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## **Hair of the Gundark**

by Z.P. Florian

The presence Luke sensed wasn't what he was hoping for. He waited for Lando and Chewie and Leia to show up with Han rescued from the carbon freeze.

"Luke you are wasting your time here. You should be going after Vader."

It was Kenobi's voice.

In the dark Tatooine night, there was a ghostly shimmer visible at the door of Kenobi's dwelling.

"Is Darth Vader my father?" Luke asked. His tone of voice wasn't something even a ghost could ignore.

"That is irrelevant at this point, even if he was your father once, he is not that man now. This mistaken feeling that guides you now, that there's still good in him, is useless. You have to kill him. That's the only way. With Vader at his side the Emperor is invincible. Whatever you are doing now is not as important.."

"Ben, if the only way to victory is to assassinate my own father and abandon my friend, than that's not the victory I want to see. I will not kill my own father, and will not leave Han to rot. He came back to save me over the Death Star, he saved my life twice. Is this what you taught my father? To abandon his friends, murder his way to victory? It seems he learned that. I won't. Go shimmer somewhere else. I still remember that you and Yoda already advised me to sacrifice Han and Leia, if I honor what they fought for. If this is what it means to be a Jedi, I'm not one. I'm just a farmboy, and where I came from we don't leave our friends, and men don't kill their fathers. And if there's a place where doing the opposite is fine with everybody I'm not going there. You better go there now. But

I'm not going with you. I'll stay here. Maybe Tatooine isn't such a bad place even if it is far from the bright center of the universe. I'm not quite sure I need all that brightness if that would mean that I'd have my own father's blood on my hands."

"He is more machine now than a man," Kenobi insisted.

"The man I fought on Bespin was not a machine, he actually tried to get me to join him and kill the Emperor and end the war. Maybe I should have done that."

"No, Luke, never, that would mean that you'd rule the Galaxy with him."

"Are you sure that I'd be such a lousy ruler? Maybe I wouldn't. I'd have Leia and Han and Chewie to guide me. And you or Yoda could always shimmer into my room at night and give me more advice." Luke was not the least bit sarcastic. He was dead serious.

"Luke," even Kenobi's disembodied voice sounded weary, "Yoda, doesn't have much time left. If you ever want to talk to him again, you should leave right now."

"I'll go there as soon as I know Han is safe."

"I hope it won't be too late."

Luke pondered quietly for a moment, and then drawing a deep breath, asked, "Was my father your apprentice?"

"Yes, he was."

"Now where does that put you as a teacher?" Sarcasm had finally entered Luke's tone.

Kenobi never thought the boy could sound so bitter. He felt sad that it had to come to this. There was nothing else for him to do here. He shimmered away in the Force.

With C3PO and Artoo for company, Luke waited for the morning, sitting outside on a rock, remembering how it was when he first came here. Chasing Artoo, then everything was simple, he learned that his father was a Jedi knight a good friend of Kenobi and the best starpilot in the galaxy. Ben hadn't said anything about Anakin being his pupil then, he only talked about Vader being his pupil, turning to evil, betraying and murdering Luke's father. But there was no such person as Vader at all, only his father. He tried to remember how Vader's call felt to him over Bespin, he'd been so afraid then. He wasn't afraid now. As soon as he knew that Han was safe he'd go to Yoda and get the whole truth of the story. Maybe Yoda is not as hell bent on me killing my father. No matter how evil he is, one

doesn't kill one's father. I'd probably kill him if he tried to kill Leia, but no other reason would make me do it.

The twin suns had started to rise on the horizon when he saw the speeder coming. Han is here, he thought hopefully, they are bringing him at last. But when the speeder got closer he could see that there was only one person in it: Lando. Maybe the others are waiting for me in the Falcon.

But, as Calrissian got out of the speeder, his expression was grim, defeated. "Luke, everything went wrong," he said, running his hand frustratedly over his dusty dark hair and avoiding Luke's eyes. "Leia got the carbonite slab open, but there was nothing in it." He sighed heavily, lifted his head and set his jaw. "Jabba set a trap and captured her. Chewie is in the dungeon, and she is chained to the throne like all Jabba's humanoid female pets. At least he can't really violate her, he is not equipped for that."

"So," Luke said slowly, "where is Han?"

"That's what we must find out. Freeing Leia and Chewie won't be that difficult, but not immediately. First, maybe Leia can get information on where Han is."

"But who would defrost him and why?"

"Luke, as much as I know Jabba, he wouldn't let him get off as easy as to stay frozen. Jabba paid nearly 100 thousand credits to Boba Fett"

"Who's that?" Luke asked.

"A very reliable bounty hunter. Some say he's the best of them all. If I know Jabba, he will want Han to earn him that much before he dies."

"Earn that much?" Luke was amazed. It was more money than he could imagine. "How??"

"That will be Leia's job to find out. I'll try to give her some ideas how to get this kind of information out of Jabba. Just how good she is at pretending?"

