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## **Grounded**

by [Judy Ebberley](#)

"Grounded? Grounded!" Han Solo's anguished howl caused several heads to turn.

Leia Organa hid her smile behind a raised hand. This was exactly the reaction she had predicted when the base commander had made the decision to ground all flights. It was also the reason she'd volunteered to break the news to Captain Solo. A princess had to have some pleasure, even a rebel princess, and annoying Han Solo was one of the few she had left to her.

"What the hell do you mean I'm grounded?"

"Exactly what it sounds like, fly-boy," she repeated, enunciating the words slowly and clearly. "You are grounded."

Rendered temporarily speechless, Han struggled to regain sufficient control over his vocal chords to splutter, "You can't ground me."

Leia returned his venomous look with interest. "I can and I have," she said, watching as his face darkened in anger.

"Yeah, well we'll see about that, sister." Han turned on his heel preparing to return to his ship, but Leia's hand on his arm stopped him.

"It isn't just you, you stubborn Corellian," she offered in a more conciliatory manner. "All flights are grounded. Too much Imperial activity -- you told us that yourself when you brought the Falcon in yesterday. We had to act on that report. This base is important to us. The unique property of this rock prevents our position being spotted by probes, its going to be ideal for work on the new

weaponry. But not if we advertise our presence to the Empire by allowing ships in and out while they remain in this sector. It will only be for a few days."

Mentally berating himself for being idiot enough to pass on his warning, Han took his frustrations out on the princess. "I don't care how many days, your highnessness. I ain't staying here any longer than it takes for me to complete my warm-up."

"The storm doors have been closed, even the Falcon can't blast through them."

"You wanna bet?"

"Solo." She found herself talking to his back as he started towards the hangar bay. "If your brain was only half the size of your mouth you'd be dangerous. You and I both know that there is nothing you can do but accept the situation with as much grace as possible. Shouting won't change things, you are grounded until we have confirmation that the Imperial search teams have moved on. Get used to it."

The Corellian stopped dead and swung on an impatient heel. An insistent finger emphasised Han's fury. "Nobody grounds Han Solo, princess. Nobody"

Leia gave up arguing with him and remained silent as she trailed him back through the half-completed base towards the hangar bay. She would have to try and explain what was happening to Chewie. The Corellian was obstinate enough to try and find some way to circumvent the orders, just to show he could. The Wookiee would know how to deal with him, she allowed herself a small smile. Chewbacca would never allow his captain to put himself or the rebellion at risk for no better reason than to prove to her she was wrong. Han Solo might claim that no one had any influence over his life but she knew better. The partnership between the two went back a long way. She had seen the Wookiee stop Solo in his tracks with no more than a low-throated growl and a stern glance from his blue eyes.

"What are you following me for?" Solo demanded stopping so suddenly that Leia only just managed to stop herself from banging into him.

"I'm going to the hangar bay."

His eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What for?"

"I have business there, captain. If you will get out of my way." She stepped around him and Han found himself unexpectedly following in her wake. Even in his present mood he couldn't help but admire the view, a smile broke through as he saw rebel technicians and pilots move out of her way. A very determined

woman was Leia Organa. Almost as determined as he was. He lengthened his stride intending to over take her before she reached the hangar.

The pair of them were almost running flat out by the time that they reached the ramp of the Falcon.

"Chewie."

"CHEWIE!"

The Wookiee ducked out from behind one of the lifters as Leia and Han called his name simultaneously.

\*What? \* he growled taking in the flushed face of the princess and his captain's heavy breathing.

"I have to tell you about .."

"Chewie, we--"

Both stopped short, waiting to see what the other was going to say.

Chewbacca shook his head at their antics. \*If you are coming to tell me that all ships are grounded you are too late, young Walker has already done so. \* He indicated a grinning Luke Skywalker who had joined him at the base of the entrance ramp.

The Tatooinian's appearance prompted two very different reactions from the recently arrived pair. Leia gave him one of her most approving smiles while Solo glowered at him as if he was a Sith Lord or a tax official at the very least.

"What did I do now?" Luke wanted to know, puzzled by the Corellian's response to his presence.

"Nothing." Leia assured him.

"But... Han?"

"Oh, ignore him." The princess waved a dismissive hand in Solo's direction. "He's sulking because he doesn't like the idea of being forcibly grounded. He even threatened to blast his way out of here."

Luke struggled to hide his grin. It sounded just the sort of thing Solo would say if he was angry. "Han, you didn't? Why?"

