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STAY WITH ME
by Deborah Kittle

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"Now that went off without a problem," Han Solo remarked to his companion as they boarded the Millenium Falcon.

Leia Organa put the data tapes in a secret compartment aboard the freighter and returned to face her captain. "I wasn't really anticipating any problems. Grianlen is a relatively neutral planet. The Imperials haven't made their presence felt ... yet."

"Well, you can't be too careful. Ready?" Han asked.

"I'm ready to lift off. We have a rendezvous to keep."

"That's four days off, Leia. I meant ready to relax a little, have a little fun," Han explained.

"Luke and Chewie are expecting us. I don't want to miss them."

Han rolled his eyes. Did she really think his ship was that slow? "The Falcon can get to Orania in less than eight hours, Your Worship. Don't worry, we won't miss the deadline. I'm going out. You can either come with me or stay on board the ship. I wouldn't advise walking around alone."

Leia knew from the tone of his voice and the way he was standing, that Han Solo was not going to be leaving Grianlen tonight. She really didn't feel like staying cooped up on the ship as she had read all the files she had brought to work on for this trip already. Of course, going out with Han was not something she wanted to do either, but she would be bored otherwise.

And Han was not boring. She sighed. "Let's go."

Han smiled. "After you, Your Worship." He extended his arm out in front of her, indicating she should precede him.

Leia watched as Han closed up the Falcon and then together they strolled out of the docking bay. "So where are we going? Someplace interesting, I'm sure."

"Always. I thought we would go to The Astuac Lounge. They have a nice dining area as well as some decent entertainment."

Leia's eyes widened.

Han looked offended. "Hey, I like places other than the shabby bars and cantinas I hang out in."

"Shabby? They're a long way from shabby. How about filthy? Foul? Nasty? Obscene? Indecent? Squalid?"

Han stopped Leia by holding up a hand. "Those aren't very nice words for places that I sometimes live in. Besides, if it weren't for places like that, the Alliance would have a much harder time getting any information."

"I realize that, Han, but it doesn't mean I like to hang out there all the time," Leia told him.

"Well, you'll enjoy this place." Leia's silence told Han that she was skeptical. He smiled. She was going to be very surprised. Almost a half hour later, Leia asked, "How much farther is it? I would've thought we'd be there by now."

'It's not much farther,' Han said as he slowed down.

"Is something wrong? Why are you slowing?"

Han turned his head towards her. "I think we're being watched. Let's get moving." He grasped her right arm and propelled her forward.

A faint rustling sound caused Han to spin around, losing his grip on Leia. Han's blaster was clear of the leather rig in less than a second but it was too late.

There were two of them. One had a blaster pointed at him and as Han slowly turned around, he saw that the other one had a blaster pointed at Leia's head.

Han's eyes flicked up to the tops of the buildings that surrounded them and saw that they were low enough to allow easy access to the ground by jumping. A perfect ambush site, he thought.

"Drop your gun."

Han stared at the nondescript humanoid in front of him who had spoken. He had slicked-back black hair and dark grey eyes. He was of average height and weight -- the type of person you see every day and don't pay much attention to. Han weighed the possible escape routes and odds of success in his head and realized that right then, they were not very good. He lowered his blaster and dropped it to the ground.

"That was very smart." The man in front of Han inclined his head towards his fellow ambusher. "He's pretty good with that thing, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah," came the answer from the brown-haired, yellow-eyed man holding Leia. "First one all day that even got his blaster clear. "Now, I would suggest that you hand over all your credits, nice and slow, or my friend over there will blow your lady's brains all over the walls."

Reaching inside his vest with his left hand, Han brought out a credit purse. He gently tossed it to the ambusher in front of him, the one who appeared to, be the leader.

"That was quite nice. My thanks." He weighed it in his hand. "Not got any on her?"

Han watched in suppressed rage as Leia was groped by her clenched and unclenched his to get the bastard's neck in them.