"I don't think she is the kind who'd be good at it. Though come to think of it she was a senator, and a Rebel leader at the same time."

"Right. Well, we'll see. I must talk to her somehow."

"That'll be too dangerous, let Artoo do it." Luke suggested.

"How?" Lando couldn't imagine how the droid could get into the palace.

Luke explained to him what he planned. "Go to Jabba and tell him that you are willing to exchange your droid for the Wookie. Artoo is worth much more than Chewie, you tell him that you want a slave who'll fight for you in a combat."

"What combat?"

"Tell him that there's a crazed young man in the Jundland wastes who thinks he is a Jedi, and wants to fight a Wookiee. And he's willing to pay 55 thousand credits for the chance."

Lando snorted. "Jabba will just take Artoo and do the the deal himself!"

"That doesn't make any difference. Artoo will be in the palace and can give a message to Leia. And Chewie will be out of there, and they will bring him here to fight me. If we can't free him than we don't deserve to be called Rebels." Luke smiled.

Lando was impressed. "Hey, Skywalker, if you ever need a good paying job, just join me. You have the makings of a great con man."

"If I ever want to be a Jedi like Kenobi I'll need the makings of a great con man." Luke grinned, but his eyes were not smiling.

"What do you mean by that? Wasn't General Kenobi practically a saint and a hero combined? Everybody talks about his wonderful deeds in the clone wars." Lando frowned confusion.

"Well, he certainly lied to me about my father." Luke wasn't sure if he should tell Lando, but, then he made up his mind. No need to lie about it -- this kind of lie always comes back to haunt you, he thought, remembering how Kenobi had evaded the question.

"What's with your father?" Lando urged, he loved this kind of family gossip.

"Kenobi said that my father was betrayed and murdered by Darth Vader." Luke drew a deep breath and looked Lando in the eye. "And then it turned out that my father was not only not betrayed and murdered by Darth Vader, my Father is Darth Vader."

Lando's jaw dropped. Regaining his voice, he asked, "Does he know?"

"Yes, Vader told me that himself."

"How can you be sure that it was Kenobi who lied? Vader would lie just to confuse you."

"I talked to Kenobi just a couple of minutes before you arrived, and he told me that Vader did not lie."

Lando blinked. "Kenobi is dead as far as I know. Are you telling me that you can communicate with the dead?" Thinking that through, Lando actually hoped that it was true, for if it was, Luke would have great job forever. People would pay a fortune to be able to have someone helping them to communicate with the dead. Once or twice in his shady past, Lando himself had tried that con and it always worked.

"Not any dead," Luke corrected, "only dead Jedi. I can't call him but he can come to me anytime he wants." Luke looked impatiently to the horizon where the twin suns were climbing rapidly higher. "We don't have time for this. I need to talk to Artoo."

The little droid came closer as soon as his name was mentioned.

Threepio followed and translated his chirps. "Artoo wants to know what kind of adventure are you sending him to this time?"

"He will go to Jabba the Hutt, and try to give my message to Leia."

"Artoo wants to know if that'd help to rescue Captain Solo."

"I certainly hope so. He can record my message, but I hope he can find a way to play it to Leia when nobody is around."

A series of loud and excited chirps answered Luke's words. "He is ready to record the message now."

Luke crouched down before the little droid, placing himself in line with the vid pickup, and placed a hand on Artoo's metallic body. "Leia," he said earnestly, "try to appeal to the Hutt's vanity. Tell him that you can't believe that he paid so much to Boba Fett just to have Han, and then never got that money out of Han's hide. Tell him you thought he was smarter than that."

Artoo chirped when the recording was done. The golden droid translated. "He thinks he will manage to give the message to the Princess without too much difficulty."

A short time later, Lando left with Artoo. Telling his story to Jabba turned out almost exactly as he expected. Jabba told him that he could have the Wookiee only if he shared 50 percent of his take from the fight. And Jabba would keep the droid too.

Luke waited as patiently as he could next morning. Finally, Jabba's sail barge loomed over the sand dunes, and, as it drew closer, Luke could see Leia chained on deck close by the Hutt. And she was wearing practically nothing. Artoo was also there serving drinks.

Luke had set up a place to fight, a simple square marked out in the dirt. Eventually, Chewie was brought there. Luke wondered what the Wookiee would do when he was told to fight him. Chewie came close to him, grabbed him and sniffed at him.

After that, Luke sensed that the Wookiee understood everything --using his sense of smell the Wookiee could read a human as well as any Jedi.

They fought and Luke let himself be beaten. Chewie hit him a few times, not hard enough to cause more than a couple of bruises. Luke pretended to pass out after two or three punches.

Lando didn't know how he could pay 25 thousand credits to Jabba. But to his surprise, when the fight was obviously over, Luke regained the consciousness he had never really lost, returned to the hut, and emerged with a pouch containing 50 thousand credits in coins. Lando wanted to ask where he got the money, but the time wasn't right.

On the way back to Jabba's palace, Chewie jumped off the barge and disappeared in the sand dunes.