\* The decision was made for our safety as well as the rebellion's. \* Chewbacca pointed out to him in the sort of reasonable way that set Solo's teeth on edge.

"Well, I don't have to like it!"

"You don't have to like it, Han, but you do have to put up with it."

This piece of advice earned the young Jedi apprentice a glance that should have reduced him to space dust. "Listen junior, I don't have to put up with anything I don't want to. This is the last time the damned rebellion puts me in this position. They don't own me and they don't tell what I can and can't do. If I choose to leave. I'll leave and no bureaucratic little autocrat or anybody else in this rag-taggle band of misfits is going to ground me again." A glare in Leia's direction made it plain who he meant.

The princess threw up her hands at this example of continued obstinacy. "Chewie." She turned to the watching Wookiee "Can't you talk some sense into him?"

As irritated as the Alderaanian by this display of deliberate wilfulness; sometimes Solo's temper overtook his inherent good sense. Chewbacca turned a determined face towards his captain and suggested they talk. Han's objection to this proposal 'There's nothing to discuss' was ignored

\*On the contrary. There is a great deal to discuss. Like your stubborn thick headedness to start with. \* The Wookiee loomed over his much smaller human partner. \* Would you prefer to hold that 'conversation' out here, in public? \*

Solo sighed, all too familiar with the look on Chewie's furry face. That particular expression usually heralded the onset of a full-blown lecture. He weighed up the chances of him being able to deflect his friend from his intentions and regretfully decided they were lousy. Since there was no way he was going to provide any more amusement for the princess and Skywalker today he muttered sourly. "No!"

A flip of a furry head encouraged him to start up the ramp.

"You want to be careful or you could find yourself grounded for the second time today, Han." Luke obviously found his remark very funny for he went off into paroxysms of laughter. Which did nothing to improve Han's already considerably bruised self-esteem.

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"Hey, watch it, kid."

Han ducked as the remote trainer Luke had been practising with whizzed over his head.

"It was nowhere near you," the Tatooinian informed him, catching the remote in his hand and throwing it back onto the shelf in the Falcon's main hold.

"It nearly took my head off," Solo complained as he struggled into his second boot. "Are you finished fooling around now? Can we get down to the commissary before they start that meeting without us?"

"Yeah, we better. Where's Chewie?"

"He's already down there. " Han stamped his foot into his boot, and picked up his flight jacket. "Come on, I don't want to be late."

Luke laughed. "You mean you don't want to give Leia an excuse to start on you again."

Solo made a face at his friend. "Yeah, right. Let's just say that I'm tired of her sharpening her claws on me all the time. Let her take her frustrations out on some other poor sap for awhile."

The two men entered the meeting venue just as Leia was taking her place at the impromptu podium. You had to give it to the alliance, Solo admitted as he made himself comfortable along the back wall. They did their best to ensure all their staff knew what was going on. Each morning a meeting was called so that the latest news could be disseminated. They also listened to complaints and did their best to sort them out. Today most of the concerns seemed to be about rations. Which were fully justified as the close up of the base had meant that there were no fresh supplies available to the crews. At present they were living off whatever they could scrounge from the transport rations and emergency packs.

Han leaned back into the wall and folded his arms across his chest as he listened to the princess. She certainly knew how to play an audience he told himself as the grumbles died away.

"Pity we can't take advantage of the game and fruit outside," someone said.

"We can't take the risk of opening the blast doors, Milson, and the other exits aren't functional yet. I'm sorry. If there was some way of getting outside without having to open the large doors I would be the first to agree to it. "

A smile lit Solo's face at her words. "Maybe there is!"

All eyes turned towards the Corellian lounging at the back of the room. Most showed interest or hopeful anticipation. One pair; a dark brown pair set in the face of Leia Organa showed only distrust and wariness. "What's that supposed to mean?"

A mischievous grin filled Solo's face. "It means I know a way of getting out of here without using the blast doors."

Leia waited for further enlightenment when none was forthcoming she prompted. "Well, flyboy?"

He favored her with his most innocent expression. "Yes, thanks."

"Han!" Luke hissed in his friend's ear, watching Leia's face darken angrily. "Remember what you said earlier."

"Okay, okay. I think I have away of solving your little problem. If you'll follow me, your royalness, I'll show you." Han pushed away from the wall and made off across the main bay, forcing Leia and Luke to trot to try and catch up with him before he disappeared into the gloomy interior of the tunnel system.

