in the crook of one massive arm, as he worked at slipping Han's parka onto the boy. Han quickly finished the job, then hugged Ka tightly. "You found me!"

Ka laughed. \*It was not hard to do, cubling.\* He made a sweeping gesture and Han looked around, then blinked in amazement. There was a hundred-foot wide circle of melted ice and mush. Ka rumbled again. \*You were well on your way to melting the surface! And broadcasting rather loudly, too. Not bad, cubling.\*

Han ducked his head, feeling strangely embarrassed. Then he straightened, his face serious. "Ka, you have to tell them. It was Kavalo--," Han hesitated "I told you about him." Ka nodded and snarled. "I overheard him and someone from here--I don't know what, but they were going to do something bad! Kavalo caught me listening and left me here."

\*Did he use a speeder, cubling? With the designation delta-pi-three- seven-eight?\*

Han thought hard, trying to see the speeder in his mind, then he nodded. \*Then do not worry, cubling. He will do no further harm to anyone We passed such a speeder crashed in the snow--the wind, perhaps--but there were no life readings, so we did not stop.\*

Curses were powerful things, Han decided after careful thought. He would remember for the future; careless words could be dangerous. Right now, though, he was not going to worry about it. He felt very warm and safe in Ka's arms and he basked in the Wookiee's obvious pleasure in Han's breakthrough with the Force.

To his surprise, he found himself yawning and he snuggled more closely against Ka. His thoughts circled around the events of the day. It had finally come down to trust, to taking a chance on something outside of himself.

That, he realized, was what all his time with Ka and his family had been about. The years with the Rhom had taught him to rely on only himself. This last year had gone a long way to changing that. He had come to trust others and something he could not see with his eyes or touch with his hands.

And he had heard the song of the Force which would remain with him forever. He bet that the stars sang, too; he would go one day and find out. Right now, though, sleeping seemed much more important. He never even noticed when they arrived back at the underground city.

END

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