Now all they needed to do was to see if Leia could get the information out of Jabba and pass it to Artoo.

Lando went back to the palace to give Jabba his share of the winnings. Artoo rolled over to him, giving him a drink and chirping softly. Lando thought he almost understood the droid. He took the drink, it was a thick ale. When he finished drinking it, he found there was a small capsule on the bottom of his cup. Inside that he found a note. The writing was barely readable. Apparently the droid tried to write with whatever appendage he could produce.

"The princess reports that Captain Solo is working, playing cards for Jabba. She doesn't know where. But Jabba told her that Captain Solo will play cards until he collects a 100 thousand credits for Jabba. Then they'll let him drop dead."

That night, Lando went back to Luke with the note. "Where did you get 50 thousand credits?" he inquired curiously as Skywalker stood reading the note by the faint glow of an antique oil lamp.

"You don't ask and I won't tell," Luke said. "You might not want to know."

"Oh, but I do. I want to learn new ways to get my hands on that much money that fast." Lando thought that the Jedi was far more interesting than he had ever imagined.

"My way only works if you are a Jedi," Luke told him somewhat distractedly, squinting as he tried to make out Artoo's scrawl. "How can Han play cards for Jabba? I don't understand this."

"I do." Lando said. He picked up some dried fruit from the table and took a bite. "There are people who pay for playing cards on the holonet," he said as he chewed, then swallowed. "Usually it is a computer who is your partner, but there are some illegal sites where you pay twice or three times as much for the privilege of playing with a real person."

"So," Luke concluded, getting up to pace the tiny confines of the adobe-walled room, "he keeps Han somewhere, and forces him to play cards?" Luke's voice dropped to a cold whisper as he felt anger tugging at his soul.

"Yeah," Lando nodded. "Probably keeps him on stimulants so he doesn't need sleep. I know what they mean by letting him drop dead -- when the money is properly collected, by that time, he'll be so addicted to the stimulants that he won't be able to live without them. They'll just throw him out, and leave him to sit on the sidewalk and howl in the throes of withdrawal until he dies."

Luke struggled to keep his anger at bay. This was more a truly evil fate -- and made his plans more complicated. He'd expected standard torture from Jabba and had hoped to simply break in and get Han out and to medical help. Now he was very worried. "Just how does this stimulant work? No one can exist without sleep for months."

"It is possible," Lando admitted gravely. "I've seen it done. Actually, in my shady youth I tried the stuff myself." Lando almost sounded repentant. "But not for long. The longest was a week or two, not long enough to get you really addicted. I really needed the money. You burn up a lot of energy, but you don't collapse. You just have to eat right. I'm sure they feed Han well while ever he's making money for them. Jabba won't want him to drop dead too soon."

"Would Han be aware of what's happening to him?" Luke asked.

Lando considered. "He should have some idea, but I'd say he couldn't think very clearly by now. He's been on the stuff for what -- four months by now?"

There was a sudden, enormous thump at the door and Luke went to open it, sensing who it was: Chewie.

The wookiee bent double and shuffled inside, carrying a shower of dust and sand from his matted fur. Then, piling surprise upon surprise, he gargled some of the water-wine mixture from a pitcher on the table, clearing his parched throat, and began speaking Standard, his voice rich and deep. Lando and Luke blinked in amazement, at first so astounded that they found it hard to concentrate on what exactly the Wookiee was telling them.

"Artoo gave me this just before I jumped off Jabba's barge." He gave Luke another capsule just like the one Lando got in his drink. Suddenly, Luke understood that the Wookiee must speak his native language to Han only when others were present and he didn't want them to understand him.

It was a note with the same uncertain handwriting.

"Come to Jabba's palace at night, and I'll make sure that you can free the Princess."

Luke's mouth fell open. "Just what kind of droid does Artoo think he is?"

C3PO, who had been standing quietly in a shadowy corner, stepped forward to explain eagerly. "Master Luke, I must tell you that Artoo is far more than just an astromech droid. He was programmed by the best programmer in the Galaxy. He has about four thousand devious plans installed in his memory, while I only have about two hundred."

"That's far more than a human has." Lando said. "In all honesty I only have about ten devious plans and I keep re-using those."

"We go tonight," Luke announced, "I don't want to wait too long to free Han. Every second he spends with the stimulants in his system is too much."

Lando had never heard Skywalker talk like this before, every word felt like an order. Lando was sure that if he'd tried to refuse he wouldn't be able to. He was sure that the Jedi didn't mean to make it an order. Skywalker probably wasn't aware that his powers worked this way. "So," Lando got to his feet and picked up his cape from the back of the chair. "What reason are you going to give for them for returning?"

"I'll tell Jabba that I think I may have seen his escaped Wookiee near Anchorhead." Luke turned to the golden droid. "Threepio, you take Chewie to the Falcon in Kenobi's old speeder. Make sure that he is not seen."

