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Solo

by [Linda Stoops](#)

Yavin 4's sky was clear that night. Not even the torpedo-induced nova that had been the Death Star could be seen from the temple fortress, as Massasi's ruins faced away from the planet and the explosion was between it and the moon. All in all, a perfect night for astronomers.

Star-gazing was not a favorite pastime of a certain Corellian freighter captain, but he had just finished replacing the carbonized wiring in the starboard deflector shields and was too tense to sleep. Unfortunately, everyone else had gone to bed and there was nothing better to do at that hour. //So here you stand,// Han mused, //getting a stiff neck staring at balls of space gas. Sure wish I could gun the engines, just to be sure they're all right. That tractor beam put more strain on them than I first thought.// He flinched at the memory of having spent three days overhauling the sublight engines. //Well, more like two-and-a-half. Chewie and I were too hung over from the celebration to do much of anything the morning after.

//He watched the sky for another five minutes, thinking of nothing in particular, then headed for the room provided for Luke, Chewbacca and him. He grinned at the familiar loud buzzing that emanated from it as he approached. //Chewie's sleeping on his back again, I'll bet,// Solo thought with a chuckle, //unless it's Luke making all that racket.//

His suspicions were confirmed when he reached the door: the *Falcon*'s co-pilot was spread-eagled on four cots, supine and snoring. //Not the most musical lullaby in the galaxy, but who's going to complain to his face?// Over in one corner the two droids had shut down for the night, with their owner stretched out on his bed less than two meters away. Luke slept on his stomach, arms raised

and crossed over his head, which was turned toward the door. Something in that position, and the way Luke's hair had fallen over his eyes, amused Han.

//Funny,// he observed with a faint smile, //right now, he looks too young to be fighting real battles...until he gets a weapon in his hand and the proper target. But I wasn't very old, either, when I left home...'course, I didn't have TIEs breathing down my neck or a battle station looking to blow me into next year.//

Easing onto his own cot, Solo leaned against the wall, clasped his hands behind his head and mulled over his present situation. //We've got to get out of here,// he decided. //Jabba's not going to wait for his money while Chewie and I play hero.// Still, doing something for another's sake, without expecting a reward (although he wouldn't have turned one down), did make him feel good.

Once in a while, of course. It wasn't safe to make a habit of it, much less good business. Let those who didn't have to worry about making a living take the risks.

Several minutes of this sort of contemplation passed, then he rose suddenly and left the room. He'd seen a clipboard with paper lying around in the hanger earlier. It took a while, but he found it again, complete with a working stylus.

The words did not surface as quickly as he'd hoped, however, and Han tapped the mattress with the writing instrument for some minutes before touching its point to the top sheet.

>Kid,<

He began, then marked it out. //Nah, doesn't sound right.// He tried a different approach:

>Dear Luke,<

//Uh-uh, too serious.// A horizontal line intersected the "Dear" and he considered the remaining word. //Maybe.// A pause, and he went on to the body of the letter.

>Don't think I'm running out on my promises. Not all of them, >anyway. It's just that I've to get some things taken care of, or >I'll have more than the Empire on my back, and I don't want you or >the princess caught up in my problems.<

"Eh." He scratched off the first and second sentences immediately, replacing them with: >Before you start criticizing me again about my priorities, understand one thing: I don't need the Empire and several angry clients on my back.<

The third sentence went the way of the others.

>Any promises I made to you or Leia will have to wait until, or *if*, >I get back. Like it or not, that's the way it is.<

He stopped, studied the entire text, nodded and resumed writing.

>Trying to save the galaxy is fine for some people, but<

Another hesitation. There was no way of finishing that sentence to his satisfaction, so Han obliterated it and started a new paragraph.

>Maybe, if you're still around by the time I get back, and you've >gotten this crusading bug out of your system, you could sign up with >us. We've been needing another hand at the controls for a while, >and you've proven yourself more than a fair pilot. Besides, a >little exposure to the rest of the galaxy would do you a lot of >good. Take it from someone who's been living in the real world >since he was knee-high to a bantha.

If my luck holds out, you might see a freighter over your shoulder someday, pulling your ass out of the fire again. Till then, don't hold your breath. Kiss Her Worship goodbye for me, and don't take any bent credits.<

He signed it, then read and re-read the last two paragraphs. //I guess it'll do.// A sudden movement from Luke's cot prompted Solo to lie down, hiding the clipboard beneath him. The blond pilot frowned in displeasure, muttered something unintelligible, then relaxed. Han stayed on his back a while longer, eyes closed in thought.

They opened again two hours later. He sat up with a jolt, cursing himself for dozing off, then moved to his sleeping first mate. As roughly as he dared, which amounted to no more than a gentle arm-shaking, he roused Chewbacca. The Wookiee's reaction was a just-audible snarl, one even Luke would understand.

Han silenced him with a gesture, half-whispering, "You've had your beauty sleep, fuzz-face. We're clearing out before anybody else gets up." Chewbacca protested, but the Corellian cut him off again. "There's more important business waiting for us on Tatooine, remember?"

The Wookiee nodded reluctantly, then glanced toward Luke. =And what of Travelling-Star? Weren't you going to ask him to join us?=
=

"No," Han replied, almost smiling at his partner's translation of Luke's name. "He'll want to stay here. 'Sides, taking him home would be like handing him over to the Imps ourselves. We owe the old man that much, at least, keepin' the kid outta their hands." He let that sink in, then continued. "The *Falcon*'s ready to go. Give me ten minutes, then start 'er up. Okay?" The huge russet head bobbed once more. "And try to make as little noise as possible," he added.

Chewbacca gave his captain a sub-vocal growl in assent and left. Solo returned to the clipboard, sat down carefully and copied the final draft of the letter on a clean sheet. He studied it a few times, made the necessary changes, then left the folded note on his cot and headed for the ship.

The sound of engines woke Luke at dawn. His eyes opened, then widened at the sight of the empty beds, and he tensed when he spotted the note. "They wouldn't..." he groaned, flinging the covers off as he rose. He snatched the letter from the rumpled blanket and nearly ripped the paper scrap trying to unfold it.

What he found written there did not ease the knot in his stomach. The note was small, torn roughly across the top, and the salutation "Kid" was crowded above the text, which read:

>If my luck holds out, you might see a freighter over your shoulder >someday, pulling your ass out of the fire again. Till then, don't >hold your breath. Kiss Her Worship goodbye for me, and don't take >any bent credits.

Han<

Luke's jaw clenched in angry disappointment as he re-read the letter, and his first impulse was to crumple, then shred the paper. But something stayed his hand long enough to remember, then reconsider. With a weak smile and a shake of his head, Skywalker refolded the scrap and stuffed it into his back pocket. A shrill, forlorn whistle interrupted his train of thought. He turned just in time to see Artoo scanning the room for the two absent smugglers, and Threepio reactivating his external sensors.

"Good morning, Master Luke," the latter began. A survey of their quarters changed the next sentence to a question. "Why, where are Captain Solo and Chewbacca?"

The smile broadened a little. "Believe it or not, following their own paths."

Threepio cocked his head at the cryptic answer, admitting, "I'm afraid I don't understand, sir." Artoo's clicks and beeps echoed his taller friend's confusion.

Luke sighed and gazed into space, replying, "Well, don't feel too bad about it, Threepio. I'm just beginning to understand it, myself." Leaving the two bewildered droids behind, he threw on clean clothes and headed for the Alliance command staff quarters in search of Princess Leia.

The end

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