"Han, wait!" Luke called. "Where are you taking us?"

"You wanted a way out of this tomb didn't you?"

"Yes, but how? Where?"

Solo gave the following couple a look of long suffering. "What have I been doing the last three days? Ah ah your highness," he cautioned the princess, who seemed about to inject one of her stinging rejoinders to this question. "Be nice!"

Swallowing down on her first sharp words, Leia replied, "You have been carrying out a survey of the passages. For which we have already said we are very grateful. Oh!" Realisation dawned. "You've found a way out."

"Got it in one, your royalness." It had been sheer boredom that had prompted him to volunteer to map out the passages. Yesterday afternoon he'd followed one such tunnel and found to his great delight a narrow fissure in the rock where light had filtered through. It showed a break just wide enough to enable him to push through onto an outside ledge. Why did you think she'd be pleased, he asked himself a second later as Leia demanded to know why he hadn't informed the base council about his find.

"I sent in my report last night your glory. You mean you haven't read it yet. Tut tut! You must be slipping."

Leia bristled at his criticism. "Well don't just stand there, flyboy. Lead on. I just hope you know where you're going."

"Listen." The temporary good will of a few moments ago was forgotten as a forceful finger pointed itself at Leia's nose. "Corellians can't get lost."

"Mores the pity," The princess muttered under her breath. It crossed her mind to wonder if all Corellians were so full of themselves as Han Solo. Somehow she doubted it.

"Will you both give it a rest?" Luke pleaded. "If we can find a way out of here that means we can supplement the rations and still keep the security then that should be all our priorities. Not bickering with each other."

Solo rolled his eyes at this advice. "You sound more like Chewie everyday," he lamented. "Come on, your holiness. This way."

Taking a deep reviving breath of real not recycled air Han allowed the natural light to bathe his face. Below him the forest spread out like a green carpet. Solo sat down on the ledge and just enjoyed the view for awhile. He hadn't realised how tense he'd become over the last few days. He felt trapped in a way he never did when he was in space. In his ship he was in control on the ground he became part of a much bigger whole and he wasn't certain he liked that idea at all.

A smile made its way over his face as a flight of birds took off from the canopy and spiralled around him. Vivid colours shimmered their beautiful plumage stood in sharp contrast to the dark green forest that was their home. Beside him the princess was also taking in the full glory of the land beneath her. She was revelling in the experience just as he was. The Tatooinian who had less experience than either of them was just plain staring. "Wow!"

"I'd forgotten how lovely this planet was." Leia filled her lungs with the smell of fresh greenery. She turned to the silent pilot. "Thank you Han, this natural entrance is perfect. Since it didn't show up on our scans it certainly won't be visible from space. All the twists and turns in the passages must mask the interior. We can start sending foraging parties out tomorrow to gather meat and fruits. It will make such a difference to everyone."

"My pleasure, your highness," Han's answer was for once devoid of all mockery. Making Leia Organa happy made him happy he realised with a jolt. Solo, he warned himself you better watch out.

"Don't eat that, Luke." Out of the corner of her eye Leia saw Luke about to help himself to one of the berries Han had sampled yesterday. "Never eat anything that hasn't been tested. There are so many different substances. Even the most innocuous fruit could be poisonous to humanoids."

"Not that one," Han told her. "I ate some yesterday and I'm okay."

Disapproval warred with concern. "You shouldn't have done that. It could have been deadly."

"Well it wasn't." Defiantly, Solo popped another fruit into his mouth.

"Solo, you are impossible." The princess shook her head at his smug face. "Come on Luke, we should get back and give the good news to the others. Are you coming hotshot?"

"Yeah." Han waited until the other two had gone back into the caves before picking a handful of fruits with which to feed himself on their way back to the hangar.

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Such good news travelled through the small base community very quickly and that evening most people seemed to have congregated in the commissary to talk and share their rations. Han Solo was a popular figure on many alliance bases and the personnel on Amalaz were no exceptions. The fact that it he had solved their food problem made him all the more welcome as he strolled into the small hall with his giant partner in his shadow.

"Hey, Solo, come and join us." One of the pilots from gold flight waved Han towards their table. As a survivor of the death star battle Lieutenant Petri was known to Solo and Skywalker; he also had a reputation of being able to organise a party at a moment's notice. Han naturally gravitated in his direction.

"Have a drink," he offered.