"I have a few devious plans in my memory too," Chewie said, still sounding strange speaking Standard. "Is there a large barrel in this house?"

"There's one in the basement, filled with moldy flour."

Chewbacca nodded. "I'll pour out the flour. I can sit on the floor of the speeder with the barrel over my head. No one will see anything unusual about a droid driving a speeder carrying a barrel. We can cover my legs with some dirty rags."

"That should work." Lando couldn't remember when he'd been in better company to execute devious plans. If they rescued Leia, he could imagine spending the rest of his life with her, but for the fact she was very obviously Han's woman. There was nothing he could do about it. He could pine for her or he could try to find another woman, just as good as the princess. Since meeting her he understood that he had been looking for the wrong quality in women before -- it was brains, not just beauty he was really interested in. He shouldn't look for a decorative accessory he should look for a partner.

Chewie brought up the barrel from the basement, cleaned it out, and got into the old speeder. It took some oiling, to get it going. Fortunately, Kenobi's house was stocked to perfection with oil and spare parts and fuel, almost enough for an army.

When the speeder was ready to go, Chewie opened the drain pipe going out of the house, and got a pot full of stinking mess from the pipe. Then he rubbed a blanket into it.

"Why?" Luke asked, wrinkling his nose at the stench.

"Luke, you shouldn't forget that not everybody here is standard human like you. Some people don't need to look, even if I'm covered, they'd smell me. So we'll need to cover my legs with this." He handed Luke the stinking blanket. The Wookiee sat in the speeder, putting the barrel over his upper body. It barely fit him, but he made himself as small as possible, wrapping his arms around himself.

Luke wouldn't touch the blanket; he used a stick to lift it and covered Chewie's legs with it. The speeder smelled like a latrine.

"Master Luke, no one would doubt now that there is manure in the barrel. That's what I'm going to say if anyone is asking. This is devious plan number 135," C3PO said.

"Have you done this before?" Luke asked.

"Of course. I have been with the Rebellion for decades, Master Luke. Unfortunately, devious plan number 135 only works if there are organic beings around -- I can't produce anything sneaky enough to achieve the desired results."

"Yes, you could -- just get some food from a synth, and let it rot for a while rotting food is manure." Lando told him.

"Oh, thankyou Master Calrissian. What a great idea." The droid sounded delighted.

"Go now. Chewie should hide in the Falcon's secret compartment. Wait for us. We will come as soon as we have Leia and Artoo." Luke was using the same tone of voice as before, and Lando was sure now that Skywalker had no idea that he was trying to use Jedi powers on a droid.

"You will rescue Artoo too??"

"Of course. We couldn't rescue Han without him," Luke said.

The speeder flew toward Mos Eisley.

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Leia was thinking that the first thing she needed do was to get a speech module installed into Artoo, one that only works if the droid wants to speak to someone otherwise he could just chirp as he did before. She had also had a near-indecipherable note from Artoo telling her,

When you see Luke and Lando arriving, ask permission to go to the bathroom and get there as fast as you can and stay there.

That night she saw them entering the throne room. She asked Bib Fortuna if she could go. She received permission but not without a guard going with her. The chain that Jabba was holding was released. The guard as usual, let her into the bathroom and waited by the door. Leia heard screams and a noise that she couldn't identify -- it sounded like a desperate foghorn.

The guard yelled at her. "Stay here! I'll see what's going on. I'll lock you in!"

By the time the guard got back into the throne room, Jabba was a charred blob on the throne. In the general confusion, Artoo rolled to Lando and Luke, chirping

like a sweet little bird, and leading them to the bathroom where Leia was. Lando started to work on picking the lock.

"Artoo, did you electrocute Jabba?" Luke asked. "Chirp twice for yes, once for no."

Two happy chirps answered. Artoo wished he could tell them how he rigged wires to the chain Jabba was holding and gave the Hutt an electric shock powerful enough to fry him. He was very proud of himself -- this was number 1367 on his devious plans list. He was worried a little what Luke would think of him if the gentle human had known that Artoo was programmed by Anakin during the clone wars to be the best assassin ever created. Who'd suspect an astromech droid being able to kill? But Artoo had appendages that might look like screwdrivers, but they were anything but that -- he could fire poisoned arrows and throw daggers. Anakin needed something that could go through weapons scanners without being suspected of carrying weapons. As the droid was already metal, nothing really showed on the scanners. Artoo still thought fondly of the good old times when he was a team with Anakin and that human really appreciated his every circuit. Anakin's company was almost as pleasant for Artoo as Amidala's was -- though nothing ever felt as good as when Amidala herself cleaned him. Luke might not be as good a partner as his father had been, but he came very close to it.

Lando finally managed to get the door open and Leia emerged, breathlessly asking, "Do you know where Han is?"

"No we don't," Luke sighed, giving her a quick hug.

Artoo chirped something.

Leia shook her head in exasperation. "I must have a speech module installed into Artoo."

"No need for that," a voice nobody recognized answered. "I already have one and it speaks on my Master's voice."

