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Secrets

by [Martha Wilson](#)

Leia Organa tapped her fingers on the surface of the conference table impatiently. Colonel Camron was taking his own sweet time delivering his intelligence report -- the man seemed to be intentionally drawing it out.

Looking up, she accidently caught General Madine's eye. He was watching Camron with an expression of faint disgust. Camron was General Degoran's appointment, and Madine, firmly in the Alderaan camp with Rieekan and Mothma and the others, had never thought much of the Colonel. Madine saw her watching him and immediately schooled his features back to blandness.

Madine was an interesting case himself, Leia reflected. He was a bit of a martinet, and hated the stereotype that said all Corellians were pirates or criminals or constitutionally incapable of following orders. Han Solo said that Madine acted like he had a coolant rod up his ass. She didn't know what Madine said about Han in private, but she didn't imagine it was any more complimentary. The two certainly couldn't get along in public. And her mind was wandering terribly.

She focused back on Colonel Camron, just as the door to the conference room slid open and Mon Mothma strode in, saying, "I apologize for my lateness. The meeting with Ackarians went longer than I expected."

Leia stared at her, surprised. "I didn't know you were attending this meeting, Mothma. We're only going over the sector intelligence reports."

"Yes," Madine agreed. "Are you sure you're supposed to be here?"

Mothma stopped, frowning, flustered for a moment. "Aren't I? I'm sure this was on my schedule." She hunted for her comlink, distracted. "Let me call my protocol droid..."

"That won't be necessary, Mon Mothma," Camron said suddenly, setting his report aside. "I requested your presence here."

"Ah." Mothma took a seat at the table. "Shall we go on, then?"

Leia raised an eyebrow at Madine, who shook his head slightly and shrugged his bafflement. Leia asked, "Why exactly did you need Mothma here, Camron?"
And why exactly did you not bother to mention it to either of us...

"The matter I wished to bring up is a very sensitive one, princess. I wanted Mon Mothma's input."

"I see." Leia's voice was dry. If this is a political maneuver, I'm going to be very annoyed. There hadn't been an Imperial advance for over a month, and if Camron was using this probably brief respite from battle for political games... Field promotions were still fast and furious in the Alliance, even after the Imperial defeat at Endor, but Camron had been passed over at least twice in favor of operatives General Rieekan had recommended. He had also been one of the officers who had not been particularly happy that Rieekan had given Han Solo a commission with a general's rank. Of course, Han hadn't been particularly happy with the commission either. He seemed to think that it was intended as some kind of a punishment for being captured on Bespin.

Camron was taking out a slim case with a code lock, used for transporting hardcopies of sensitive information. "You recall the capture of the Imperial Data Center on Gyndine?"

"Vaguely," Madine said, his voice acerbic.

Mothma frowned at him and he folded his hands and straightened his back self-consciously.

Camron snapped open the case and took out a holodisk. "In our search of the captured data, this turned up." He slipped it into the reader in the center of the table, and the wall screen came to life with an image of the Imperial seal.

Leia met Camron's eyes. His expression was a mix of trepidation and anticipation. _He really thinks this is going to affect me, whatever it is._ She turned expectantly toward the screen, not betraying any anxiety.

Camron tapped the console and the screen switched to a display of a service report from the Imperial Academy, and a medical identification record with fingerprints, retina scan, and holoportrait. The portrait was clearly of Han Solo.

He was young, perhaps no older than Luke had been when he had destroyed the first Death Star. He looked a little mussed, and defiant, as if he had just come out of a fight. _He must have won it, anyway,_ Leia thought fondly. He was smiling faintly and there was a triumphant glint in his eyes.

Madine cleared his throat.

Leia sat up a little straighter, realizing her expression must have become more than a bit preoccupied.

"Did you know about this, princess?" Camron said. He looked indecently expectant. "That Solo had been to the Academy, had been commissioned a lieutenant in the Imperial Fifth Navy?"

"Oh, yes." Leia met Camron's eyes calmly, her face open and candid. She hadn't known anything about it, of course. But she had always suspected something of the sort. It didn't surprise her.

"You knew?" Camron was nonplussed.

"Of course." Leia shrugged. That Camron, probably with General Degoran's full cooperation and approval, had meant to use this to drive a wedge between her and Han, was infuriating. It was a petty way to inconvenience General Rieekan by sowing dissension among his friends and staff members. It was all Leia could do to keep the anger out of her expression.