"Thanks." Han lowered himself into the seating and helped himself to a glass. Everyone else at the table held their breath as he downed the first mouthful. "Where in all the seven hells did you get this stuff?" He wheezed as the fiery liquid burned its way down his throat.

"Helpin's set up a still." Petri nodded towards a green skinned Rodian.

"What's he usin'?" Solo wiped his streaming eyes and took another more cautious swallow "jet juice?"

"No ,it's not that good." There was general rowdy discussion on the quality or lack of it of technician Helpin's home brew but everyone continued to drink it. Someone then suggested a round of cards to help fill the evening and Han's eyes lit up. His giant partner rumbled a comment at his captain before retreating to the more sober side of the room. "What did he say?" Petri wanted to know.

"Nothing important." Han spared his co-pilot a dirty look as the Wookiee sauntered away. Damn smart mouthed fuzz-ball, Han muttered to himself. Solo's card playing capabilities were a constant cause of disagreement between the pair. Chewbacca had yet to be convinced that Solo was capable of playing cards and winning!

Chewie meanwhile had settled himself next to Luke and was intent on teaching the youth a few more Wookiee phrases. The Tatooinian had shown himself very quick at picking up Kashyykian and could now understand much of what the Wookiee said without the need of a translator. He was also interested in the ancient rituals and the lore's of Wookiee society and whenever the pair had time to fill and their Corellian friend was otherwise occupied; they happily conversed on this and many other subjects.

The Wookiee also kept a discreet eye on his captain as the evening wore on. The noise level at the card table had risen steadily as the alcohol in the bottles had decreased. Someone was singing a decidedly off colour ditty. Thankfully, Chewie noted it wasn't Solo as Leia Organa had just arrived in the hall. Her eyes swept over the gathering. Then she spotted Luke and Chewbacca and collected a hot drink made her way over to their table. "Do you two mind if I join you?"

Luke moved further along the bench. "I wondered where you'd got to. Your shift finished a whole time part ago."

"I know." Leia smiled apologetically "I got caught up in something. They seem to be enjoying themselves." She nodded at Han's table. "I hope they don't overdo it. We have a full day ahead tomorrow."

Han got to his feet and had to grab the edge of the table to steady himself. Shaking his head in an attempt to clear it, he only succeeded in making himself dizzier. *That home brew must have been stronger than you thought*, he told himself as Helpin's face swam briefly into view. *I'm sure he didn't have two heads at the start of the evening*. Collecting his winnings, he wished his card playing compatriots good night and made his way, somewhat unsteadily towards where he'd last seen Chewbacca.

His forward movement was checked by the edge of the table. Unable to stop in time he tumbled forward, ending up sprawled across the surface. Only quick

reactions saved the three drinks that had been resting there before he landed. Solo blinked owlishly as he tried focusing on his partner but the fuzball appeared to be even more fuzzy than usual. Han peered at him more closely and then wished he hadn't. The Wookiee was wearing his most disapproving expression. Han transferred his gaze to the smaller human seated beside him. "Luke, kid, good to see ya" he smiled at the Tatooinian, greeting him as if it had been at least a full planetary turn since they'd last seen each other. "You having a good time?" He put a hand on a support pillar to pull himself upright.

"Not as good as you, obviously."

"Corellians always know how to have a good time," Han agreed then proceeded to prove this by studying the roof support with great interest.

"Good evening Captain Solo." Leia's greeting succeeded in drawing Solo's attention away from his study of the pillar's surface.

"Your highnessness...ness...ness."

The smile he bestowed on her was wonderfully lop-sided and gloriously foolish. Leia's lips twitched. She had never seen Han Solo drunk before. Well maybe not drunk she amended mentally, but certainly tipsy. With his defences temporarily down he'd lost the hard-edged look he normally cultivated and was instead showing signs of being quite engagingly charming. "I won," he informed her. "Chewie." He threw a challenging look at his partner. "Said I couldn't do it, so I did."

"Of course you did. Maybe you should sit down." She didn't add 'before you fall down' but both Luke and Chewbacca took her meaning as the Corellian swayed gently.

Han considered the invitation for so long, Leia began to wonder if he'd forgotten what she'd said. Finally he decided to join the group at the table and with Chewie's help was manoeuvred into a seat the Wookiee was rewarded for his help with another sunny smile and the comment, "I won."

"You already told us that. \* Solo's face crumpled at this mild criticism and Leia found she very much wanted to pat him on the head and say 'there, there, never mind!'