"She feels clean," came the answer.

"Too bad. We were hoping for a larger take. Well, I'll just have blaster and its rig and sell it later. Take it off," the leader ordered.

Not my rig, you bastards, Han thought. It was the only thing besides the Falcon that he valued much as his own life. He remained motionless.

"I told you to take it off."

Hazel eyes turned to brown. He could tell that Leia was wondering what he was waiting for. As he slowly reached down with his right hand and undid the buckle at his hips, Han realized that this might be the only chance they had to escape with their lives and property intact. It was a risk he was willing to take. He hoped Leia was, too.

Bending down more to get the tie-down, he unhooked it with his left and held the rig in place with his right hand. Grasping it as it slid away from his body, Han went into action. He threw the rig into the leader's face and sent his body into the man's legs, knocking him off balance.

His partner instinctively moved to help him, thus releasing Leia. She took the opportunity and elbowed him in the chest. He dropped the gun and she scooped it up. Spinning, she brought the gun to bear and fired. Hitting her target dead center, she dropped him. She turned to lend Han a hand.

The Corellian was leaning over the other man, who looked to be dead. There was a knife on the ground.

"Are you all right?" she walked over to him and noticed that he looked a little pale.

"Yeah. I'll be fine," he answered as he fell to his knees and looked at his left hand, covered in blood. "It's nothing a little synthflesh can't handle."

Leia went around to his wounded side and moved the edges of his shirt away to get a better look. It was deep and long. "This is going to require a medical visit, Han. It's too much for me to handle.

"Not necessary.

"Believe me, it is necessary. I don't want you bleeding to death here." Leia eased Han down to the ground. "Just take it easy." She pulled out her comlink, changed frequencies and called for an emergency team. Han was unconscious by the time she finished. The princess put his blaster back into the rig and placed it at her

feet. Holding the wound with part of Han's torn shirt to keep pressure on the area, Leia wondered at Han's hesitation in parting with the rig. She had seen the anguish in his eyes for a brief second. Running a finger of her free hand over it, she wondered how important it was to him.

Leia waited for the doctor to finish with Han. They had been there an hour or so and the doctor seemed pretty optimistic that everything was fine. She watched the Grianlenian, Dr. Bialt, put the finishing touches to the dressing at Han's side and cover him.

"He's rather fortunate. He's lost some blood but I feel that by tomorrow, he'll be up and around and able to leave. I've given him a rather strong pain killer and antibiotics. He should sleep through the night."

Leia shook Dr. Bialt's hand, his four digit hand grasping hers firmly. "Thank you for everything. Is it possible to stay the evening here? I'm tired and if he wakes up in the middle of the night, he might become disoriented. I want to be here for him."

Dr. Bialt wrinkled his two noses in thought. "Ummm, well..." His one blue and one green eye scanned the room. There were three empty beds across from Han and two more on either side. This area of the hospital was practically deserted. "I suppose that it would be all right. Right now, it seems we are short on patients. It's been rather quiet the past few days."

That surprised Leia. The ambushers had boasted that they'd made more than one attack today. Either the victims had been allowed to leave or they had been killed outright. 'I'll have my nurse bring you something to eat later. I'll be going off duty about that time and. I'll tell my replacement all the details of Captain Rholo's injury. Dr. Thager will probably stop by to check on him. just get some rest, Seeta. He'll be fine.

"Seeta" waved Dr. Bialt out of the room and sat down on the bed closest to the window, the one on Han's right side. The names Seeta and Captain Rholo were not the most brilliant but they would do. Not that she thought there would be any trouble with their real names but as Han had said earlier, you couldn't be too careful. Gods, had it only been a few hours ago that everything was going well? The princess took off her boots then settled Han's gun and rig at the

head of her bed. She then lay down and relaxed until her meal came. She ate quickly, realizing only then that she was stamng. She met Dr. Thager soon after the nurse took her tray away, and watched as he took readings. She asked him a lot of questions about the monitoring systems hooked up to Han's bed. She wanted to be prepared in case anything went wrong. Not that it should, but Han's warning came back to her again.