Mothma steepled her fingers. "I'm puzzled. Why didn't this information come to light before?"

"There's not much here," Madine said. He had transferred the data from the central screen to the terminal at his place on the table. "Little more than a medical record and the bare statement of facts. He was court-martialled." He snorted. "I could've guessed that."

"What was he court-martialled for?" Mothma asked.

Leia found herself holding her breath. She could guess how Han would feel about this. Under the bluff exterior, he was the most intensely private person she knew.

Madine said, "For insubordination, of course. He was court-martialled on board ship, by executive order of an Admiral I've never heard of... Ah, the ship was

destroyed shortly afterward and all hands presumed dead. The records were put under security seal. The Empire was still consolidating its position at that time, and there were policies against letting that sort of thing get out. Solo was presumed dead with the crew, and with a security seal on these records, they wouldn't have been accessed in any ID search the Empire did on him."

"I see." Mothma looked at Camron. "I'm not sure why this is a concern then. The Alliance wasn't even organized at the time this occurred. Bail and I were still in the Imperial Senate. Leia was a child."

"We've never known much about General Solo's past--" Camron began.

Mothma wasn't having any. "There are a number of individuals in the Alliance who have events in their past they would like to forget. They sometimes even change their identities. General Solo has even been using his own name," she pointed out. Leia could've kissed her. Mothma wasn't an emotional person and didn't make efforts to get to know her officers as Rieekan did. But she believed in paying debts, and Leia was relieved to see that Mothma meant the Alliance to pay its debt to Han.

Camron wouldn't back down. His voice took on a slightly malicious edge. "That's true, but General Solo's position here is somewhat unique."

Madine made a muffled choking sound he managed to turn into a cough. Leia folded her lips and refused to look at him, knowing her own composure was tenuous at best. Of course, laughing in Camron's face might be the best response.

Fortunately the innuendo went right over Mothma's head. She said, "But Leia has been aware of the facts--"

"I'm merely exercising caution," Camron argued. "It's this kind of information that could allow us to identify a possible Imperial operative--"

"Oh, please," Leia interrupted. He had gone too far, and now she had him. She had let Madine do the initial fighting for her, but it was time to finish Camron. "Are you really suggesting that the Empire would fake a court-martial and the destruction of a cruiser to establish a deep cover operative before the Alliance was anything but a gleam in my father's eye? On the off chance that some thirteen years later that operative would happen to be hanging around a bar in Mos Eisley, and be approached by General Obiwan Kenobi, a Jedi Knight?" She shook her head. "Han's whole involvement with the Rebellion is purely by accident. That was one of the reasons he was trusted so quickly. Not to mention the hundreds, perhaps thousands of opportunities he has had to cause us incredible damage."

"Do you see any problem, Madine?" Mothma asked.

Camron looked hopeful. Everyone knew Madine and Han did not get along, to put it mildly. Madine shook his head. "Hardly." It showed Camron didn't know Madine any better than he knew Han Solo. The two Corellians would fight out their own disagreements without outside interference.

"Then if that's all, I have another meeting to get to." Mothma was standing up.

Leia snagged the holodisk out of the reader, before Camron could reach for it. "Do you mind if I keep this?" she said, already tucking it into her dispatch case.

Camron gave in to the *fait accompli* with a reasonable amount of grace. "Of course not, princess."

"How do I look?" Leia demanded.

The dress was high-collared and long-sleeved, but made up for it with a flared skirt and a tight-fitting bodice. It was a deep wine color, which Leia thought flattered her terribly, if she did say so herself.

"It looked better before," Han said. He was stretched out on her bunk, propped up on one elbow, in a state of *dishabille* Leia found wonderfully distracting.

"You mean on the floor? Maybe so, but I don't have time to get dressed again." Leia regarded herself in the inadequate mirror. The temporary respite from battle with the Empire had stretched from one month to three. Leia knew it couldn't last; there were still far too many organized pockets of Imperial resistance and just because they weren't throwing everything they had at the Alliance now didn't mean the war was over. She also didn't much like wasting the precious time on diplomatic receptions, but it did give the impression that the Alliance was confident and secure. Shaking her head, she went to the shelf unit near the bed to paw through her limited selection of jewelry.

