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## Resolutions

by [Martha Wilson](#)

Han Solo was stretched full length in the maintenance crawlway of the *Millennium Falcon's* left bow mandible, running a check on the fore deflector shield generator, when he heard Leia Organa clear her throat.

He lifted his arm, squinting back toward the open grill at the end of the crawlway, and saw a pair of diminutive booted feet. Han rolled his eyes in annoyance. He and the Princess had not gotten along at all well in the short time since the evacuation of Yavin IV. He disliked what he thought of as her all-business dedicated revolutionary nut persona, and it brought out what even he recognized as the less attractive features of his own personality. Han had meant to leave the Rebellion to its own devices after the Death Star, but things hadn't worked out that way, and here he was, the *Falcon* tucked into the belly bay of the *Tantavie IV*, hiding out with the rest of the fleet of ships evacuated from the base on Yavin's fourth moon, wondering what the hell was wrong with him. Luke Skywalker was retraining as an x-wing pilot with some other new recruits under Wedge Antilles as the fleet hopped from system to system, gathering ships and supplies and dodging the Empire. He should tell her no, he was leaving. Instead he said, "What do you want?"

"I need to speak to you," she said, sounding like she was holding on to her patience with both hands. "It's urgent."

Han let out his breath. Since she had him cornered in a space not much larger than his own body, he supposed he didn't have much choice. "Go ahead."

She sat on her heels to peer at him down the narrow crawlway. "We've received a communication from a Vitarin clan who have a trading company on Sairsa's

Freehold. They aren't officially members of the Alliance, but they are part of our commercial support network and they've always been reliable."

"So?" Sairsa's Freehold was a hub station, in a system just at the fringes of Imperial jurisdiction, in a sector that the Corporate Sector Authority had been trying to lay claim to for years. The "Freehold" part of the name was wishful thinking, Han knew. It was only an independent system until the Empire felt like waltzing in and taking over, which was sure to happen eventually. But until then the hub station was the backwater version of Commenor, though without the Commenor bureaucracy. It was an anarchy, and anything and everything was for sale there.

Leia cleared her throat. "They've been approached by someone who claims to have information vital to the Alliance. The Vitarin are understandably upset that this person has managed to discover their connection with the Alliance, and they've demanded a member of the High Council respond to this situation. I'm the only member of the High Council who can possibly get there in time."

Han stopped and sat up on one elbow. "I guess it's occurred to you that this is probably a trap?"

"Intelligence has verified what they could of the Vitarin's story already, and an operative will be meeting me there. It's more likely the Vitarin are about to walk into a trap themselves, and I have to get there in time to walk them back out of it. We can't afford to lose them." Leia's tone took on more than a hint of exasperation. "I have to be there in," there was a pause as she checked her wrist chrono. "Less than twenty timeparts. The Vitarin are currently hosting a trade conference and I'll go in disguised as a delegate from a new company that wants to open trade relations with them."

Han shook his head and went back to the diagnostic. "And?"

"I need to arrive in something that looks like a commercial vessel and the *Falcon* is the closest I can come to that in the time I've got, which isn't much."

Han had finished the diagnostic and sealed the generator while she was talking, and now snapped the cover back in place. He started to wriggle out of the crawlway and she stepped back to give him room. He slid out and sat back against the bulkhead, tossing his scanner into the open tool kit. He prompted, "And out of the goodness of my heart...?"

Leia folded her arms. Her expression was carefully neutral. It had been less than a month, as the rebel fleet measured days, since the Death Star and in that short time she had changed. Her face was thinner, the hollows under her eyes a little darker. Things had gotten tenser between them since she had helped him get the *Falcon* back from the Imperial saboteurs who had stolen it on Yavin IV. Their last

argument had been notable for the immaturity shown by both sides. "A supply transport just arrived with some scrap ships from Fornax. One of them has a Corellstand Apex Doxicon Isolator in good working condition, and if you take me to Freehold, it's yours."

Han's face went blank, to conceal the surge of emotion that had just welled up in his chest. He would have done a lot worse than ferry Leia Organa to the other end of nowhere for that brand of Isolator.

Leia gestured impatiently. "It should only take a couple of station days, and I won't need you to go to the conference with me." She hesitated. "I know you wouldn't consider loaning us the *Falcon*...."

Han snorted derisively. "No, I'm not likely to go for that." He got to his feet and leaned against the bulkhead, considering the proposition. *A Corellstand Apex Doxicon Isolator*.... It would make such a lovely addition to the *Falcon's* illegal jamming equipment. A unit like that could mean life or death in some of the tight situations the *Falcon* seemed to be getting into lately. His mouth was watering at the thought of it. But there were other concerns. He said, "I've had some run-ins with the Corporate Sector Authority." That was putting it mildly.

"They don't have jurisdiction either. For now it's still just the individual companies and associations that run the station. We'll be well-supplied with false ID documents and a false ship registration to the Ascalon Trading Company, which was incorporated about twenty minutes ago in the *Tantavie's* conference chamber." Leia pressed her lips together, waiting. When he didn't say anything, she asked impatiently, "Will you take me?"

Han stared into space, frowning. "Chewie's not going to like it. He's nervous about the Corporate Sector." He shrugged. "But for that Isolator, he'll get over it. We'll take you."

\* \* \*

*I suppose that went as well as could be expected*, Leia thought, making her way past the rows of shuttles and small ships docked in the *Tantavie's* bay. They had arranged departure for one timepart from now. That gave her just enough time to finish putting her materials on the Freehold together and finalize plans with Intelligence.

She took the elevator up to the conference room above the second level of the frigate's bridge and found General Rieekan and Colonel Degoran already there. She nodded to Rieekan, who was occupied with checking through the set of datadisks that held all the information concerning Freehold that Alliance Intelligence currently had access to. "Well?" he asked hopefully.

"Han's agreed to take me. Everything's set."

"Is that wise?" Degoran asked, frowning at her.

*Yes, I'm sure I look like someone who's in the mood for guessing games,* Leia thought. "Is what wise?" As soon as she said it she knew her tone was too clipped; her temper was getting the better of her more and more.

"Travelling alone with Captain Solo," Degoran said, by way of clarification.

Leia was confused. "We're not going alone. His co-pilot will be with us, of course." *What is he getting at?* Degoran was not a welcome presence on the *Tantavie*, as far as she was concerned. He was Alderanni and had been a customs inspector before joining the Alliance. He was also a member of the anti-Organan faction in the High Command and a perpetual thorn in General Rieekan's side.

"A Wookiee," Degoran said, one brow raised.

"The last time I checked, yes." She bit her tongue. Obviously, she had been around a certain Corellian too much lately.