Turning off the viewer, Leia settled down to get some sleep as it was getting late. There had been nothing mentioned on the news about the ambush on two visitors to Grianlen which was just as well. No need to broadcast the incident all over the planet. She turned to face Han's bed and watched his chest rise and fall.

Just as she was dozing off, the door to their wing opened. At first, Leia had thought it was a nurse but the figure approaching was anything but. Sitting up in bed, Leia watched in fascination. The woman came closer and as she did, the princess noticed that she was beautiful, the most beautiful woman she had ever seen. Her skin was pale but flawless, her lips full and red, her hair pale blonde, seeming to flow around her body as if it had a life of its own. Her long and flowing white gown reflected a myriad of colors from what little light was present in the hospital wing but her eyes caught Leia's attention the most. They were obsidian, as black as space. She turned on the light above her bed and looked at the beautiful woman. "I think you have the wrong wing."

The woman shook her head slightly, sending her hair in every direction. "I am in the right place," she stated.

Even the voice was light and musical. Leia was a little jealous. The woman must have men throwing themselves at her feet. "What is it you want?"

The woman turned to look at Han. "I recognized his ship at the docking bay. I came to see him.

"How did you know he was here?" Leia got very suspicious. "I know everything that happens on Grianlen. I am a friend of Han Solo of Corellia. I am glad to see he was not killed."

"He should be fine in the morning. You could come back then. The doctors want him to rest this evening. If you'll tell me your name, I'll let Han know that you were here. I'm sure he'll want to say hello." And a few other things, Leia added to herself.

The woman smiled and it seemed to light up the room but not her face. "I'm sure he will. You may tell him that Ny'A was here." The woman called Ny'A walked over to Han's left side and leaned over him. Leia watched. Her hand had inched up to the blaster. She didn't trust this Ny'a and she wanted to be ready in case something happened. But all Ny'A did was lean over Han's body, whisper something in his ear which Leia couldn't hear and run a hand down his left arm. Then she straightened, inclined her head towards Leia and walked out of the wing, seeming to float on air.

Turning off the light, Leia wondered how Han managed to keep such beautiful company as Ny'A. Somehow, she didn't think Han was worthy enough of her. However, there was something about her that gnawed at Leia. Hopefully, Han could provide some answers in the morning. An alarm going off woke Leia from a sound sleep. Coming instantly awake, she jumped out of the bed just as Dr. Bialt and a team of nurses rushed to Han's bedside. The alarm was turned off but the frantic activity continued for almost fifteen minutes before Dr. Bialt turned to the princess. "That was close."

"What happened?"

I'm not quite sure, Seeta. Captain Rholo went into full cardiac arrest and we almost lost him. I can find no reason for it and plan to run a battery of tests on him this morning. Did anything unusual happen last night? Did he wake?"

-- Leia shook her head. -- "No, everything was quiet last night. I thought this was just a knife wound.

"As did I. I checked for any poisons and toxic substances and his chemistries showed normal. I'll run a more in-depth and extensive set of tests." Dr. Bialt turned to the head nurse and punched some buttons on the notepad she held.

"Will he be all right?" Leia asked.

"Under normal circumstances, I'd say yes but I'll wait until the tests are concluded. I'll let you know how they turn out."

"Thanks." The princess just sat and watched as Dr. Bialt and several nurses did whatever was necessary to get the tests run.

* * *

It was several hours before Leia was alone again. Something had to show up on the tests, she thought. Han was in excellent physical shape. Something just wasn't right.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. Leia watched as Han's vital signs continued to show marked improvement throughout the day. That was encouraging. It told her Han was fighting whatever was doing this to him. That's why when Dr. Bialt arrived in the early evening and told her his tests showed all normal, Leia had a hard time believing him.