Han captured her hand and kissed the palm. "It's beautiful. You're beautiful."

Smiling, Leia snatched her hand back. "Stop that. We're going to be late. This event is a mess, anyway. Why anyone thinks a diplomatic reception for the Evaryons is going to be some sort of payback for what they did for us..." She straightened, trying to get her earrings in. The tiny cabin, a luxury on the crowded Freedom Wing, was in disorder, her datadisks and papers heaped on every flat surface. The drawers in the inadequate storage unit were overflowing. Perhaps it was lucky she had so few personal possessions; there was nowhere to put them.

"I need an office," she muttered. Perhaps she could pull rank and conscript some extra space. "Maybe I should let Threepio clean this place up."

Han rolled onto his back and stretched, as if there was all the time in the world. "Then you'd never find anything."

Leia tried to look stern. He was trying to lure her into tickling him. Then her clothes would end up on the floor again and they would be late. "Would you finish getting dressed? The sooner we get started, the earlier I can arrange to slip out."

Han considered that. Since Endor, they had tried to spend as much time together as possible. Part of the clutter in the bottom of Leia's tiny closet was Han's, like Leia's things had invaded his cabin on the Millennium Falcon. They switched back and forth between her quarters in the officer's section of Freedom Wing and the Falcon, now residing in the rebel ship's bay, depending on who was busiest with what, and how late. Leia hadn't thought of keeping their relationship secret; she had expected to hear gossip about it, and was somewhat chagrined to discover that most of the Alliance's lower echelons thought it had been going on since Yavin.

"All right." Reluctantly, Han sat up on his elbows. "But...one kiss."

"One kiss?" Leia was skeptical.

"One kiss."

It couldn't matter if they were a little late to the reception, after all.

The reception was well underway by the time Han and Leia arrived. They managed to stay together for a time, until Mothma took Leia away to meet the Evaryon envoy, and Han was caught up in a conversation with Rieekan, Antilles, and some of the other pilots. The group broke up as Rieekan was hauled away to do his part for diplomacy, and Han ended up stationing himself near the wall where he could have a quick escape route, if he saw someone he would rather not run into. The assembly chamber was slowly filling with rebels in civilian clothes and all variety of dress uniforms, or what passed for dress uniforms among the occasionally ragtag crews. The Evaryons were born with their party clothes, or at least that's how it appeared to human eyes.

They were tall bipeds covered with short downy plumage that shifted color apparently at random. Well, not entirely at random, Han decided. There was one group that seemed to stick to gold-amber-red, and another that did primarily blue, violet, and several shades of green. Their voices were unfortunately high and squeaky, though the visual effect of their presence made up for it. They were

physically delicate, so much so that the gravity in the room had been lightened for their comfort. Their world had been helpless against the Empire; that they had sent even supply transports to the Alliance had been a courageous act. Like Leia, Han wasn't sure how one diplomatic event on the Freedom Wing was supposed to thank them for it.

He scanned the crowd, looking for somebody to talk to. Luke wasn't here, though he was due back sometime tonight by the ship's clock. Chewie was down in the Falcon, supposedly checking the refit of the drive controls, but probably lying around watching holotapes. Han leaned back against the wall and folded his arms, resigned to boredom. He could've probably gotten out of attending, too, even without the excuse of being an irascible and uncivilized Wookiee. But that hadn't seemed quite fair to Leia.

General Madine stepped in through the nearby door, and spotted Han. The other Corellian had been away from the Fleet for the past few weeks, and Han hadn't realized he was back. Han had never been able to tolerate the Corellian general, and he was more than certain the feeling was mutual. Whether it had to do with Madine's insistence on military order or Han's easygoing attitude, or just the fact that they were both arrogant Corellian men with high opinions of themselves, Han couldn't tell. Madine strolled up to Han, and they eyed one another warily. After a moment, the General said, "Clever of you to keep it a secret."

Han snorted derisively and looked away. He had no idea what Madine was talking about, but had no intention of admitting it.

"I can't say it surprised me," Madine continued.

Han fixed him with a look of narrow-eyed contempt. He still hadn't a clue. He wasn't sure he cared, either, but it was better than boredom. As a stab in the dark, he said, "I didn't think you were that observant."