"Is that so unusual? His winning, I mean," Luke asked of the Wookiee.

\* Very.\* Chewbacca's reply was concise. He glanced over to where his captain was sitting, chin in hand, elbows propped up on the table, eyes unfocused.

"Hey!" Han roused himself long enough to make a protest. "I won the Falcon."

\* And would have lost her again on the turn of the next card if I hadn't intervened.  
\*

Solo scowled at this unwelcome reminder then brightened as he heard the princess's laughter. A whimsical smile filled his face as he turned green-gold eyes on the young woman opposite. "You have a lovely laugh, princess."

Leia blushed at this compliment. "Do I?"

"Yeah. You ought to laugh more often. I like it when you laugh. Your whole face lights up. "

"Why thank you, Han. I'll remember that the next time you're insulting me." Her smile robbed her words of any sting, but acted as reminder to Chewie that maybe he should get his captain to bed before he said something he might later come to regret.

\*We have a busy day ahead of us, cub. It's time to say good night. \* He accompanied this advice with a firm paw under Solo's elbow bringing the pilot to his feet and steadying him.

The Corellian didn't seem at all keen to leave. He wrapped one hand firmly round the chair back and plopped down again into his seat. "We were just getting to know each other better." He waved a hand in Leia's direction. "I really want to get to know her better," he added with an attempted leer.

"I'll walk you back to the Falcon."

Han spared Luke an exaggerated take at this offer. "No offence kid, but I'd sooner have the princess's company."

"Maybe she would rather--" Luke started.

"We'll both come." Leia broke up the glaring contest between the two men. "Come on, Han let me help you." Solo's grin split his features as the princess helped him to his feet. Luke was certain the Corellian didn't need to lean that close into her as she supported him and was relieved when the Wookiee took over from her.

Chewie kept a firm grip on Solo until they had left the commissary. As the door closed behind them, Han brushed his friend's hand aside. "I can walk on my own, ya know." His assertion was met with good-natured snorts of disbelief from his three companions but they stood back and watched as Han wobbled off across the hangar bay in the general direction of his ship.

"Can Corellians still use their direction finding abilities even when they are intoxicated?" Luke asked.

\* Usually, yes. Although Han very rarely drinks enough to make him drunk. Piloting is his life and he doesn't put it at risk through drinking. This way, cub.\* He readjusted Solo's path so that he was once more going in the direction of the Falcon.

Overhearing his concern, Leia was prompted to ask, "You think something is wrong with him, Chewie?"

The Wookiee looked down at her. \* I'm not certain, little princess. He acts as if he is drunk, he sounds as if he is drunk but the amount I saw him swallow this evening shouldn't have affected him like this. Cub!\* Chewie darted forward just managing to stop his captain from falling flat on his face by catching the back of his blaster belt. Since Solo's, arms and legs seemed to want to go in opposite directions he decided it would be wiser to guide the pilot the rest of the way to the ship.

Leia and Luke exchanged grins as the Corellian was half-carried, half-dragged towards the Falcon. The Wookiee used this time to good effect by keeping up a positive barrage of maledictions on his unfortunate partner's head. "He's going to have difficulty living this down." Luke chuckled as the Wookiee propped his now totally unstrung captain against the side of the ship, wished them both a good night and hauled Solo inside and closed the hatch. "What I wouldn't give to be a Fessil fly on the wall tomorrow morning when Han wakes up."

Picturing a hung over Han Solo, Leia agreed smilingly, "So would I, Luke. So would I."

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"Just don't yell at me," Solo pleaded the next morning as Chewbacca came to check up on him. "I swear Chewie I didn't have more than four drinks. I felt fine until I came to stand up and then it hit me like a stun beam." A half hopeful half apprehensive look came over his face, "I didn't say or do anythin' too stupid after that did I?"

\* Not if you don't count almost falling flat on your face and telling the little princess how much you admired her. \*

"I didn't!" Noting his captain's red face the Wookiee bared his fangs in a grin.

\* I assure you, you did. You can ask young Walker if you don't believe me. \*

"Not the kid as well, they're never goin' to let me live this down. Why didn't you stop me?"

\* I tried. I had to all but carry you back to the ship as it was, and put you to bed. The princess offered to help me.\* His teasing caused Solo to moan even louder

"You didn't let her, did you?"