"I'm quite sure, Seeta. I double checked everything. Captain Rholo is in perfect health except for the stab wound which is not healing as quickly as it should but I'm not worried. We'll give him another day as his vital signs are all returning to normal.

"All right." Leia rubbed her eyes.

As Dr. Bialt left the wing, he said, "I'll send the nurse in with some food. I noticed you didn't eat today."

Who could eat with all this commotion? Leia thought. Lying on her left side, she looked at Han just as she had done all day. It was comforting to her to see him breathing. "You gave me quite a scare this morning, Han," she whispered to him. "Be all right, please. I don't want to tell Chewie that you died just because you didn't want to part with your blaster rig." Was that thing more important than my life or even yours? Will I ever know?

She lay there until her food arrived. Later, after the nurse left with the empty tray, Leia decided to turn in early as the day had been rather exhausting.

How long she'd been asleep, Leia had no idea but something woke her. She glanced up and saw Ny'A at the foot of her bed. She sat up and asked, "How long have you been here?"

"Not long at all," came the response.

"Did you give Han Solo of Corellia my message?"

"Han hasn't been doing well today. He hasn't woken up yet. I'm sorry."

"That's too bad. Will he be all right?"

Dr. Bialt thinks so. It will probably take a little longer than he thought." Leia watched as Ny'A glided over to Han's bed and repeated her actions of the previous night. "What did you tell him?" The princess realized that it really wasn't any of her business but couldn't take the question back now that it had slipped out.

Ny'A answered, "Just that he will see me soon. Good night to you." She turned and glided out.

Leia shook her head to clear it. The Strange woman was a mystery to her. Leave it to Han to get mixed up with someone like that. Smiling, Leia resettled herself in the bed and drifted off to sleep.

An hour or so before dawn, Leia lay drowsily watching Han and his monitors. It was too early to get up so she just stayed in bed. She was hoping Han would wake up soon so she could yell at him for endangering their lives over a piece of leather.

Staring at the monitors, she began to notice his vital signs slowly begin to fall. Leia sat up and turned on the light above her. Shielding her eyes for a few seconds until they adjusted, she looked at the monitors more closely. Yes, they were definitely falling. She left the bed and went over to stand next to Han. His breathing had slowed tremendously by this time.

"Breathe, Han. Why aren't you breathing normally?" Leia whispered to the Corellian. The Alderaani princess placed her hand on the alarm button to summon help when she saw Han take a deep breath. Relieved, she dropped her hand as she waited for his next intake of breath. The seconds dragged by. It then hit her that he had stopped breathing. Leia hit the alarm.

Dr. Bialt rushed in with a group of nurses. "What's happened?" "He's stopped breathing." The alarm went off to indicate that his heart had now stopped and it caused Leia to jump. The medical staff went to work on Han. She stood there and watched and waited. He just has to be all right, Leia told herself. She had summoned them earlier than yesterday. They had a head start. Everything would be fine. "Seeta?" Dr. Bialt called her name then touched her arm to get her attention. . "Oh, I'm sorry. I was telling myself he'd be fine and I guess I got caught up in it. How is he?"

"Not good. It took us a very long time to bring him back but we were finally able to. His vitals are so low I'm afraid if he has another attack, he won't make it," the doctor explained.

Leia sank slowly down to the bed. "Any reason why this is happening?"

"I can't explain it. I'll run some more tests but I'm afraid the results will be the same. At the time he was admitted, you had said you knew of no family history problems. Is there anyone who might know?"

There was only one person who would know and Chewie was unreachable until their rendezvous in two days. "No, no one," she answered.

"I'll do the best I can," Dr. Bialt reassured her.

The day passed very slowly for Leia. Dr. Bialt and his staff were in and out of the wing, running test after test. By the time the evening meal was being served, Dr. Bialt stood in front of her. "It's as I feared. All the tests are normal".