Rieekan's expression was amused, despite how harried he must be. He said, "I think Degoran is worried about propriety, Leia."

"Propriety?" Leia stopped and stared at him. "Whose propriety?"

Anyone else would have been warned off by the icy razor edge in her voice. Degoran was made of sterner stuff. He said, "Yours, princess. It must be obvious to you that Captain Solo comes from an element of society that you have little experience with. If he...." Degoran hesitated, apparently out of respect for her delicate sensibilities.

"If he tries something," Rieekan supplied dryly, not looking up from his terminal.

Degoran glanced at Rieekan with annoyance, but continued, "Will you know how to respond?"

"I'm quite capable of handling Captain Solo," she said, then realized how that sounded. Rieekan's lips twitched but Degoran's expression remained bland. Leia

gritted her teeth and fought down her irritation. Degoran wasn't a fool; his goal was to undermine her and the other leading members of what had been Bail Organa's faction in the Alliance command structure. She said, "Colonel, I know my lack of years gives you doubt about my abilities, but I assure you, my diplomatic training did not preclude an education in the vagaries of real life." She snatched the disks out of Rieekan proffering hand and strode out of the room.

But for the next timepart, as she prepared for the trip, she couldn't get those words out of her head.

\* \* \*

Han had broken the bad news to Chewbacca and was almost done with the preflight by the departure time, which had been set by the princess and had been highly optimistic for a starship whose needs were as individualized as the *Falcon's*. He had taken a moment to go and hunt Luke Skywalker down among the X-wing maintenance bays, to tell him what was going on and that he should get anything he needed off the ship before they left. All the living quarters on the *Tantavie* were crowded, and Luke had been staying on the *Falcon*, using the hold space for a private practice area for his lightsabre techniques.

Han had the first part of this conversation with Luke's rear end, which was about all that was visible of him as the younger man was wedged into an X-wing's undercarriage. With training from Han and the other pilots and techs, Luke was becoming one hell of a flight mechanic. From what Luke had told him, this was not due to any astuteness on the part of the Anchorhead district education system on Tatooine, but to Luke's Uncle Owen allowing supervised experimentation with the farm's skyhopper. Han wasn't sure Luke had actually heard what he was saying until he replied, his voice muffled by the X-wing's innards, "Okay, I'll send Threepio over."

Han hated Threepio. The astromech droid, what's-its-name, was all right, Han was even beginning to like it, but Threepio he just wanted to space. Once after the droid had said or done something that particularly irritated both of them, he had asked Luke, "Why the hell do you need a protocol droid?"

"I don't," Luke had replied, exasperated.

"Then get rid of it. Donate it to the Alliance, if you can't find somebody dumb enough to buy it."

"I would, but Artoo's really fond of Threepio," Luke said seriously, "and it would hurt his feelings if I got rid of him."

Han stared at him, incredulous, "They're mechanicals, kid. You can't treat them like they're organic."

"Oh yeah?" Luke demanded. "So what are you doing when you talk to the *Falcon's* navicomp? Or that psycho backup computer that's always trying to override the others?"

There had been nothing to say to that, of course, except to thump Luke in the head and walk away. Now Han sighed and said, "As long as it doesn't try to talk to me."

Luke chuckled and started to wiggle backward out of the housing. "Threepio knows he's not allowed to talk to you unless it's an emergency," he said, patiently.

"Then why does he still do it?"

"He forgets."

"Then he needs a new processor." A new processor would effectively wipe the droid's personality; Han had been recommending this for the past month.

"See, that's why he's afraid of you." Luke finished extracting himself from the X-wing and sat back, wiping coolant fluid off his forehead with the sleeve of his coverall and smiling at Han. He needed a haircut, badly. "He doesn't know you're kidding."

"I'm not kidding." Han checked the chronometer. "I've got to get moving. I want to look at that motivator again before we lift."

Luke nodded sympathetically. Having helped with the *Falcon's* maintenance, he had no need to ask "What motivator?" It was fast becoming the bane of Han and Chewie's lives. Wiping his hands off on a rag and looking thoughtful, Luke said, "So it's just you, the Princess, and Chewie?"

"Yeah," Han said, then took a closer look at Luke's expression. A smile tugged at his mouth. "Why? You worried?"

"No."

"Okay."

"Okay."

They eyed each other for a moment, then Luke gave in and grinned. "Just don't do anything I wouldn't do," he said.

Han paused in the hatchway. "According to a certain shuttle pilot named Alyn, that gives me a lot of room to work with."

Luke swore and looked around for something to throw and Han ducked out, laughing, before he could find anything.

Now Han was standing under the *Falcon's* drive housing, doing the last visual check, when General Rieekan walked up to him.

This was close to the middle of the ship's "day" and the hangar, crammed with racks of fighters, several different types of shuttle, and the larger courier ships, was relatively busy, with techs, support crew, pilots on maintenance duty, and droids everywhere in the smaller bays and work areas built into the bulkheads and suspended overhead on the gantries and catwalks. It was unusual for Rieekan to make it down here at all, let alone at this time of the shift.

The General stopped under the shadow of the freighter, hands jammed in his pockets, and said, "I'm glad you're going on this mission, Solo."

"Yeah?" Han glanced at him warily, mostly occupied with checking the joints on the hull plate that had had to be replaced. Rieekan looked more like somebody's nice old uncle than Han's idea of a general, and the most uniform he ever wore was a battered set of fatigues.

"Keep an eye on Leia. She hasn't been herself lately."

"You mean she gets worse?" Han said. After a month with the Alliance Han was learning to trust Rieekan, as hard as that was to believe. Han had been leery of turning his back on anybody with a military rank higher than private for years, but Rieekan was different.

The General chuckled, then added seriously, "She's been through a hard time."

Han nodded noncommittally. That was putting it mildly. All the Alderanni onboard had been going through shock and survivor guilt, breaking down or burying themselves in their work, but Leia was a special case. She was the only one who had seen it happen, and she was the only surviving member of the World Family of Alderaan, hereditary rulers who had considered themselves personally responsible for the well-being of every living thing on the planet. And the other Alderanni tended to come to her for comfort. Han wasn't sure who Leia went to when she couldn't take it anymore. Rieekan, presumably.

Across the deck Leia appeared from around the bulk of one of the big shuttles, striding toward the *Falcon*, an upright, determined figure with a carryall slung over one shoulder. Watching her approach, Han realized something else. She could still do it to him. He had thought he was over it, that rush of overwhelming

attraction he had felt since the first time he had seen her. Since she had grabbed Luke's blaster and shot out the grill over the garbage chute and called him a flyboy. *Are you out of your mind?* he asked himself. Maybe he argued with her because he liked how she looked when anger made her flushed and excited. *Yeah, you're out of your mind.* This train of thought made his expression more grim than it might otherwise have been and Leia, seeing him, was immediately put on the defensive.