Chewie's lips twitched \* No, but I was very tempted just to pay you back for your foolishness. Here take these meds. They should help clear your head.\*

He handed over two pills and a glass of water. Han automatically put out his hand but then withdrew it again. "Thanks but I don't need anything. Apart from a faulty memory I feel fine. No hangover, no nothing. I seem to have slept the effects off. Maybe it wasn't the alcohol at all." He shrugged. "I dunno. Still, I don't suppose it matters now. We better get going, or her highnessness will start hollering at me, and that *will* give me a headache!"

\* I don't know about shouting but you can expect some teasing after your performance last night,\* The Wookiee warned. A frown replaced Solo's smile and his forward movement was temporarily stayed. \*You have to face her some time,\* Chewie advised, seeing Solo about to make an excuse for not going out with the foraging party. \*The sooner you get it over with the better.\*

"That's easy for you to say." Han grumped as he followed his partner out of the ship and made his way over to the deck entrance where the others were waiting.

"How are you feeling, Han?" Genuine concern was clear in the Tatooinian's voice.

"Never felt better."

"Yeah?" Luke stared at his friend worriedly. But seeing no sign of distress ,he looked relieved. "Well that's great. Hey, Leia!" Before Han could stop him Luke shouted across to the princess. "Han made it! I told you he would."

Her attention caught, Leia turned and seeing the Corellian standing next to the Jedi apprentice, came across to join them. "Captain Solo, how are you feeling?"

Already tired of answering enquiries on his health which only served to remind him of his exhibition last evening, Han growled, "Like I told the kid I'm fine. Uh, thanks," he added as he caught the frown that had appeared on his partner's face. "Princess." she turned to face him again. " About last night. I, well I'm sorry if I upset anyone. I didn't do anything too stupid, did I?"

"No more than usual." Her reply was accompanied by a twinkling smile, which reassured him some what. "Are you really well enough to take part in today?"

"Yeah, I don't even have a headache." The princess raised her eyebrows at him.

"Then let's get to work."

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The party split into several smaller groups, each one with their own list of needs. Han and Chewie voted to join the hunting party and spent much of the morning tracking, setting traps and catching a variety of animal life that had been identified as edible. By the time they caught up with the other foraging parties seated in an open glade it was well into the planetary afternoon.

Solo dropped into a seated position onto the ground next to a lounging Luke Skywalker. "I hope you left something for the real workers," he grunted seeing the empty platters.

"There's plenty," Luke appeased. "Here." Han helped himself to the food that was passed taking a large portion of the berries he'd taken a liking to and set to with a will. "You sure you got enough?" The Tatooinian queried.

"Yeah. Are there anymore of those berries? Thanks." He nodded at Petri, who'd passed over his helping.

"We were intending to take some of those back with us to the base." Solo looked over to where the princess was seated.

"I'll try and remember that, your highnessness."

She smiled as she took in the state of his fingers and the tell tale ring of blue around his mouth.

"What?" he asked warily.

"You may want to wipe your face, Captain. Unless wearing lipstick is a new Corellian fashion."

Hastily wiping his mouth on his sleeve and his fingers down the back of his pants, Han asked, "That better?"

"Much. Are you returning to the base now or going out again with the trappers?"

He checked his chronometer. There were a couple of time parts of daylight left. "I'll check the traps Chewie and I set, then come in."

"We'll see you later, then."

Han stood and watched as Leia led her group back to the rock fissure. They had collected substantial amounts of fruits and tubers with which to supplement the diet of the base members and her highness looked very satisfied with her day's work. That gave him a very contented feeling. It was beginning to be a habit with him one he had to admit he was not making any real efforts to curb. He waved as the group rounded a corner, then moved off after his partner. The smile he was wearing slipped a little as his stomach did an unexpected flip flop and he had to swallow hard on the bile that rose in his throat. As if sensing something was wrong Chewie turned back to wait, giving him a worried frown as Solo pushed in front of him and set off at a brisk pace into the woods. Han ignored him, he had no intention of admitting that he felt nauseous; it would leave him open to the sort of over-solicitousness that he hated. Nevertheless by the time they had checked their last trap and they were on their way back to the base he was finding it increasingly difficult to disguise his growing discomfort. Along with the nausea he was experiencing dizzy spells and increasingly sharp abdominal pains. Han was thankful that the rapidly settling dusk hid his features from the sharp eyes of his partner. "I'm just going back to the ship," Solo announced as the group exited from the tunnels. "Don't bother to wait. I'll catch you up."