"Thank you for all you've done." Gods, she sounded like Han was already gone. "I plan on being up all night and I'll alert Dr. Thager and the staff to any changes I see."

"Very good. I need to ask this one

last time. You know of no family history that might explain this? Or have there been any suspicious visitors who might want to harm Captain Rholo in any way? Some spacers make some enemies." "No. I haven't crewed with the captain for very long and he's a fairly private man. No, no visitors." Leia felt Dr. Bialt didn't need to know about Ny'A. A lady love out of Han's past was not really suspicious -- just annoying, considering the time of night she came around.

"All right. Well, I'll go brief Dr. Thager and I'll see you in the morning. Good night," bid Dr. Bialt.

"Night." Leia sat on the bed and monitored Han and the equipment for the slightest change. After an hour of this, her eyes began to water, and the lights began to run together. She got up and stretched, then sat back down.

Gazing at Han's face, Leia smiled. She had to admit he was a very handsome man. As he lay there unconscious, his face calm and relaxed, she could almost imagine.... She let the thought die. Imagine what? she asked herself. Imagine that he might care for you in the same way as you care for him?

"Stay with me, Han. Please. I'm not sure what I'd do without you around." Leia went over, grasped Han's right hand in hers and squeezed it. "I never thought I'd say this to anyone. I've never needed anyone the way I need you. You make me feel ... things I never felt before. Stay with me. I couldn't bear to see you die as I did Alderaan." She stopped there and blinked back the tears that threatened to fall.

Leia wiped the moisture from her eyes. "There are times when I can't help but think of Alderaan and you come along, make some quip or comment and for a time I forget. You make me think, you make me feel, you make me ... care." She reached over and placed a light kiss on his forehead. "Stay with me!" she whispered fiercely.

Caressing his face, she half-expected him to open those hazel eyes of his and make some crude remark. If he did, she'd MI him herself. But then, it would be nice to see his eyes open. That would mean he'd be all right. However, his eyes remained closed.

She ran her hand down his arm, much like Ny'A had. And that stopped her cold. She, of course, had assumed Ny'A was a friend of Han's. What if she were an enemy or even a bounty hunter, sent to kill Han any way she could? Leia had never seen her with a weapon but she did touch Han. The princess was quite aware that some poisons were untraceable, quite deadly and only required the barest of touches. Tucking the coverlet around Han's bare chest, she let her eyes linger on his body, then turned to business. She pulled out Han's blaster and sat down with it on her lap. She would be well prepared when Ny'A came to visit.

The waiting seemed like an eternity to Leia but finally, just after moonrise, the door opened and in floated Ny'A. Leia gripped the handle of the blaster tightly and kept it out of sight. "You should call before you come so you don't make the trip here unnecessarily." The beautiful woman smiled. "This trip is not unnecessary." Gazing at Han's still form, she asked, "He is still unconscious?"

"It seems the wound was more serious than we thought. He should be better in a few days," Leia answered.

Those obsidian eyes turned their gaze to the princess. "You shouldn't lie. It doesn't become you." Ny'A moved closer to the bed. "You are much stronger than I thought, Han Solo of Corellia, but tonight you will be mine."

"Not a chance of that, Ny'A. Step away from him or I will shoot you," Leia warned.

Ny'A turned and saw that a blaster was pointed at her. "Put that away, Leia Organa of Alderaan. You will be unable to shoot me, I can assure you of that."

The blaster almost wavered. "How "

"I told you, I know everything that happens on my planet. You don't know who I am, do you?" She glided away from the bed to face Leia.
" "No, I don't."

"A shame, but Han Solo of Corellia knows who I am and tonight, we shall be together. Please drop that blaster, Leia Organa of Alderaan. This is a hospital," Ny'A remarked.

Leia dropped the blaster to the floor. Not because she wanted to, but because it had gotten so very heavy, she couldn't continue to hold it. She tried to bend down to pick it up but her body refused to respond. She tried moving her arms and legs and though they moved freely, she couldn't bend down. "What has happened?"