Reaching them, she glared up at Han. "You're not ready yet?"

"I told you that wouldn't be enough time. You can go up and slap Chewie around if you think it'll make him work faster."

She fumed for a moment but managed not to answer. Giving Rieekan a stiff nod, she stamped up the ramp.

Rieekan let out his breath and smiled wryly, "Good luck," he told Han.

Han shook his head. "Thanks, I'll need it."

\* \* \*

Later, with the *Falcon* safely in hyperspace, Han strolled back into the lounge, stripping off his gloves. Leia was seated at the game table, already fitting a datadisk into a portable reader.

He leaned against the concussion padding and regarded her thoughtfully. She did look older than the woman he had met on the Death Star. He wondered if it was the stress of her responsibilities in the Alliance, or the simple fact that less than a month ago she had been forced to stand helplessly and watch while Alderaan was destroyed.

He wondered what it was like, losing an entire world.

Han let out his breath. He supposed the least he could do was call a truce. They had been picking at each other for days senselessly. She had had to swallow her pride to come to him for help with this mission. The least he could do was be nice about it. "Hey, Leia, I--"

"Han." Leia sat up even straighter, if that was possible, and said stiffly, "I think it best if we just associated together as little as possible during this trip."

Han stared at her, the generous impulse to make peace dissolving in a wave of serious annoyance. "You want me to stay out of your way?" he said, just to make sure he understood.

Leia knew she hadn't said quite what she had meant to say. *You know, a wry inner voice informed her, a trained diplomat really ought to be able to say what she means without being offensive, especially to someone she knows.* "I--"

"I don't know if you've noticed this or not," Han pointed out acidly, "But I live here."

"I know that," Leia snapped. "That's not what I meant."

"Then what the hell did you mean?"

"I-- I--" Han waited, but that seemed about as far as she could get. If he didn't know better, he would say she didn't know what the hell she meant, either. She finally managed, "Oh, you know what I mean! Just behave as if I'm not here."

"That would be a pleasure, your holiness," Han said, and slammed out of the lounge.

\* \* \*

Sometime later, Leia realized she was doing less reading, and more fuming. She didn't know who she was more angry at, herself or Han. Mostly herself, she suspected. It was no secret that he could be deliberately provoking when he wanted to, and he seemed to want to a disproportionate amount of time, but she had started this round because of Degoran's idiotic suggestion.

Maybe the problem was that she really didn't know Han well at all. Luke practically lived in the hangar bay and on the *Falcon*, and yet she felt she knew him much better. She honestly didn't know if Han would "take advantage" of this situation, as Degoran had predicted, or not. The wry voice unhelpfully said, *but it never occurred to you that he might until Degoran put the idea in your mind.*

Han wandered through the lounge area, scratching his head. Leia, glancing up cautiously, noticed he wasn't wearing his boots, that his shirt was untucked and rumpled, and his hair was mussed. While she had been sitting here fuming he had gone back to his cabin and gone to sleep. *That is so damn typical*, she thought in exasperation.

She braced herself to say something apologetic but he dropped into the chair at the tech station without even glancing at her, sprawled comfortably, and called up something on the terminal there. He was ignoring her. *Didn't you ask him to?* the wry voice wondered. Leia decided, firmly, to ignore him, too. And the wry voice.

After a time this proved just as unsatisfactory, since Han remained absorbed in reading something with a lot of equations and technical diagrams, apparently oblivious to the fact that he was being ignored. She was a little relieved, having no desire to spend the entire trip in a state of armed truce with him. She had noticed that while Han was quick to become angry, he got over it with equal speed. She was used to her father's ability to be angry for days, while you waited in sick anticipation for the cutting tirade you knew was coming. Bail Organa had been able to use stony silence like a master. If Han had something to say to you, he had to say it immediately, and if he could maintain a stony silence for more than thirty seconds, she had yet to see him do it.

Maybe she was taking advantage of that. Her temper had been so short lately, maybe she had been using Han as a safe outlet to vent her feelings on. She couldn't yell at Rieekan, or Madine, or the others on the command council; they were just as harried as she was. If she yelled at Degoran and his allies it would only give them more ammunition to use against her. She couldn't yell at her subordinates; most of them were too in awe of her to defend themselves properly. Han was technically her subordinate but that status had never really seemed to penetrate past the upper levels of his consciousness, and he wasn't in awe of her at all. He defended himself with a refreshing lack of respect for her status as either former senator or former planetary royalty.

Han switched off the terminal and stretched, slowly, luxuriously. Uninhibitedly, as if he had completely forgotten her presence. He immediately proved that wrong by glancing over at her and saying, "You hungry?"

"No," Leia said. She realized that she had been staring. And that she was starving. "I mean, yes."

The truce was official.

\* \* \*

Leia still needed to change out of her Alliance fatigues into the clothes she hoped would pass for something a trading delegate would wear. The need for civilian clothing had caught her unprepared and she hadn't wanted to wear one of the two formal dresses which were the only good outfits to survive her recent adventures; they were too close to senatorial robes for comfort and the Empire had too many holos of her wearing them. An outfit had been thrown together at the last minute by several of the female pilots and intelligence operatives. The jacket, vest, and shirt were a little too big, but she could wear her own boots and Threepio, who had been programmed with the ability to sew at some time, had hurriedly altered the pants to fit. Leia just hoped she looked business-like, and not like a little girl wearing big sister's hand-me-downs.

Han was still deep in an intense study of schematics and technical manuals, occasionally making notes and muttering to himself. Leia hadn't realized that maintaining the *Falcon* took that much constant work. *But I should have*, she thought, surprised at herself. The *Falcon* was old, jury-rigged, and, since it had been with the Alliance, shot at constantly. *Leia, where's your brain?* She was aware she hadn't been working at her usual level; when she had expressed this thought to Rieekan, he had suggested it might be shock. That she was finally feeling the real effect of both the Imperial torture and Alderaan's destruction. That was a possibility, but she didn't have time for shock.

When she told Han she was going to take a shower and change, expecting some sort of annoying comment, all she got was a blank stare and then an apparently standard lecture on what to do if the sonics failed and the contortions necessary to force the plumbing to function if she wanted to use real water.