"You have one?" All three humans stared at him.

"Of course, but I'm not supposed to use it until someone actually requires it."

"So you could have spoken to people if they only asked for it.?"

"Not any people -- only Skywalkers." Artoo's voice was soft and gentle.

"But -- I'm not a Skywalker," Leia pointed out.

"Yes, you are. You mean you didn't know??" Artoo's newly used voice accurately conveyed his surprise. "You and Luke are twins. Anakin programmed me and he gave me his voice. He was a good friend and a cunning warrior."

Luke's brows rose and he nodded agreement. "That's what Kenobi told me he was."

"That's what Anakin told Kenobi to tell you -- when the time was right. Did Kenobi tell you that your father was betrayed and murdered by Darth Vader?"

"Yes, he did."

"That was Anakin's idea," the soft, cultured voice said.

"Why??Why would he want to mislead me this way?"

"Not you, not you. The one who is being misled is the Emperor."

Leia and Luke exchanged puzzled glances. "We will talk about this later. Now we must find Han."

"I know where he is." Artoo said.

"Then let's go there right now." Leia was still dazed by the idea of she and Luke being twins, but she'd have time to work that out when Han was free.

They went to the Falcon, where they found Chewie still smelling horrible, and complaining about it.

Artoo started to program coordinates into the navcomputer.

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About two days later they arrived at an asteroid. By that time, Artoo had explained the whole thing to Luke. "The idea was that you must not know about your father being alive. The Emperor had to think that even if you are Anakin's son you are nothing more than a farmboy being used by Kenobi to get Vader killed. At one point Vader was supposed to try and get you team up with him, that'd give the idea to the Emperor that it was time to get rid of Vader and have you take his place. Luke, you are the only being in this universe whose mere existence ensures that there might be a future where the Emperor is killed. The plan was that you can't ever seem to be dangerous enough to warrant that the Emperor would have you killed. And if you knew the truth all along, the Emperor could have read it in your mind. Misleading you about it allows the Emperor to underestimate you. Now you know the truth. The Emperor will know immediately

that you will never turn to the dark side. But maybe that wouldn't hurt the plans too much, he will try to kill you anyway ."

"Now I understand. And I think I owe an apology to Kenobi". Luke felt much better knowing the truth.

"No you don't" Artoo refused. "Your reaction was perfectly normal. Kenobi didn't expect anything else. Now, you go and rescue Han. He is in the main building, in basement room number 45. There's not much security, they know he can't escape. You will have to do something to get him through the door. The schematics show that the door is too narrow."

"I don't understand why that --" Luke began but Artoo cut him off.

"You will. When you get him out, take all the stimulants you find in the room. You can't just stop giving them to him suddenly. You must decrease the dose gradually." Artoo spoke again in that soft voice, sounding much like Vader, Luke thought.

"I will go and find him," he said. "And I'll make sure nobody sees me."

Luke went into the building carrying a small box. Artoo was right about not having much security; there was only a tired looking Rodian sitting by the entrance with a gun.

"I have to take this package to room number 45," Luke said.

"He has to take that box to room 45." The Rodian repeated it and kept repeating it for a good hour. Luke never knew how much power he used on him.

Room number 45 wasn't very difficult to find. Han was there, but at first Luke didn't recognize him. He must have weighed at least 400 pounds. Now Luke understood why would it be a problem to get Han out through the door. He remembered Lando saying something about taking the stimulants that put the metabolism in very high gear. It would kill a person, unless he eats right. Not just eats right, but eats non stop. There was a food synth right beside Solo's chair, producing piles of junk food, spitting them out onto the desk Luke watched Han devour the food.

"I'm so hungry! There's never enough food!" Han wailed. "And where is my next shot?" Han pulled out a drawer, and Luke saw it was packed full with syringes. Luke snatched a dozen of them.

Han tried to turn around to see who was behind him. But his seat wasn't really a chair. It was basically a commode, and he was tied to it.

"Han, do you know where you are?" Luke leaned closer to him, studying the man's glazed eyes.

"Sure. I know I'm here," Han said querulously, "I just don't know where here is. And who the hell are you? I can't see too good."

"It's me, Luke."

"Then I must be hallucinating. Luke was killed by Darth Vader."

"Who told you that?"

"Boba Fett. He said Luke came to Bespin to free me and Vader was waiting for him. Am I supposed to believe that Luke fought Darth Vader and survived?"

"Well, that's what happened," Luke said. "I gotta get you out of here. And, by the way, Jabba is dead."

Han gaped a moment, then blinked and looked toward the exit despairingly. "You can't get me out of here I don't fit through the door any more. Besides, I won't live long without these shots."

"Well, then," Luke decided determinedly, "I'll just have to talk the door into letting you out. And then see if what I heard about the wilderness method being a true cure for drug addictions."

"What wilderness method? Never mind," Han smiled groggily up at him. "This is a rather entertaining hallucination, I'm having."