"Only what I wish. You want to shoot me and though the blast would cause me no harm, you might get carried away and harm others when it is not their time to go. Now, time is short and I must be about my business and that is to take Han Solo of Corellia." Ny'A bent forward.

"No! Please don't take him away from me!" Ny'A turned and saw the anguish in Leia's face and heard it in her voice. "Do you care for this man?"

"I do," Leia answered without hesitation.

"Interesting. I had not thought it possible but perhaps there is more to you than I had thought. Unfortunately, I cannot explore it at this time." Again Ny'A bent forward and was stopped.

"Please, don't do this," Leia pleaded. The floating vision in white whirled abruptly causing Leia to take a step back. "Would you willingly give yourself to me in place of Han Solo of Corellia?"

Turning from Ny'A to Han, she knew her answer in less than a heartbeat. "Yes." Han had saved her life and those of so many others in the past few months since "joining" the Rebellion. Regardless of how many times they had yelled at each other, her life had been brightened by this Corellian smuggler. There had also been times when she felt she should've died on Alderaan with her family and friends and not had the burden to carry on in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds -- but carry on she did. Perhaps this was the way to repay all the other souls who had died for Alderaan and for the Rebellion. Han certainly should not be made to pay. "Yes, I will go with you."

Leia watched as Ny'A came towards her with arms outstretched. She wasn't sure what to expect or even what was really happening. Perhaps she was dreaming all this.

Abruptly, Ny'A stopped and looked

up at a point above Leia's head.

"Are you sure?"

Leia answered, "Yes, I said I was." She turned to look behind and above her as Ny'A was still not looking at her. The princess got the impression that the question was not directed at her.

"Then if I do this, the debt will be repaid and I owe you nothing else," Ny'A again spoke to the ceiling. A few moments later she added, "Then it is done. The debt is repaid. All is as it should be." Turning, she addressed the princess.

"Leia Organa of Alderaan, your life and the life of Han Solo of Corellia have been spared. It seems that I cannot interfere in the events about to take place. However, leave Grianlen as soon as possible for if either of you ever return here, you will not see the sunrise that next day for it will be my right to take what was returned to you this day. Is that understood?"

Completely confused about what had just transpired, Leia answered, "I think so."

"Good." Bending over the Corellian, the strange woman again whispered in his ear and trailed a light touch along his left arm.

Leia could only watch. Trying to stop Ny'A was impossible. "

"Good-bye, Leia Organa of Alderaan. Please give Han Solo of Corellia my greetings. It will be interesting to see the expression on his face." Ny'A bowed her head in Leia's direction, turned and disappeared.

Rubbing her eyes to try and clear her vision, Leia could've sworn that Ny'A had just completely vanished without having left through the door. These past few nights were disturbing, to say the least. Picking up the blaster on her way to Han's bed, she reached out to touch him and found that he was indeed still breathing.

Leia stayed by his bedside for a few minutes more and then realized she was exhausted. Making her way to her own bed, she put the blaster back in the rig hanging by the bed, but still within easy reach. She settled down on her left side and tried to stay awake but within seconds she drifted off.

Han slowly awoke and wondered where he was. He detected no sounds of ship's engines, just very faint clicks and whirs from somewhere on his left side. He slowly opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. Definitely not on board the Falcon. His eyes wandered to his left. He noticed a bank of machines. That, combined with what his nose was telling him, confirmed that he was in a hospital. Briefly, he closed his eyes and the events leading up to this point came flooding back to him.

Han searched to his right and immediately saw Leia in the bed next to him. He breathed a sigh of relief. He felt a momentary rush of fear that something had happened to her but she appeared to be all right, just sleeping. Smiling, he thought she looked pretty good sleeping. Shame to wake her up and spoil the view because it was a nice one.

"Leia," he called softly.