She managed to get through the experience without any trouble, though the *Falcon's* sanitary arrangements were as archaic as its tiny galley. If the *Falcon* was going to run more missions for the Alliance, then it would need to be resupplied. She began to make a mental list of rations, weapons, survival gear, and medical equipment that might come in handy should Han and Chewbacca have to pick up injured pilots or transport commando teams. It was pragmatic, she told herself. If the Alliance was going to ask Han to put his ship at risk, it should help him prepare for it as best it could. Never mind that it would make a wonderful peace offering, and hopefully in some small part make up for the fact that the Alliance's representative Leia Organa turned into a shrieking maniac every time she spoke to him for more than two minutes.

Leia would have to find out from Han what tools or spare components the ship might need to make emergency repairs easier; he would ask for twice as much

as what they could afford to give him, of course, and she would have to find a happy medium to keep the supply officers from complaining. Then just as she was stepping out of the shower cubby the door slid open. Leia swore and grabbed for a towel. Her emotions, on seeing that it was Chewbacca and not Han, were an irritatingly ambiguous mix of relief and disappointment. "Oh, Chewie, get out," she said, more annoyed at herself than him.

She tried to wrap the towel around her, but it wasn't nearly large enough and had a gaping hole. *Men*, she thought angrily, *are the same everywhere*. She had yet to find an installation set up by male humans where the living conditions were anywhere close to livable. She added new towels and bedding to her mental supply list. And Chewbacca was still standing there. "Chewie, get out," she repeated. No response. "CHEWIE!" she shouted.

The Wookiee started, finally managing to drag his eyes up to her face. "Get out!" Leia said again.

The Wookiee hooted something and made placating gestures, backing out. Cursing, Leia hit the release to shut the door again.

Later, dressed and with her hair re-braided, she walked through the lounge area. Han was still sitting at the tech station. As she passed, he said, "Oh, and the privacy lock on the hatch to the head is broken."

"Is it really?" she said frostily.

He leaned out of the chair and called after her. "Chewie says to tell you that you have a nice ass!"

"Thank him for me!"

\* \* \*

After taking a nap on the lumpy spare bunk, Leia felt almost prepared to face the Vitarin and whatever mess they had gotten themselves into. She went out to the lounge, seeing that Han had left the tech station and the game table had been lowered back into the deck in preparation for landing. She checked the chrono. *Yes, we're almost there.*

Chewbacca appeared in the entrance to the companionway, hooted a welcome at her, and motioned for her to follow him.

*Oh, my*, Leia thought. "What?" she asked warily.

The Wookiee motioned for her to come closer again, making coaxing noises. Leia sighed, and went over to him.

When she stepped into the companionway, Chewbacca ducked back to one of the cabins, but reappeared almost instantly carrying a bedraggled hat. He clapped it on his head and pointed at it with an interrogatory growl.

"It's lovely," Leia said politely, her diplomatic training taking over. The hat had at one time been white, and still possessed military braid and a black brim. Then she looked at the worn insignia more closely. "Wait a minute. Is that...? That can't be a Corporate Sector Authority Security Police admiral's hat? Where did you get--?"

Han came up behind the Wookiee and snatched the hat off, apparently angry. "I told you not to show that to people, damn it."

Chewbacca snarled and made a grab for the hat. Even Leia had understood that growl. The Wookiee had said, clearly, "Give that back."

Han stepped back nimbly, holding it out of reach. He said, "Make me."

Chewie made another grab for the hat and Han bolted out of the companionway. Chewie howled angrily and tore off after him.

Leia cautiously retreated, hearing muted thumps, howls of rage, and yells that seemed to come from all over the ship. She reached the lounge in time to see Chewie catch Han and sling him over one shoulder, swing him around a couple of times and then dump him onto the couch. The Wookiee snatched the hat from him, smacked him with it, then slammed it down on his own head and marched out of the lounge in an attitude of triumph. Han bounced off the couch and headed for the cockpit, apparently none the worse for wear.

Leia shook her head. That was about all the excitement she could take. Some crewmembers on the *Tantavie* who were nervous of Wookiees had complained that they couldn't tell when Han and Chewie were fighting and when they were just discussing something emphatically. Now she knew what they meant.

She hoped the rest of the trip was dull.

\* \* \*

The *Falcon* exited hyper without a hitch, sliding smoothly back into reality and an approach to Sairsa's Freehold. A sensor sweep brought back data from hundreds of ships, but all of them had commercial ID signals and none showed the kind of power signature that would have marked an Imperial cruiser. The only craft putting out anything close to a military sensor profile were the station's own picket ships, necessary to protect it from pirates and raiders. Han couldn't take his attention off his headset and the station's traffic control channel until he had clearance for a bay and found the beacon to guide him into it. By that time Freehold was visible in the port.

It was a giant torus, with thousands of hangars and docking ports in the outer ring and a collection of large bulbous dome structures clustered thickly in the hub.

Chewie muttered a comment, and Han told him irritably, "No, no Authority ships either. Will you control yourself?" Han preferred to reserve the right to be pessimistic to himself.

\* \* \*

Standing in the blast-scarred, dingy bay, Han had the leisure to think that maybe Leia was right, this would be easy. The station's Port Authority was run by a clan of Thetarans, big furry bipeds, only slightly smaller than Wookiees, with high pointed ears and prominent fangs. Since they were supposedly from a trading company here for the Vitarin's conference, the Thetaran Portmaster came to check their registry and sign them in herself. She was big and burly, and dressed only in a utility belt to hold up her blaster and comm gear. It was hard for her to remember that Han was the shipmaster and not Leia, and as they stood at the bottom of the *Falcon's* ramp, she kept automatically handing the landing ticket and the other port documents to the princess. Han knew it was because the Thetarans were a matriarchal culture, who believed in keeping their men at home and probably chained to the wall. But the Portmaster was an enlightened being from so much experience with other species and cultures and she kept apologizing for her lapses, which helped Han keep a philosophical perspective on the situation.

Then Chewie, who had been doing the inside post-flight, strolled down the ramp.

The Portmaster stopped adding fees up on her data tablet and looked dubiously at the big Wookiee. Han saw Chewie's double take, noticed his partner's

breathing get heavy, and thought, *oh my, love at first sight*. The Portmaster said, "There's a little problem. We have a rule. No male Wookiees on station. Some came in as contract labor on a Kivellan freighter and caused big trouble last year."

"He's female," Leia said, surprising the hell out of Han, who had been about to blurt out the same thing himself. She added, "That is, he's not a he, he's a she."

Han, Leia, and the Portmaster all looked at the Wookiee. It took what the princess had said a moment or two to sink in, since Chewie had obviously been making serious plans for his stay here involving Thetarans in general and probably the Portmaster in particular. Then he stared at Leia, his eyes wide with hurt incredulity. Leia actually looked guilty.