Madine sneered back. "I knew you had some training, and I didn't suppose you learned it in the Commenor outsystem or some downport hole."

"What?" Han frowned, startled into asking a direct question.

Madine lifted a skeptical eyebrow, as if trying to decide whether the question was pretense or not.

Han had no chance to find out anything more. Leia came up to them, bullying her way through the growing crowd, trailed by a couple of anxious diplomatic aides, and Madine faded away. Leia said, "Han, I left the plaque in my quarters."

"What plaque?"

"For the Evaryon envoy. Can you go and find it?"

"Sure. Where is it?"

"Thank you." She stood on tiptoe to kiss him lightly. "I haven't any idea."

Han reached Leia's cabin and spent a few fruitless minutes searching the drawers, muttering to himself and trying not to disturb the contents too much. A carved wooden box looked like a promising location for a plaque, but opening it he saw it contained only a holodisk. Han would have put it aside and gone on with the search, but the label caught his eye. It read "Imperial Academy Personnel Record."

He found himself hesitating, his mind gone curiously blank. Why was it here, and not with the datadisks stacked in plastic holders near the terminal on the built-in desk. _It can't be,_ he told himself. -You're paranoid. Just put it down and go on._ But he took it out, holding it thoughtfully.

It wasn't an Imperial military issue disk, but one of the civilian commercial brands the Alliance used; if the data on it was from the Imperial Academy, as the label said, then it had been copied from a central system. He thought, _not after all this time. It's impossible. And it's snooping in her stuff._

Then... _Can you take that chance? Just one quick look. If it's not what you think it is, take it out and forget about it._

Han leaned over and slid the disk into the viewer in the console.

It took him a full minute to recognize himself, as the image leapt to life on the small screen. He kept trying to see it as someone else's face.

Han sat down on the floor with a thump, cold with shock. It had been months since he had had even a mild attack of hibernation sickness. Maybe that's what this was.

Maybe not. Han rubbed his face, trying to get his mind started again. When had she found this? Maybe it had been today. He made himself move, sitting up and checking the log information on the holodisk. It had been read by the Freedom Wing's comps several times, and by a terminal using Leia's private access code... Han mouth went dry. Over two months ago. She hadn't just stumbled onto it today, and been waiting for the right time to tell him about it. She had had the thing for two months.

It explained why the holodisk hadn't been kept with the others. This holodisk was in the box, of course, because Han occasionally used Leia's desk himself. If it had been on the console, he might have stumbled onto it before now.

Keep moving, he thought. That was always the first rule. _They're expecting you back any minute with that damn plaque. Just keep moving and act like nothing's wrong._ Time for shock and denial later.

He took the disk out of the viewer and replaced it, burying the box back under the other debris in the drawer. He still had to find the damn plaque. He hoped that was all he found; he didn't think he could stand any more surprises.

He found the plaque finally in almost the last place he looked. It was in Leia's jewelry case, neatly placed atop the diamond and chrysopaz earrings he had bought for her on Commenor.

On the way back to the Assembly chamber he saw the busy corridors of the rebel ship with different eyes. This was the first time since he had arrived at the base on Yavin's Moon that he had been this jumpy in a rebel-controlled place. Uncomfortable, yes. Annoyed, yes. But paranoid, with the fear of a quarry in some unseen hunt, never.

The Assembly area was too noisy, too crowded, and too warm, despite the air system's best efforts. Han spotted Leia easily -- the wine-colored dress stood out even among the brilliant plumage of the Evaryons. He collared one of her aides -- literally, the man gasped for air before Han released him, and said, "Take this to the princess."

The aide hurried off, and Han lost himself in the crowd again. ** *

"You're supposed to be checking the engine refit," Han snapped.

Chewbacca started awake, snorting. The Wookiee had been slumped in the oversized copilot's seat in the Falcon's cockpit, sound asleep. He looked up at his partner, read the distinctive body language, and decided to go for sympathy instead of shouting back. Chewie snuffled and mumbled that it was unfair, him having to work while certain other people went to parties.

It didn't go over well. "Don't give me that. I asked you if you wanted to go to the party and you said you'd rather chew your own arm off." Han leaned on the console to bring up the internal status monitor. "Are we charged up? Could we lift if we had to?"