No response so he called out again a little louder, "Leia." Still nothing so in a regular tone, he said, "Hey, Your Worship. Rise and shine."

Leia's eyes flew open and looked around. Seeing that Han was awake and addressing her, she jumped out of bed. "You're up. You had us all really worried."

Han was surprised to see the openness on Leia's face, especially in her eyes. If he didn't know any better, he would've thought she cared for him. That wasn't possible. "Aw, Your Worship. I didn't know you cared." He watched the walls slam into place.

"Why, you-- I said 'us'. That includes the doctors. If you had died, how was I supposed to fly your ship off Grianlen? That bucket is so patched together, it's a wonder how she gets off the ground."

"Be careful what you say, Princess. That ship has gotten you out of numerous.... Wait. Did you say 'died'? The knife wound wasn't that bad, was it?"

"Dr. Bialt didn't think so ,,at first, but you came close to death twice. Last night, I really thought you might. We've been here three days, Han," Leia explained.

"I can't believe that," Han mumbled. He really felt pretty good. "Are you--" He was interrupted by the arrival of a doctor.

"Ah, Captain Rholo, I am Dr. Bialt. I am very glad to see you conscious and aware. You had us all very worried. Now, if you'll lie back, I want to check your vitals and the area of the wound." The doctor began his examination- and- Leia saw that- Han didn't protest at all. Most unusual, but he looked shaken up a bit from the news. Sitting back on the bed, Leia watched. She didn't think Han was shaken up from being so near death. He faced it every day in his line of work -- or so he bragged all the time. Perhaps it was because a wound that seemed so small had turned into something so big. Or maybe he was upset because she was there and would have to go through everything alone again. She would like to think it was the latter reason but he would never admit it, she was sure.

"Well, this is rather interesting but it seems the wound is almost healed. Yesterday, it looked quite infected but today I am at a lost to explain it. You must have an excellent immune system, Captain," the doctor remarked.

"Thanks. Can we leave now?" Han began to fidget.

"Of course. I see no reason to keep you here. I would like it, though, if you took it easy for a day or two longer. Stay here while I process the paperwork to get you released." Dr. Bialt left. As Han began to remove tubes and wires, Leia stayed his hands. "Let the doctor do that. -You might damage the equipment."

"Whatever you say, Your Worship." He settled back into bed. "So, anything else happen while I was out of it?"

"You had a visitor," Leia answered.

"A visitor? I don't know anyone on Grianlen. Who was he?"

"Not a he, but a she. You had a woman come to see you." Leia watched as Han smiled. It was the smile that seemed to have a certain effect on the female of any species, herself included.

"A woman? I'm sorry I wasn't able to greet her. Did she give you her name?"

"Yes. It was Ny'A.

"What did you say?" Han whispered.

Leia saw that Han seemed a little pale. "I said her name was Ny'A.

"Are you all right? Is the wound bothering you?"

"No. Forget about that." Sitting up in bed, he pinned Leia with his gaze. "I want you to tell me everything that happened. Everything. "But, Han..."

"Please, just tell me. I'll explain things later. I just need to know what happened." Han indicated that she should sit on the end of his bed.

Sitting down, Leia related the events of the past few days. However, when she got to the part when Ny'A had asked her if she would take Han's place, she changed the version slightly. She didn't want to let Han know how deeply she was afraid her feelings for him ran, when she wasn't sure herself. "So, last'night when she arrived, I thought she was a bounty hunter or something coming after you. I wasn't sure what she was going to do but it didn't sound good. However, when I tried to threaten her with your blaster, she made me drop it. It was very strange.

"I think I angered her a little because she wanted to take me like she wanted to take you. I couldn't move. just as it was about to happen, whatever 'it' was, she stopped and looked up at the ceiling. But I think she looked through the ceiling up into the night sky. Then she spoke but it wasn't to me. She said something about a debt finally being repaid and that things were now as they should be. Then she left after touching you again. She did say before she vanished that she wanted to see your face when you found out who had visited you. Who was she?"