"I'll show you hallucination," Luke growled at him rather playfully. He drew his lightsaber and went to work on the wall soon creating an opening large enough. "Can you walk?" he asked worriedly as he turned back to Solo who was watching him dreamily.

"No, my muscles atrophied completely. I can't possibly stand up -- my legs won't support my weight."

Luke activated his comlink. "Chewie, get down here. I can't get him out without your help."

Chewie appeared in five minutes, finding the Rodian at the door was still chanting. When the Wookiee looked at Han he told Luke. "I can't let Leia see him like this, he'd never forgive me."

"Just take him out, I'll make sure Leia will never remember seeing him." He had no intention of doing that -- Leia loved Han, and had every right to see him no matter what shape he was in.

Chewie managed to lift Han up and take him outside. Luke stepped beside the Rodian. "You have seen nothing," he commanded.

The Rodian started to scream, "I'm blind I'm blind!"

"You didn't blind him for real, did you?" Chewie asked.

"No. It'll wear off after a while," Luke said.

It was true that this kind of manipulation should wear off after a couple of minutes, but not when someone with Luke's power was doing it. The Rodian spent almost a week in a hospital convinced that he was blind. Even when that manipulation wore off he was still interested to know whether the box that had to be delivered to room 45 ever got there.

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Luke gave small shots of the stimulant to Han for about a week. But then he had to increase the dose when Han started to scream and wouldn't stop. What am I going to do with him? Luke thought desperately. We are killing him. I can't wean him from this stuff. And he is in no shape to try the wilderness method. He can't even walk. He should be left in the wilderness as the curing of addictions advice goes. Who can help him?? Would Jedi manipulation do any good to him? I might as well try. Can't hurt -- he doesn't even know what's going on though he's finally remembered me.

The next day he tried to manipulate Han as he did it with the Rodian. You don't need the shots, he suggested, but it didn't work at all. Very upset, he sat down to meditate. He understood then that Jedi manipulation had its limits -- it couldn't eliminate a real need but it could create a need to do something, even if the person wouldn't do it normally.

He went to Han, who was still eating without pause. "Han, do you believe now that you are not hallucinating?"

"Almost," the Corellian agreed. "If I'm not hallucinating, and you really are Luke and you are my friend, would you please just put me out of my misery? I'm now about as big as Jabba was."

"I'm not going to kill you unless everything else fails. Would you kill Leia if this had happened to her? Would you kill me if this had happened to me?"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"What else can you think of to do?"

Solo considered. "If I could spend a couple of months on Corellia by The Greensea in the forest, I could get rid of any addiction. But I'm not in any shape to do that. And as long as I'm getting these stimulants, I can't stop eating."

"Easy, as pie then," Luke suggested. "We just have to get you addicted to something else that doesn't require eating."

"Are you out of your mind?" Han could barely stop eating to talk.

"No, I think I'm just starting to use it. Isn't there some saying about the hair of the gundark curing the bite? What kind of spice would make you extremely relaxed?"

"Kesselian, concentrated 75 percent pure. You want me drugged enough so I'd sleep for a few weeks."

"That's the idea. That'd put your weight back to where it had been. Then I could just drop you off in that forest -- without even a blaster."

"Naked -- they say you must be naked," Han said.

"Who are they?" Luke stared at him. He couldn't imagine what Han was talking about.

"The healers," Han replied, as if he expected Luke to understand.

"What healers?"

"The Wookiee healers. Ask Chewie, he knows all about it. Now, leave me alone. I must eat now. I can't use my mouth for talking this much."

Luke asked Chewie why one must be naked in the forest. Since the Wookiee had started speaking standard, Luke fully realized just how intelligent and well-educated Chewie was.

"Sometimes a Wookiee falls prey to drugs," Chewbacca explained. "And then the healers take him into a valley and leave him there. Once it was tried on a human, but it only works on humans if they are naked. You must have contact with nature all over your body."

"Do you think my plan would work?" Luke was sure it would, but he still wanted to have Chewie's approval. After all, the Wookiee was 200 years old and Luke himself was only a couple of years over twenty.

"I don't see why it wouldn't," Chewie said. "Just be sure to check that the stimulant doesn't interact badly with the spice."

Luke checked the medcomp in the sickbay. It warned about a possible reaction and suggested not to take stimulants for 48 hours before taking the spice. Well, I don't have any choice, I have to get him knocked out for 48 hours.

Chewie volunteered to do it. He was very careful not to cause serious damage. Han was out like a light. He came to once, screaming for his shot, but Chewie hit him again, and then the 48 hours passed.

In the meantime, Luke and Lando had gone to acquire some Kessel spice. Luke was surprised how expensive it was. He spent over 60 thousand credits on it.

"Now would you please tell me where are you getting all this money?" Lando asked the Jedi.

"They are just giving it to me if I ask. If you are really interested next time, I'll let you watch. But only if you tell me some interesting stories, about the best schemes you ever worked on." Luke smiled at him. They were becoming really good friends in this crisis.

"How long do you want to keep Han on this?" Lando inquired.