The Thetaran Portmaster considered a moment, then shrugged. She said, "That's all right, then. Now...." The Portmaster hit more buttons on her tablet, calling up another set of instructions.

Han took advantage of her distraction to elbow Chewie in the ribs, hoping the Portmaster hadn't noticed the "female" Wookiee was staring at her prominent mammary glands. Chewie made a low whuffling sort of sound, poignant with abused dignity and recrimination, and managed to direct his gaze off toward the bay doors. Han wasn't too surprised the Portmaster had bought the story. Chewbacca's size, weight, and muscular build would look female to Thetaran eyes. *None of that would've mattered*, Han thought, *if Wookiees didn't have retractable genitalia*.

"These things change every day.... Ishatar come in here, bring a bunch of males to push everyone around...." the Portmaster was saying.

"Ishatar?" Leia said, her expression politely curious. "Who are they?" Han would've bet anything she didn't need to ask, that she knew who they were just as well as he did. The Ishatar Conglomerate, a member of the Corporate Sector Authority. They were a security company, which meant they did everything from policing ports to providing muscle for the legalized slave trade.

"A damn human company -- no offense," she added, looking up from her tablet and remembering she was currently speaking to humans. "They come from Corporate Sector and buy a percentage of the port management contract. Try to cut us out." She shook her head. "Everything going to hell here."

"That's new," Han said, looking grimly at Leia. New and unexpected. She glared back at him.

The Portmaster nodded. "Shiny new. Just took effect three shifts ago." She tabbed through the datapad again. "I think that's-- Wait, I knew there was

something else. If this is your first time on station representing a corporate entity, I need to see copy of trade registry for damn Ishatar documents. So much easier when we do this the old way."

"I've got that on my datareader," Leia said, distracted. "Just a minute." As she hurried back up the ramp, Han wondered if she really did have it or she was somehow going to forge one in the next minute.

Chewie was staring at the Portmaster again, who was busy with her data tablet and com set. "Why don't you go check out that bad plate in the aft quadrant?" Han asked pointedly. The Wookiee glared and made a low growl, accusing Han of trying to cut him out with the Portmaster.

Han swore under his breath. Chewie hadn't forgotten he was supposed to be a female Wookiee, he was just ignoring it as an uncomfortable fact of life which he preferred not to deal with just now. Han said, "Just do it."

As his partner stamped off, Han relaxed a little. The bay doors were open and outside was a wide high-ceilinged corridor giving access to the other bays on this level and to the tubeways and slidewalks that led up the spokes into the hub. Despite being in fairly good shape, it was still pretty much like any other commercial space station: metallic recycled air, a scarred and scuffed deck, blinking advertisements scrolling by on the overhead displays. The foot traffic was mostly nonhumans of various types, many in breathing gear, and droids. Humans made up only a small percentage of Freehold's population, which might account for the usually ethnocentric Empire's lack of interest in the place. *It wouldn't stop the Authority*, Han thought. The Corporate Sector didn't care who it stole from.

Then out of the corner of his eye Han saw something black flash by the open bay doors. Han was moving almost before he realized that it hadn't been one of the passersby or droids who were going about their business in the access corridor, but a single figure in dark blast armor going for a sniper's position just inside the hatch. He drew his blaster, shouting a warning to Chewie, and flung himself sideways, snapping off a shot just as the edge of a stunblast caught him. Han hit the deck hard, his body heavy and limp, his skin tingling with the effect of the blast. He had kept his grip on his blaster and managed to roll, so he had a good view of the six men in dark uniforms and semi-armor with badges showing Ishatar Conglomerate insignia who were rushing in through the bay entrance. He took another shot but his aim was unsteady and it glanced harmlessly off the bay wall.

The one in front was almost on top of him. Then suddenly an energy bolt from a new direction splashed on the deck, leaving a black blast scar and making the Ishatar men freeze in their tracks. Chewbacca was covering them from the side of the bay with his bowcaster.

The Ishatar man who was nearest Han had lieutenant's tabs on his armor. His helmet was open so Han could see his contemptuous expression. He said, "Tell that thing to drop the weapon or I'll shoot."

"Go ahead and shoot," Han told him, struggling to his knees and managing to sound as if he didn't care whether he got his head blown off in the next five seconds or not. The other security men were spread out near the front of the bay. The Thetaran Portmaster had caught most of the stun blast and lay sprawled on the deckplates not far from Han. "That's a bowcaster and it's set to fire explosive canisters. It'll blow this bulkhead wide open." Chewie waggled his eyebrows and snarled with grim menace, hefting the bowcaster threateningly. Han hoped none of the security men knew enough about the unusual weapon to notice that the extra attachment that fired the canisters had been removed. His partner was doing a good imitation of a savage Wookiee who was crazy enough to carry a weapon that fired explosives onto a space station, so maybe it would slip their attention just long enough.

The lieutenant glanced at Chewbacca, his expression clearly showing his desire to shoot both of them and his frustration at not seeing a way to do it without getting fried himself. *Why the hell doesn't Leia use the belly gun?* Han thought desperately. He had set the interrupter-templates so it wouldn't accidentally blow up the ramp or the landing gear, so that couldn't be giving her trouble. Then Han caught movement under the ramp and swore under his breath. Leia was trapped under the ramp, that's why she hadn't used the belly gun. She must have been caught stepping out of the ship when the firefight started and had had to take cover there. But it did give him one more option.

"Tell him to surrender," the lieutenant was saying, turning back to Han, sneering. "Do you both want to die?"

"I don't know," Han said. "What's the alternative?" He tried to stand, got halfway to his feet, and collapsed again.

The move had brought him closer to the lieutenant who, like a good soldier, sidled to the left to keep the distance between them, putting his back to the ramp. He said, "You Corellians are all--"

Han didn't get to hear the rest of it. Leia whipped out from under the ramp, using the lieutenant's body as cover from the other men, wrapped an arm around his neck from behind and shoved her blaster in his ear. She said, "Now you drop it."

The lieutenant swore angrily and said, "No."

Han slumped wearily on the deck. Chewie moaned. Leia knew exactly how they felt. She said, through gritted teeth, "I'll blow your head off."

"Do it," the lieutenant said, apparently serious. "You'll start a firefight that will kill everyone in this bay."

"It's a thought," Leia said. *Dammit, this idiot is as crazy as...as we are.*

"It's no use," the lieutenant persisted. "You won't escape. I have a warrant to arrest you as smugglers. Do you know what we do with smugglers on Freehold, Corellian?"

Han knew what they did with smugglers everywhere else. He said, "Your warrant's bogus. Who's paying you to hassle honest traders?" The response was automatic; this was the dumbest stand-off he had ever seen, it couldn't go much further without somebody getting killed.