The Wookiee grunted, surprised. Sure they could lift. Were they going somewhere?

"Yes. No. I don't know." Han slapped the shutdown switch on the monitor and stormed back down the companionway. He did a quick turn around the ship, doing a preflight check, then ended up in the lounge area, pacing restlessly.

He could see how the Alliance might come across his Academy records, completely by accident. Different parts of the Alliance forces were taking over abandoned Imperial installations every day, as Imperial supply lines were cut and troops deserted. All kinds of strange data, long concealed by Imp Intelligence, were turning up in the sector reports every day. He could see how it could happen, though he hadn't been prepared for it. It had been so many years... And maybe he had been fooling himself, telling himself the records had never turned up because the files had been destroyed.

What he couldn't explain was what his records were doing hidden in Leia's cabin, and why she hadn't said anything about it. That was the question he wanted most to answer. Why she hadn't said anything about it.

Chewie slunk out of the companionway, heading aft. "What are you doing?" Han asked him.

The Wookiee halted and said that he was going to check the engine refit.

Han shook his head and kept pacing. "You don't have to do that now."

Chewie folded his arms, a human gesture he had adopted. Whether it was meant to express annoyance or not was hard to tell. He said he did need to do it now, until someone got over this fit he was having.

"Fine." Han ran a hand through his hair, distracted. "But don't go anywhere. If we have to lift it'll be in a hurry."

Chewie shrugged agreement, but looked disturbed. He hovered a moment as if he wanted to ask, then decided against it and headed aft.

Han didn't know how long he stood there, his thoughts going around in circles. If he was anywhere else, any of the pirate or smuggler bases where he had taken up temporary residence in the past, he would have known exactly what to do. If somebody hid something like this from you there, some knowledge they had about your past, it meant only one thing -- you had to run, and run fast before whatever trap they were laying for you snapped shut.

Han knew Leia didn't do things like that. But intellectual knowledge was having a hard time convincing more than thirty years of instinct. And worse, he didn't want to leave. Even if it was some kind of a trap, even if he woke up in her bed tomorrow and found himself under arrest on some faked-up charge of Imperial

collaboration, he didn't want to leave. That was the most frightening part; he had been brainwashed all this time and he hadn't even known it.

The com beeped for attention; somebody was at the outer hatch, wanting in. Han hesitated, considered just ignoring it, then cursed and hit the switch. That's just what he needed in this situation. To be so damn paralyzed with indecision that he couldn't even answer the damn com. He snarled, "Who is it?"

"It's me," Luke's voice answered. "What the hell is wrong with you? I could feel it as soon as I came out of hyper."

"Nothing is wrong," Han answered, teeth gritted. That was all he needed, a Jedi snooping on how he felt.

"Let me in, okay?"

Han hit the remote hatch release and dropped into the chair at the tech station, fuming. He wondered how much Luke knew about this. The young Jedi had only been gone for a week or two, plenty of time to be told about the disk, to see it... Han felt his insides writhe at the thought of people he didn't know seeing that disk.

Luke stopped in the lounge's hatchway, looking at him sharply. He was still wearing his flightsuit. He said, "What's with you? I thought you were in here being murdered, but the deck officer told me everything was quiet."

Han kept his expression neutral, though he probably wasn't fooling Luke. The young Jedi had changed since Bespin, and Han knew why. He wondered if Luke had changed more than he had realized. "Why are you here, Luke?"

"I just told you." Luke took a seat at the game table, pulling off his gloves. "If you had a fight with Leia, she's not mad at you. She's up in the central core somewhere, acting perfectly normal."

Han snorted. Whatever "perfectly normal" meant. Obviously it was a standard for other people, and not him. They sat in silence for a time, Luke watching him worriedly. Finally the Jedi sighed in frustration and said, "Will you just tell me what's wrong?"

Han looked away. He was being an idiot, suspecting Luke. Hell, even as a Jedi Knight the kid had never learned to be subtle. He thought about it a little more, and said, "Can you stop being a Jedi for a minute?"

Luke considered that. "Okay," he said slowly, his expression clearly stating that he was humoring a crazy man.

"I'm serious."

"Well, I'll try. If you'll tell me what happened."

"How do you know when to trust somebody? Without using the Force."

"You're not going to tell me what's wrong, are you?"