Concentrating on carrying the large game animal he'd snared without dropping it, Chewbacca nodded agreement. \* Don't be too long. I don't want to end up preparing all this meat on my own. \*

"I'll be as quick as I can," Han called after him.

Relief at having got back to the base undetected gave way to haste as a sharp pain stabbed at his stomach. Gasping and wincing he grabbed at the Falcon's landing struts then hurried inside, making straight for his cabin.

"Didn't Han come back with you?" Luke watched as the Wookiee gutted and cleaned the carcass of the deer he had trapped.

\*He went to the ship for something. He should have been here by now. \*

"You want me to go and chase him up for you?" The Tatooinian offered seeing the look of concern that had settled over the Wookiee's features.

\*Thank you, yes.\*

It was only a short walk to the hangar bay. "Han, Han?" Luke called up into the Falcon. "Are you in here?" A sudden bad feeling encouraged him to not wait for permission to enter the ship. He hurried up the ramp. A quick inspection showed

that Han was not in the main hold or the cockpit, in the access way. Luke's unease grew. The door to Han's cabin was open he found the pilot slumped across his bunk, unconscious.

Leia and Luke stood silently in the forward hold waiting for the Two Bee unit to complete its diagnosis. It had chased them from Solo's cabin complaining of the lack of space to work. It had not however succeeded in budging the Wookiee. Chewbacca had announced his place was with his captain and the medical droid had heard enough tales to know that it wasn't wise to upset a Wookiee. It had been almost a full time part since Luke had discovered his friend. Anxious moments had followed for the young Jedi and the rebel princess. Both of them had become very fond of Han Solo. He may have been stubborn, self-centred, egotistical and arrogant but he was also brave to a fault, loyal, charming and a wonderful person to have as a friend.

The door to Solo's cabin finally slid open and the medical droid moved towards them. "Is he going to be all right, Two One Bee?"

"Captain Solo should make a full recovery, your highness. A few days bed rest and careful monitoring of his diet should be all that he requires. I have left medication and instructions with first mate Chewbacca. I have complete faith in his ability to 'deal' with the captain." The two humans exchanged relieved smiles at this news and at the droids comments on Solo and his first mate.

"You may go in and see him now if you wish. I will be by later to administer some more general medicines. First mate Chewbacca asked me to complete a full vital scan while I was working on the captain. Some of his inoculations are overdue. If you will excuse me, your highness, Lieutenant Skywalker."

The medical unit continued on its way, unconcerned by the amusement its last words had engendered. Solo's hatred of medical procedures in general and needles in particular was well known to them both. "May we come in?" Leia tapped lightly on the bulkhead panel next to Solo's open cabin door. A soft Wookiee woof gave them permission while a raised finger indicated that they should keep quiet.

Leia approached the Corellian's bunk in silence. It was not the first time she had seen him asleep or ill, Han had an unfortunate knack of getting himself into situations which ended with him spending time in a variety of medical facilities. Still she found the experience very disturbing. Asleep Solo looked so much younger so much more vulnerable, his hair falling over his forehead as tousled as ever. Against the white of the sheets he appeared very pale. Almost unconsciously Leia let her hand run through the tangled mass of coppery hair

and then carefully felt his brow. Han stirred but didn't wake. "He is very hot. What did Two One Bee tell you, Chewie?"

\*That Han has suffered an extreme allergic reaction.\*

"To what?" Luke wanted to know.

\* Something he ate.\*

"But he hasn't eaten anything we haven't," Luke protested, then paused as he recalled something. "Not to those berries he'd become so fond of?"

Chewbacca nodded. \*Apparently so. Alone they are fine but it seems the Corellian digestion system reacts very badly to a mixture of Benith berries and alcohol. Initially they give a false impression of well being, like a state of drunkenness. Which is what we all saw last evening. If more are eaten the reaction becomes more extreme. Violent stomach cramps, nausea and dizziness which if ignored lead on to fever and eventually unconsciousness. It is a good job you found him when you did young Luke it could have been much worse, as it is the cub has got away quite lightly.\*

"Lightly?" a weak voice interrupted. "You try having your stomach pumped, and then call it getting off lightly?"

"Han! How are you feeling?" Solo's sour expression answered Luke's question. "Chewie said it could have been much worse," the Jedi told him defensively.

"How?" Han groaned and attempted to pull himself into a sitting position. "Don't stand there frowning fuzz-ball," he commanded his partner. "Help me sit up."