"On Freehold that doesn't matter," the lieutenant said. "This world isn't in Authority or Imperial jurisdiction, so I'm allowed to do whatever I want."

"You're not going to be around to do anything if you don't drop your blaster," Leia said grimly. Her hand was sweating on the grip of her weapon and she couldn't see any way out of this.

"How much do you think I'll get for a Corellian on the open market? It's all perfectly legal on Freehold, of course. The independent groups sell most of their criminals to Kessel."

Chewie snarled and Leia met Han's eyes over the lieutenant's shoulder. What she saw there matched her own opinion. *Yes, we're going to have to do this the hard way*, she thought. She would have to kill the lieutenant and try to get inside the ship, and just hope Han and Chewie survived long enough for her to reach the guns. But just then the Thetaran Portmaster staggered to her feet, shaking her head.

Leia shifted her grip on the blaster uncertainly. Shooting the neutral Portmaster hadn't been part of her hastily made plan.

The Thetaran looked around, taking in the situation, and shook her head wearily. Then she walked up to Leia's hostage and said, "Vagran-lieutenant." Her voice had the dry tone of someone confronting an old nemesis. "You are in violation of Thetaran-Ishataran agreements."

Vagran stared up at her angrily, not happy to be challenged by the Portmaster. "What do you mean?" he said. "That Corellian's a smuggler, wanted on Mystarta."

"You've got the wrong ship," Han said, sticking to the only story he had. "I've never been to Mystarta. I'm on permanent charter to the Ascalon Trading Company."

*And we've got the forged papers to prove it, Leia thought. Dammit, what is this?*

The Thetaran stared down at the lieutenant, her clawed fingers clicking as she tapped them on her leather belt. She glanced over her shoulder and said, "I think it time for everybody to stop holding everybody else hostage, heh?"

Leia looked at the bay doors. There were a lot of Thetarans coming in, all as large and strongly built as the Portmaster, and all armed, though none had their blasters drawn. They casually surrounded the badly outnumbered security police, who looked distinctly nervous. The Portmaster turned back to Leia, eyed her thoughtfully a moment, then stepped forward and jerked Vagran's blast-rifle out of his grip. He swore and she said, "You I don't trust." Her gaze returned to Leia. "That better?"

Leia pressed her lips together, deliberately ignoring Han, who was glaring at her. She couldn't hold Vagran hostage forever. She was standing on her tiptoes and her arms were getting ready to give out. And it had to be the most ridiculous stand-off she had ever seen. She released him, stepping back quickly out of reach as he jerked away from her.

The Portmaster interposed her bulk between them and said, "I already okayed this ship, Vagran-lieutenant. What rights you got?"

"I have a warrant." The lieutenant was going red in the face. He might be from a Corporate Sector Authority conglomerate, but he had an Imperial inner world accent, and Leia thought she could see some of that look of inner world overbreeding in the man's narrow features. But if the Ishatarans had gotten their orders from the Empire, they wouldn't have bothered with a warrant. *Wherever he's from, he can't push the Thetarans too far*, Leia thought. And the lieutenant hadn't given any sign he knew the name of the ship, or even the name it was currently registered under, and hadn't asked to see their ID papers. Leia was willing to bet the warrant was just so much paper.

Apparently the Portmaster's thoughts were running along similar lines. She said, "Let's see this warrant."

Vagran's lip curled. "You wouldn't understand it." *Yes, he's an inner worlder all right*, Leia thought.

The Portmaster leaned over him deliberately. "I understand plenty more than you think. Now let's see warrant."

The lieutenant took another step back from her and reluctantly withdrew a folded piece of hardcopy from under his armored chest protector. The Thetaran turned back to Leia and said softly, "I ask you, don't make trouble here, and I will help you settle this. I swear it. It impinges on my clan honor that I have given you safe conduct on this station and they threaten your people."

Leia didn't have a chance to reply. Vagran waved the hardcopy and the Portmaster snatched it out of his grasp. The lieutenant cursed, thought about trying to get it back, but after eyeing the two-meter tall Thetaran, decided against it. "You see I have every right to arrest these people--"

But the Thetaran was holding up one furry hand. "Wait." She had quickly scanned the document. "This says male Wookiee." She smiled at the officer, revealing a full set of fangs. "That's a female Wookiee." She rubbed suspiciously at the print and studied her finger carefully.

Leia bit her lip to keep from smiling. The Portmaster was checking to see how recently the warrant had been printed.

The test must have been inconclusive, because she only crumbled the warrant and threw it at Vagran. "And your paper says nothing about any female, and nothing about searching ships. The name of the ship and the registry is blank! What proof I have that your warrant is for these people and this ship? We got rules in this port, buddy. This is not the damn Corporate Sector."

"Nevertheless, I am empowered to make arrests on suspicion of illegal activity. I'm arresting this Corellian on suspicion of smuggling."

The Portmaster cocked an eyebrow at him. "Just him?"

Vagran hesitated, trying to read her expression and failing. Finally he said, "Yes, just him."

She frowned. "You have no suspicions of anyone else here?"

Leia held her breath. Vagran smiled, and took the last step into the trap. "No, no one else."

The Thetaran gestured to Leia to come forward. Leia advanced warily.

The Portmaster glanced down at her. "This Corellian male is yours, right?"

*Uh-oh*, Leia thought. She felt sure the Portmaster was trying to help them, and she didn't want to wreck this by giving the wrong answer. "I'm not sure I understand the question."

"He's your...Your..." The Portmaster gestured impatiently. "What is the word in standard? You're bonded, true?"

"Yes, that's true," Leia agreed, relieved. Compared to passing Chewie off as a woman, this was easy. She had a qualm when she saw Han roll his eyes to the ceiling and shake his head.

"In that case, by Thetaran clan law, which we hold this port ring under, you can't charge him," the Portmaster explained patiently to the lieutenant. "She is the head of household and the trade delegation, for that matter. You can't charge him unless you charge her, and you said you have no suspicions of her."

"Wait," the lieutenant said. He stared at Leia. "She's the head of the trade delegation...."

*That's it, Leia thought. He assumed Han was the Ascalon delegate. He's trying to keep us away from the trade conference.* She didn't know whether to be relieved or annoyed. "Yes," she said, "I'm the delegate."

Vagran looked her over speculatively, and Leia lifted a brow. The Portmaster said, "Is too late to change mind."

But Vagran said, "The lady is an Alderanni, isn't she?"

The Portmaster looked down at Leia, confused, obviously having no idea why it mattered what kind of human she was. Leia wasn't sure she did, either. She said, warily, "Yes, I am."

"Then where are your wedding bands?"