Han didn't answer, not seeing any point to it.

Giving in, Luke sighed and scratched his head. "I don't know. I never really trusted somebody I shouldn't have. Not that I really trusted, anyway." He gave Han a thoughtful look. "Maybe I was always using the Force subliminally, or something. I've never been fooled very badly by anybody, lied to by somebody I thought was my friend. Unless...when Ben lied to me about my father." He slumped back in his seat and shrugged helplessly. "I don't know what you want, Han. Maybe I'm the wrong person to ask." He added carefully, "Maybe you should ask Leia."

Han rolled his eyes. "Oh, that was subtle. I hardly saw that one coming."

Luke sat up. "Look, I don't know why you're in this big panic--"

"I am not in a big panic--"

"But I think it's got to be about Leia, because there's not much else you care about."

It was Han's turn to slump back in his chair, effectively silenced.

"If you think she's done something," Luke persisted, "It's got to be a mistake."

Grudgingly, Han said, "Maybe." Maybe what he was really afraid of was not that the details of his so-called career would become common knowledge in the Alliance, or that he would be accused of being an Imp agent, but that he had badly misjudged Leia. That he had given his heart to somebody who had only pretended to give hers in return.

"I'm going to find her." Luke was getting to his feet.

Han didn't object, and felt like a coward.

Luke paused in the hatchway. "You know, we get used to Leia being perfect and never making any mistakes, so when she does do something wrong, it probably seems a lot worse than it is."

Han waited, mulling unpleasant thoughts. He wanted to believe Luke, but optimism wasn't something he had had a lot of experience with.

Chewie came up forward, reporting that the diagnostics on the engine retrofit weren't showing any problems. Han nodded, without really hearing anything the Wookiee was saying. He said, "Why don't you take off for a while? Go get a drink or something."

Chewie gave him a skeptical eye. Are you sure?

"Of course I'm sure. I said it, didn't I? Just get out of here."

Chewie snorted and made for the hatch.

Not much later there was another impatient chime from the com. Han hit the switch to open the main hatch and started out of the lounge, trying to ignore what his stomach was doing.

Leia stood hesitating in the companionway, still dressed for the reception. She was a bit out of breath, and the expression on her face was a mingling of worry and guilt. She said, "I can explain."

"Yeah?"

"As soon as Luke told me you were upset, I realized what it was. You found the disk, didn't you?"

Han nodded.

She winced and kneaded her hands together. "Camron turned it up in the search of the Imperial Data center on Gyndine. He tried to make something of it -- sprang it on me in front of Madine and Mothma, but they didn't buy it. Madine mentioned it to Rieekan, but no one else knows."

__Rieekan, Mothma, Madine, plus Camron and Degoran and that bunch. Why don't they just include it in the daily report for the whole damn fleet,__ Han thought. "So why didn't I know? Why did you hide it?" he demanded.

"I didn't hide it...intentionally." Leia waved her arms, trying to explain. Seeing her at a loss for words was almost worth all this, but Han was still in no mood to enjoy it. She said, "It had your medical records, I thought we might need that someday. And... I didn't tell you because I was afraid of how you would react."

Han stared at her incredulously, and Leia rubbed her forehead and admitted, "No, I know that's not it." She sighed. "I knew you would want me to destroy it, and it's the only picture I have of you."

"What?"

"It's the only picture I have of you." She folded her arms, glaring at him. "There, are you happy?"

"Oh." He leaned his shoulder against the wall, carefully examining the deckplates under his feet. It wasn't a likely explanation at all, unless you knew Leia.

"Why did you think I did it?" she demanded.

"Well, I didn't know."

"You probably thought up some paranoid plot--"

She was embarrassed and trying to get mad at him now, but Han was still too angry to let her get away with it. "Hey, lady, I'm not the one who fucked up this time," he interrupted, meeting her eyes.

Leia seemed to fight a brief internal struggle, then took a deep breath. "I know. I'm sorry. I knew it would bother you."

Han snorted. "That's putting it mildly."

"I'd hope that you trusted me enough--"

"I do trust you, Leia. I didn't leave."

That stopped her cold. The blood drained from her face. Han felt a stab of guilt; he hated to hurt her, even when he was mad at her, but he knew it was important to let her know how close he had come to flight. He said, "I don't want to hurt you, but you have to know how my mind works. I don't come from the same place as you and Luke. I think I've come a long way, but you've got to understand that I just can't forget everything I learned my whole life."