\* Two One Bee said you should rest. \*

"Well he ain't here now is he? Come on."

Seeing that his captain was determined, Chewbacca lent him his aid in getting upright, but also secured him more tightly by tucking in the covers.

"I ain't about to run away," Solo protested. "The way I feel now I probably wouldn't make it as far as the door. What did the damned medical droid have to say anyway?"

"You are suffering from an allergic reaction."

"To what?"

"To those berries you told me wouldn't do you any harm." Leia's concern was tempered by a desire to point out to the stubborn Corellian that she had told him so.

Han had the grace to look a little discomfited. But did his best to defend his behavior. "I was okay that first time, no after effects at all."

"That's true enough," Leia agreed. "And for most species there would be no problems. Unfortunately for you, Corellians are different. Apparently your body chemistry changes the properties of the fruit which wouldn't have been a problem. But when you combined it with alcohol, the interaction became more extreme. Which explains your performance of last night. When you ate more of the fruit the reaction became even more dramatic."

"Tell me about it." Han shifted uncomfortably. "so now what happens?"

"You get to spend a few days in bed while the after effects are cleared from your system." The face Han made at this piece of news made his audience exchange long suffering looks. Keeping the Corellian prone for any length of time, unless he was tied down, was almost impossible.

\* Until all of the chemicals are removed from your system you may suffer from recurrences of the dizziness and nausea,\* Chewie warned. \* You have to stay in bed.\*

"That's what you think." Han made to pull the covers off his legs. A Wookiee roar combined with the voices of the two humans demanded that he stay right where he was. Outnumbered by three to one and not at all sure that he could actually have made it to his feet without falling flat on his face Solo dropped back into his pillows arms curled across his chest his face a study in frustrated helplessness. "But I feel fine!" he complained when their scolding had died down. "Why do I have to stay in bed?" Chewbacca frowned at him and Han dropped his eyes back to the covers. "Okay, okay," he mumbled "I was only asking. Jeez."

\* Two One Bee knows what he is doing. \*

"Yeah making my life miserable." Han's sigh was long and heartfelt.

"At least with the base closed down you aren't missing much." Luke commiserated with his friend.

"Ah well, that's not quite true. We've just heard we can open up the base again."

Leia's interruption caused a violent reaction from the Corellian. Han sat up abruptly. "What? Oh shit!" He groaned as he had to grip the edges of the bunk as his stomach protested the sudden movement.

"Clearance came through this afternoon while we were out. The first ships fly out tomorrow. And if you hadn't ignored the basic rules of not eating food on strange planets until they have been cleared you could have joined them." She wagged an admonitory finger at him.

An increasingly sheepish looking Han Solo acknowledged the truth in her words by dropping his gaze back to the bed covers. He really didn't need a reminder that he was in this mess because of his own stupidity. "So how long do I have to stay here?" he asked penitently.

"Two One Bee has prescribed bed rest for at least five days." The princess didn't bother to hide her smile as Solo's mouth dropped open at the pronouncement as if this was a life sentence.

"Five? You have to be kidding. There's no way I'm staying here for five days."

"That's what Two One Bee feared you would say." The tone of her voice and the distinct twinkle in her eyes warned Solo that there was more and it wasn't likely to be anything good. But Leia left it to the Tatooinian to break the really bad news.

"Seems he doesn't think he can trust you to stay put, Han. So he's made it official. As the chief medical officer on base, even though he is a droid, he has powers to order people to rest if he thinks its necessary. He's used those powers on you. You're grounded. Sorry."

Han turned desperate eyes on the princess. "Isn't there anything you can do to get this ban lifted?"

"I'm sorry, Han." Although Solo noted sourly that she didn't look in the least bit sorry. "There's nothing I can do. Even I can't overrule medical orders." Han fell back into his pillows, cursing his ill fortune.

Luke, however, had begun to laugh.

"What's so damned funny?" Han glowered at the Jedi.

"I was just thinking." Luke's wide grin encompassed them all. "Your boast about never being grounded by the rebellion again didn't last very long did it?"

\* That's true.\* Ignoring his captain's baleful "Chewie!" Chewbacca joined in the teasing.

"Never mind Han." Leia patted his hand comfortingly before turning to the others with a wink. "At least this time it wasn't a bureaucratic little autocrat who grounded you. It was only a droid!"

Solo pulled the covers over his head to drown out their laughter. He had a feeling that it was going to be a helluva long five days!

**end**

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