*I should have shot you and then had this conversation,* Leia thought, grimly. She folded her arms. "I'm having them cleaned," she said dryly.

"Then I submit that the marriage isn't legal," Vagran said.

*Now I'm being accused of cohabiting with a Corellian smuggler,* Leia thought. *I'd be terribly insulted if Han's life didn't depend on proving it was true.* She said, "You can't prove that. Just because I'm from Alderaan and I'm not wearing Alderaanian wedding bands doesn't mean--"

The lieutenant interrupted, "But proof of bonding is required in Thetaran society, isn't it, Portmaster?"

The Portmaster hesitated. Leia kept her expression calm and neutral while inwardly cursing. If Thetaran culture had a strict emphasis on personal honor, the chances were they also had a strict emphasis on symbols of honor. If she wasn't

wearing something that symbolized a marriage, it might not be technically legal to them. *Damn the man for knowing about wedding bands, anyway.* Leia had had a set that had belonged to her mother, made of sky blue spidersilk, but they had been destroyed with the rest of her world. Finally the Portmaster said, "Maybe we don't need to prove it. Maybe you just get married again."

*This is getting a little complicated,* Leia thought worriedly, but she said, "That's perfectly fine with me."

"They're humans, you can't marry them," The officer objected angrily. *He's obviously trying to keep us from getting to the Vitarin,* Leia thought. *Now he's angry, and his pride is on the line.*

There was an indignant mutter from the bay doors. A large number of bystanders had gathered to watch, most nonhuman, including some Ith'ick'thon, curious and hissing at each other in their own sibilant language. This had gone from a private disposal of unwanted individuals to an almost public event. The Portmaster's ears went back and she leaned over Vagran. "I'm head of a clan, buster, I can marry anybody I want."

Chewie made a muffled noise, staring at the Portmaster with admiration.

Vagran looked Leia over, deliberately, and sneered, "I'm restricted to Corporate Sector Authority law. It doesn't recognize the Thetaran concept of marriage, which includes the right to sell your husband's favors to other women and other barbaric customs. I refuse to release him on those grounds."

*Wait,* Leia thought, *wait.* The Thetarans muttered to each other angrily, and by the Ith'ick'thon's gestures even they seemed to feel the customs officer was out of line. How this man could represent a political body that used indenture and slavery but argue Thetaran native marriage customs were barbaric boggled the mind. Leia knew logic wouldn't work. Her best bet was to appeal to the Thetarans' pride. She said, "Well, if you're set on making Thetaran customs illegal in the port ring...."

There was a chorus of growls from the Thetarans, and uneasy murmurs from the other spectators.

"This is not the Corporate Sector Authority," the Portmaster said. She was so angry her fur was beginning to puff out. "We have agreements. Thetaran law is law in this station, just as much as any other enclave. Ishatar signed the charter and agree to this." She regarded the lieutenant narrowly, and added, "I'm getting a little tired of you. Let's not start anything we can't finish, hey?"

Vagran stared up at her, his throat working. Finally he gestured angrily and his men backed away. "I want to witness the ceremony, and I want the Corellian held at the Port Authority until it's performed."

The Portmaster nodded. "Easily done."

Watching Leia narrowly, Vagran said, "I'll report to my superiors about this. I intend to make sure this farce is taken to its conclusion, and if I find you're not abiding by the bond, I'll arrest both of you." He was fuming. He hadn't thought she would go through with it. He didn't believe she and Han were anything but employer and employee, and hadn't expected her to go this far to free him.

As Vagran and his men withdrew, the Portmaster took Leia's arm and drew her aside a little, and said, "I told you it would be all right. But I worry about them, even after we make it legal. You keep an eye on him while you're on-station, understand? Besides," the Portmaster nudged her with an elbow, grinning, "He's a cute male for a human. I can see why you don't want to lose him."

Leia let out her breath in relief as the Portmaster moved away to talk to someone on her portable commset. Han was staggering to his feet, and Leia couldn't avoid a confrontation any longer.

Han limped over to her and leaned against the ramp support. Chewie joined them, his bowcaster slung back over his shoulder, and ruffled his partner's hair sympathetically. The Wookiee jerked his head at Leia and grumbled a comment which made Han snort with amusement. Leia was glad she hadn't understood it; she had enough to worry about right now. Han looked at her finally and said, mock ingenuously, "Gosh, Leia, it's really going well so far, isn't it?"

"You know I had no choice," she snapped, to cover her suddenly intense embarrassment. "Someone is trying to sabotage my meeting with the Vitarin."

Han leaned his head back against the stanchion. From his expression, she suspected it was to keep from gesturing violently. He said, "Of course, you had to explain that to me because I have the brains of a mollusk--"

"All right, all right." Leia rubbed her forehead, trying for calm. An argument wouldn't help anything. She felt that events had slipped out of her control at some point, though she wasn't sure exactly where. She couldn't believe they had been forced into this, and it had happened so quickly. Trying to lighten the atmosphere, she said, tentatively, "The Portmaster thinks you're cute."

"Great. Maybe you could rent me to her."

Leia glared at him. "It was the only way out of this--"

"You could have said I was your brother. Half-brother. It would have been all the same to the Thetarians and you could've told Vagran your father had an affair with the pilot of his private courier ship, or whatever the hell if he cares so damn much. He couldn't prove it wasn't true without a genetic test and the Portmaster probably wouldn't have put up with that."

Leia stopped. She closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, hoping without hope to quell the incipient headache. Damn. She knew why this had happened. Degoran had set her up for it by planting the idea in her head that anyone who saw her with Han would assume that they were sleeping together. Unintentionally, but he had still set her up for it. "You're right, I'm sorry. But I didn't exactly have a lot of time to think about it." She let out her breath. "There's no help for it now. I'm glad the Portmaster was serious about giving us safe conduct though I don't know when she did it...."

"When I signed the docking ticket." Han said, not looking at her. "To the Authority assholes it's just a piece of paper, but to her, it's her honor. Wookiees are like that with paperwork, too." He swore. "This was supposed to be a cakewalk, your worship."

"I know that," she snapped. "And you'll have to come to the conference with me, because we can't trust Vagran to obey the agreement. As soon as the Portmaster turned her back, he'd go after you again."

"What, no honeymoon?"

The Portmaster was coming over to her again. "Vagran thinks there won't be time to get bonding license, but my sister's daughter works as assistant in station Recorder's Office and she can push one through comps quick before the office close." She rubbed her hands together and chuckled delightedly. "I can't wait to see Vagran's face."

"I can't wait to see my face," Han muttered. Chewie growled agreement.

