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ONE DAY IN THE PARK

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Princess Leia Organa stooped and, squinting against the sun, looked around the park. It was a beautiful park, green, neatly laid out and ornamented with statues, sculptures, murals and other artistic outpourings.

And every last square inch of it had been donated by some of the most wanted criminals in the Empire.

Haven was a strange world. The Princess was here to receive certain information for which the Alliance was paying through the nose, but she had been astonished at what she had found. Though Haven was within the boundaries of the Empire, it was relatively control free. It contained the only known dyrilliurn mine, which had been very thoroughly laced with powerful bombs. At the slightest hint of an Empire move in Haven's direction, the powers-that-be were warned, the mine would be blown to bits. The Empire snarled frustratedly, but kept its distance.

As a result, Haven became very attractive to criminals, who naturally appreciated having a free world to retreat to, and who demonstrated their appreciation in tangible ways. The inhabitants had changed the planet's name to its present appellation, and let it be known that, as long as they obeyed Haven's laws and were generous to its coffers, everyone was welcome. Even Jabba the Hutt.

Jabba! Her hands clenched into fists at the thought of his name. It was more than a year since Han had been taken by the bounty hunter and she had finally had to stop lying to herself. She no longer believed that Han was still alive and the minute she had admitted that, the pain had started. It had been with her constantly since then and she knew that, thirty years

from now, it would still be as intense as it was today. She was so made that she gave her love once; there would never be anyone but Han for her. Upon her realizing the nature of Haven, there had been a momentary hope that Jabba was in residence. As a parting gesture, she would have loved to turn her ship's guns on his home and blow it up, with him in it. But even that was to be denied her.

She had already passed several pieces of artwork, with Jabba's name on them, everything in the park being identified as to donor, when she came upon another. It was a statue of a human figure, true as to shape but featureless, almost an impressionistic style. She stopped again abruptly, and her entourage of six well armed guards did likewise. Peering, closer, she could see four small indentations, as if something, had briefly been placed against the metal before it had cooled. Like a measuring device.

As comprehension dawned on her, she stared at the work in astonished disbelief and then suddenly, laughter, lost for over a year, exploded. She collapsed against the statue, laughing so hard the tears streamed down her face, as the others gaped at her in astonishment.

"L-lieutenant, we're leaving here around midnight tonight, aren't we?" she asked, wiping her eyes and shooing a pigeon cautiously.

"Fine. Then around eleven o'clock, by which time it should be dark enough, you are to return here and bring as many men -- and whatever equipment --you think you need. Be very careful. We wouldn't want anything ... vital damaged."

He was still bewildered. "But your Highness, when we come back, what are we supposed to do?"

She grinned at him. "Steal the statue, Lieutenant. Steal the statue."

END

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