"When his weight is back to normal. then we stop."

"That might take more than a month. I don't know anyone who had been taking this kind of spice for more than a week who ever got rid of the habit."

"Han will," Luke said, sounding completely confident.

"Is this a Jedi hunch? Is it true that a Jedi can see the future?" Lando wondered how the young man could live with such an ability.

"It is true. But seeing the future doesn't mean much, if you don't interpret it correctly," Luke explained. "The images are blurred, and it is not always the same image. For example, I tried to see the time when I meet the Emperor. Sometimes, I see myself dead, sometimes I see Vader dead. Once I saw Leia there. Once I even saw Han there. I guess it depends on the present which of the possible futures will happen. You can't really take what you see seriously..And you can't base your decisions on what you have seen. "

When Luke started to give the spice to Han, the Corellian mostly slept. When he didn't sleep he just sat very quietly looking at something only he could see.

"What are you looking at?" Leia asked him one day.

"Flowers, beautiful flowers, they sing. So beautifully they sing.,How come you can't hear it? "

Han didn't eat at all. Even water had to be forced on him. Luke just gave him vitamins and very basic nutrients and not much of that. His weight was dropping fast enough. At this rate Luke thought he'd be down to his normal weight in a month.

But barely two weeks had passed when a message came from the Alliance that they were needed back at the fleet.

There they learned about the new Death Star and the Emperor being on it.

"Chewie," Luke said. "I must go to Endor. I wish Han could be with us -- it is his kind of work. I hope I learned enough from him to deactivate the shield generator."

"Go, Skywalker," the Wookiee ruffled Luke's hair affectionately. "Take care of yourself. I will take Han to Corellia and continue the treatment. Then I'll take him to the forest. Naked. He will be all right soon enough. Don't worry about him. If he is back to normal by the time the Emperor arrives on the Death Star, I'll bring him back here. I hope you won't need the Falcon, for a while, I'll have to take her.." The Wookiee sounded just as confident as Luke had been about Han's recovery.

Leia watched the Falcon leave. Remembering the Han she used to know, how many times they fought, how many times they annoyed each other to death. Now she'd give anything to have Han annoying her again.

Maybe it will happen soon, she thought hopefully as she watched Han's beloved ship disappear into the starfield. If anyone can get rid of an addiction Han will. I should be with him now, he might need me. But the Alliance needs me too, and I can't abandon the Alliance for my private life. But is it really my private life? Han is a wonderful asset to the Alliance, without him we might not be able to achieve victory? Is this a feeling or is it something the Force is trying to tell me? -- if I really have the same ability that Luke has. But why do I feel that Han not being there would hurt us, but not Chewie not being there? She decided to ask Luke about it.

Luke wanted her to share her visions with him. They both had seen the same thing -- Chewie grabbing some bloody carcass of an animal. And everybody getting trapped in a net. Only when this happens, would the Alliance win.

"Well, if Chewie is not there, someone else will have to grab the bloody carcass," Leia said.

"Strange. Why would this help us?" Luke was very worried about trying to interpret the vision correctly. It could just as easily mislead them.

"It can't hurt to try," Leia said. "C3PO has to be there too. And Artoo, and you and me. You must go to our father. Maybe we both should go."

"No," Luke shook his head and smiled softly at her. "One of us must stay with the Alliance. If I die, you must learn to use your powers."

"Who'd teach me?"

"As things look, probably Kenobi would come back to teach you. Or if I can get our father freed from whatever bondage he had to enter to serve the Emperor," Luke shrugged, "he could do it."

But shortly before the fleet was ready to go to Endor, the Falcon arrived back with Chewie piloting. The Wookie told them that Han insisted on him coming here. "He told me that he had a dream that if I'm not here both Luke and Leia will die, and the Emperor will win. and even the droids will be destroyed. Hankho never had dreams of the future before." Chewie sounded worried, he didn't like that Han had visions.

"It might have been a message from Anakin or Kenobi," Leia said thoughtfully. Then she brightened to ask eagerly, "How is Han doing?"

"I left him in the forest on Corellia by the Greensea, naked as he had to be," Chewie told her. "I think it'll take about four months to get rid of his addiction. We agreed that as soon as he feels cured, he'll call. I left a comlink with him."

Leia tried to imagine how Han looked, naked in the forest. The image was disturbing. She wanted him more than ever.

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### **Four months later.**

The Death Star had been destroyed, the Emperor was dead, and Anakin was alive. Still, Luke and Leia hadn't heard anything about Han.

Chewie left immediately after the victory celebration, going back to Corellia to see how Han was doing. He'd tried to contact him as soon as he arrived, but the

comlink was not responding. He called Luke then, asking the Jedi to come here and locate Han in the forest. Leia came with him too.

It wasn't very easy. The forest was full of animals, and locating another life-form through the Force wasn't something that Luke was really good at. Eventually he had to call Anakin to help him.