She whispered, "I am sorry."

"I know." Han turned away and wandered back into the lounge. He was sore all over, as if he had been on the losing end of a fist fight, and he had an incredible headache. He hadn't been so scared the last time he'd been captured. Well, yes, he had, but this was a whole different kind of scared. He dropped into the chair at the tech station again and leaned his head back. Leia followed him, leaning against the hatchway. She asked, "What did Luke say to you?"

"The usual crap."

"Did you tell him what it was all about?"

"You mean, did I tell him I'm an ex-Imp? No, but I'm sure he'll pick it up in the commissary once it gets around."

"It's not going to get around," Leia protested. "It happened a long time ago, and there are a lot of people in the Alliance with similar incidents in their pasts. Just maybe not so dramatic." She eased into the lounge a little further, as if he was a wild animal she didn't want to frighten. "What happened, anyway? To the ship you were on, I mean. The Caliphe, wasn't it?"

"You didn't read that part?"

"I don't think it's on the disk. That was all Camron had."

Han sighed. _Why the hell not? She knows everything else._ "It's a long story. Admiral Quinlan was a lousy commander, and that's putting it mildly. His staff officers were having secret meetings about him in thruster pod six, nobody above the rank of corporal could go near the crew's quarters on the offshift without getting tossed out an airlock, and I didn't know half of what was going on. I was busy being court-martialled."

Leia hesitated. Han knew what she wanted to ask, and answered, "I got in a fight with a superior officer. That happened all the time, but I was young and stupid. I didn't let him win, and I didn't kill him and dump the body. That, and not being an Imperial citizen, pretty much did it for me."

Leia smiled wanly. "Insubordination."

"I was supposed to be executed, but the Caliphe had her little accident, and I got away, and the Empire hid the evidence so nobody would know what lousy line officers they had then. And then the next year they stopped allowing anybody but Imperial citizens into the Academy, so nobody even considered the idea that I might have slipped through at the last minute."

"What was the Caliphe's little accident?"

Han looked up at her. "Well, Admiral Quinlan has the distinction of being the only line officer in the whole history of the Empire to lose an Imperial cruiser to Corellian pirates."

"Oh. Oh, I see." Leia looked thoughtful. "Madine was right about the reason for the security seal. The Empire would never have wanted that to become public knowledge."

Han shrugged. "Maybe I should have told you before."

"I don't know." Leia shook her head. "It was a long time ago. And I'm not sure it's anybody's business. And it's certainly not the worst secret that's being kept from the Alliance," she added ruefully.

He knew what she meant. Her and Luke's parentage, and their father's unfortunate identity change from Anakin Skywalker to Darth Vader. Han was the only one still alive, besides Leia and Luke, who knew that. _I never thought of that,_ Han realized. _I never thought that since I had something on her, so to speak, she might want something on me._ Maybe he wasn't all that paranoid, after all.

Leia was pacing the cabin, thinking hard. She said finally, "You were perfectly right to be angry. I should have given you the disk and let you decide what to do with it." She faced him and gestured helplessly. "I can't believe I did this. I just have never been able to think straight when it comes to you. It was unforgivable."

Han looked over at her, his eyes softening. That admission went a long way to soothe any remaining hurt feelings. Han knew he couldn't think straight when it came to her either, and it was nice to hear the problem was mutual. "It's not unforgivable," he said, after a moment.

"Oh." Leia was silent, considering. "So, what would need to happen for it to be forgiven?"

"I could think of some things," he said slowly.

Leia crossed the lounge, leaned on the arm of the chair, and kissed him.

It was one of her better efforts, and Han was left a little short of breath. "That's a start," he admitted.

She sighed. "Any more secrets I should be on the look out for? Anything else you'd like to get off your chest?"

"Just the wife and kids on Dantooine, but I thought I'd wait a couple of years to let that one slip."

Leia chuckled. "You know what they say about us?"

"Probably, but tell me anyway."

"That I'm wrong for you, you're wrong for me, and I'm making a fool of myself."

"And if they're right?"

"It could take a long time to find out." She slid into his lap.

"Years," he agreed, nuzzling her neck.

"Decades."

end

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