"I don't know how I can thank you enough for your help," Leia told her, while her mind was reeling. She didn't know anything about how the Empire viewed Thetaran marriage, but a bonding license sounded very...legal. Still, she knew the Portmaster had done her best for them. Offering credits was rude in cultures that valued honor so highly and she wasn't wearing any jewelry and didn't have anything on her that would make an appropriate gift. She had a wrist chrono, but the Portmaster was already wearing one and it looked better than Leia's old, battered model. "If you could tell me how your people would express that--"

The Portmaster was half turning away, and so didn't see Han kick Leia in the ankle. Leia hopped out of reach, to lean against the ramp's stanchion and rub the injured area. She glared at Han, but he didn't look the least bit guilty. She

supposed she didn't blame him. It had occurred to her at just about the same moment what kind of "gift" a Thetaran might ask for in a society where you could sell your husband's favors to other women. She finished hurriedly, "Or whatever."

Fortunately the Portmaster gestured the thanks away. "Just make a good deal with the Vitarin and cut one of those damn Authority companies off our station." She looked down at Han. "One more damn thing. Vagran wants you to come to Port Authority office under arrest until wedding, so you don't skip out. Funny, huh?"

"Yeah, it's fucking hilarious," Han said.

"Wait," Leia said quickly, before Han could express his opinion further. "Can I have your word that nothing will happen to him?"

"He'll be fine," the Portmaster promised. "I make sure nothing happen. I swear it."

"Thank you." As the Portmaster went back to the other Thetarans, Leia turned back to Han, who was still giving her that look that should have struck her dead on the spot. "Will you go?" she asked.

He let out his breath and looked away. "All right, all right."

Chewie made an arch remark, and this time Leia understood it. The timing made her wonder if Chewbacca intentionally made his speech easier to understand when he wanted her to catch it. The Wookiee had said, "Taking orders from the wife already?"

Han looked up at him and said with acid sweetness, "Jealous, honey?"

Chewie squawked in outrage and looked around hastily, to see if any of the Thetarans had overheard.

"That's settled," Leia said briskly, trying to regain some sort of control over the situation. "I'll be there as soon as--"

"Leia." Han stared at the ceiling, apparently begging some deity for the patience not to kill her. Then he took her arm and dragged her a few steps away. Lowering his voice, he said, "Once the Thetarans are gone, you have to tell Chewie to remember that he's a girl, and not to show his goodies to any of the pretty furry ladies."

Leia stared. "Excuse me?"

Han glanced at Chewie, who was standing with his fists planted on his hips and glaring suspiciously at them. "I guarantee you that if you don't tell him, it's the first

thing he'll do as soon as you're out of sight. It's been a long time since we were in a port crawling with two meter-plus women with fur. His technique, as far as I can tell, is something like 'Hi, my name is Chewbacca, want to fuck?' So you just better tell him to leave them alone."

Leia sighed. *I can't believe this is happening to me.* "All right. Is there anything from the ship you want me to bring you?"

"There's some proton explosive in the weapons locker."

Han went with the Thetarans, not happily.

Chewbacca stood next to Leia and whined worriedly. Again, she was glad Chewbacca's understanding of standard was far better than her understanding of his language. She said, "I'm sure everything will be fine." The Wookiee was looking down at her, puzzled, his brows drawn together in concern. She found herself adding, "And it's not my fault. Really, it isn't."

She must have looked upset, because Chewbacca patted her on the head and grunted reassuringly.

She went up the ramp into the ship and found the carryall bag she had packed earlier for herself, and went in to Han's cabin to get his things. The cabin was cramped like the rest of the *Falcon*, especially since Han was using most of the available space to store pressurized supply barrels. The bunk was unmade and the retaining web had to be untangled from the locker before she could open it. Since he had refused to tell her what he needed, she would just have to look around and figure it out for herself. She sat down on the bunk, holding one of his shirts, and rested her head in her hands.

Maybe the memory of Alderaan's destruction, the ball of fire she saw every time she closed her eyes, was enough for her to live with. It was affecting her work, her behavior. *I can't believe I mishandled this so badly.*

The other survivors of Alderaan made it worse. She had to be strong for them, listen to their anguish and fear, but some of them demanded to know why she was risking herself on the *Tantavie*, instead of hiding somewhere on one of the allied worlds. She was the last member of the World Family; she should be protected. For what purpose? she wanted to ask. The World Family had existed for Alderaan. Now that Alderaan was dead, there was no purpose in it anymore. She was better off helping to make sure that Alderaan hadn't been sacrificed in vain, instead of saving herself for some hypothetical future purpose.

And now she had to go and tell Chewbacca he had to sit in the ship and be bored, and not go out looking for nice Thetarans to have relations with.

She repacked her bag and left the cabin, and found Chewie in the lounge. He was using the metal over the hatchway as a mirror, and grooming the hair on his arms with a carved wooden comb.

*Han*, she thought, *was absolutely right*. She said, sternly, "Chewie."

He cocked one eye in her direction, warily.

"Han said that you have to remember that you're supposed to be female--"

Chewie threw back his head and howled. Leia was glad she knew the Wookiee was given to exaggeration. She shouted, "Chewie!"

He wasn't listening to her. She knew, when Han was in this situation, he usually just grabbed a double handful of beard and yanked Chewie's head down to eye level, and yelled back. She decided to forego the beard-grabbing part. She walked up to him and in her loudest command voice, shouted, "CHEWBACCA, SHUT UP! I'VE HAD ENOUGH TROUBLE AND I DON'T NEED ANY FROM YOU!"

Chewie flinched and looked down at her, warily drawing back against the bulkhead. His howling died down to a whimper. *Let's see*, she thought. *Han makes him look him in the eye, so direct eye contact is probably another dominance gesture in Wookiee culture*. She grabbed a stanchion and stood up on the acceleration couch, so she could look Chewie in the eye. It was effective; he cringed. Firmly, she said, "Han said you were to stay here in the ship, and if anyone asks, you tell them you're female. You are especially not to make any passes at any female Thetarans, or you're going to get us in a lot of trouble that we won't be able to get out of. Do you understand me?"

Chewie breathed hard for a moment, then relaxed and hooted at her in a more normal tone. She thought he was saying something like: all right, fine, but Han had better make sure he got some...something soon or there was going to be mutiny.

"Well, you're going to have to discuss that with Han when we get back." Leia climbed down off the couch and picked up her bag. "Wish me luck."

Chewie patted her on the head again and followed her to the hatch, grumbling anxiously. "Yes, we'll be careful," Leia said. "Yes, I'll tell Han. You just do what he said."

Chewie swore solemnly on the Forest Spirit that he would remain celibate, and Leia started back toward the Port Authority.

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