His father had no difficulty locating Han -- he still had a good memory of Solo's presence. "That way," he announced, adding with a smile. "Stop worrying. He is fine."

"Then why didn't he call?"

"Did it occur to you that it might be as simple as the batteries in his comlink going dead?" Anakin winked at his son. "You youngsters tend to forget the plainest explanations. Not everything is complex. Besides, did you ever try to call him through the Force?"

Luke sighed. "I don't know how to do that."

Anakin frowned. "Hmm. I have to complete your training. Now, let's go this way. He is about four miles north of here."

"You stay here," Leia said. "I'm going after him with Chewie. There's no need to have company when I meet him. I want to be alone with him."

"Why?" Luke asked.

Anakin laughed. "I can understand that. What I don't understand is why you don't understand?"

Luke blushed. "I'm not very good with this kind of thing."

"In time you will be," Anakin said -- it was not a prediction it was an order. Luke frowned at it.

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After a long wal, Leia spotted Han in a sun-dappled clearing. He was naked, tanned, and back to his normal weight, or even a little less than that. Oh, my Goddess, she thought, he is beautiful, I can't possibly do anything else but ravish him.

And she did just that, grabbing him and kissing him with passion that she had never allowed to surface before.

Han's mouth tasted of sweet berries. But he pulled away from her and she thought she was mistaken about his feelings for her. But when Han started to speak, she didn't know what to think anymore.

"We have to get to civilization, Leia," he said. "You can't possibly think that you can take me without us being bonded. I'm not going to lose my honor this way. You will have to bond with me, before I lose my head and let you take me here and now."

"You are joking, right?" Leia thought she must be hallucinating -- ever since they'd first met she'd been convinced that Han must have had sex with thousands of beings all over the galaxy.

"No, I'm not joking at all. What did you think of me that I'd just have sex for the fun of it? I have my pride, Leia, I'm an honorable man. I won't let any female use me, except the one that bonds with me? Will you?"

"Yes! I will. But where and how?" She was still totally surprised. She had never been so mistaken about a person in her entire life.

"There's a temple just by the sea," Han explained with a smile. "Not very far from here. We can walk there now. And you can have me in the wedding chamber. But they'll probably refuse the bonding, because your family is not here."

"My father is here. And my brother." Leia called Luke and Anakin on the comlink. "Meet us at the temple by the sea." She turned to Solo. "Could you give them directions?" Han took the comlink Luke answered, taking the directions.

"Luke?" Han asked. "Is that you? Leia said that her brother is here? And her father is here?"

"That'd be Lord Vader and me," Luke said deadpan.

Han actually dropped the comlink. "You are her brother and Vader is the father of both of you?" Regaining his composure, he asked. So, do you have any clothes to spare?"

"All I can give you is a cape. Anything else would be too short for you," Luke said.

"A cape will do fine as long as I can wrap it around myself. See you at the temple then."

As it turned out, they met them even before they got to the temple. Luke took off his cape and Han wrapped himself in it. He was quite good with turning it into a kind of toga.

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The temple was nothing like Leia expected it to be. It was a round building made entirely of wood, completely covered with flowering vines. Leia entered and found two old women were there wearing white robes. They had Han on his knees taking an oath, swearing that he was unspoiled. Then they asked Leia if she was satisfied with the oath. Only when she said yes did they agree to perform the ceremony.

It was a very long process, going on for almost an hour. The women were chanting something in a language Leia had not even known existed. She guessed it had to be old Corellian. She wished C3PO was there to translate.

Later, she asked Han about it. It turned out that it was a list of Han's duties as a husband. This is what Han translated for her:

Provide food, shelter, and entertainment for his wife. Never touch another female, not even in an emergency. If he has to touch a woman to save her life he should wear gloves. He also has to provide his wife with sex as often as she wants -- no exception. He must wear only the kind of clothes his wife allows him to wear. If his wife so demands, he might have to cover his face. His hair must be as long as his wife desires. If his wife wants, he must grow beard or mustache. If any woman forces him to have sex with her it is his duty to castrate himself rather than being defiled. If he can't save himself this way he must report to the temple and they would make sure that his death is completely painless.

"I never thought that Corellian males were slaves!" Leia told Han, astounded when he completed the recitation.

"Leia," he corrected softly, "this is not slavery. This means that we men are extremely valued. Why would they think that no female but you must touch me? I'm yours and yours only." Han's expression was blissful.

Leia shook her head. "This is so medieval."

Han grinned. "Now -- will you take me? The bed chamber is over there."

Leia looked. "That's not a chamber, it's a tent!"

"Right," he nodded. "It has to be a tent, otherwise the priestesses won't hear us."

"You can't possibly mean that they are going to listen?!"

"Of course they will. They will not certify the bonding complete unless they hear your pleasure."

Leia raised an eyebrow. "Mine, not yours?"

"My pleasure is secondary," Han said with an impish smile. "You are the wife. I'm the husband."

Leia went into the tent with him, thinking that she might learn to like these old Corellian customs, in time.

**The end**

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