Han rolled his eyes. This had to be some sort of cruel joke someone was playing on him. "Did I mumble or say anything while I was unconscious?"

"No, not a sound."

"Did you ever leave this room for anything or speak to anyone other than the doctors?"

'No, Han, I never left. Why?' Leia asked.

There could be no way Leia could have found out, no way at all. If that was the case, then it must have really happened. That's impossible, he told himself. She was just a legend, someone who wasn't real at all. How could that be?

Dr. Bialt returned. "Everything is in order. Seeta, if you'll come out and sign some forms, I'll disconnect the captain and he may get dressed and then you both can be on your way."

"Fine." Leia made her way to the desk out in front of the room where she had just spent the last three days of her life. She gave the nurse there fifty credits that she had recovered from the two dead thieves, to help pay the bill. The rest would be paid by the government since she and 'Captain Rholo' were poor.

Han came out of the sanitarium as Leia stood by the bed. She wordlessly handed him his rig and blaster. She had hoped to hear some sort of explanation but he placed the rig around his hips and adjusted it without a sound.

Han knew that Leia wanted to know why he had possibly risked their lives for this piece of leather. Would she understand that this rig was the only thing he had left from a family he'd never known and probably never would? That sometimes he dreamed about having a family

and that the closest he ever got was the well-worn leather around his hips? That it was as much a part of him as his ship? Maybe someday he'd tell her all of it -- if he stuck around long enough, if he ever let them get close enough. What he would never tell Leia was that he had prayed to every god on Corellia and a few dozen others to let them come through this alive.

"Let's go, Leia. We have a rendezvous to keep."

Following Han out of the hospital, she waited as he negotiated a rental aircar. A few moments later they were headed to the spaceport. "Are you going to explain things to me. Who was that woman?" Leia asked as she watched the traffic and people around her.

"Wait 'til we get back to the ship," came his terse answer.

Glancing over at him, she saw his white-knuckled grip on the controls. Something was really bothering him. They stopped at an intersection and as she waited, Leia noticed a huge wall in front of and to her right. Her eyes travelled up the wall and widened as they beheld the holo projected on the wall. "That's her."

"What?"

Leia leaned forward and pointed out of the 'car. "That's her. That's..."

Han slapped her hand down and gunned the engine. He took off with a start, causing Leia to hit the seat with enough force to knock the air out of her lungs. "Don't say anything. Don't point at anything. To answer your question, yes, I know that was her. That was Ny'A. That was also O'Gunnye'Ararshganah. She's known on Grianlen as the Goddess of Death."

As they boarded the Falcon, Leia made her way to the cockpit as Han took a walk through his ship to make sure everything was untouched. The rest of the journey had been made in complete silence. What could one say after Han had laid that revelation on her? But it seemed to make sense if one believed that a true goddess could come to life. Sitting in the co-pilot's chair, she waited for Han's return and ran over the events of the past few days. It made sense. If Ny'A were really the Goddess of Death then she could take whomever she had wanted. And apparently, she had wanted Han.

Her thoughts were interrupted as Han sat down in his seat. "Any problems?"

"Not that I can see. Looks like she wasn't bothered at all," Han answered as he reached for the comm switch. Leia listened as he asked for clearance to leave and heard his disgust when he broke off. "Must be a busy time now."

"Just our luck to have to sit for thirty minutes or more til we can get clearance." Han ran a pre-flight check.

"Well, since we're going to be here for a little bit, why don't you explain to me how you know about Ny'A and what she means to you."

Leia leaned back into the softness of Chewbacca's chair and waited. "About six or seven years ago, Chewie and me landed on Grianlen to drop off a cargo that had given us a rather nice pay-off so we celebrated by buying ourselves a couple of drinks. While in the cantina, we heard a commotion at the bar but paid it little attention since it didn't involve us. Chewie woofed a question and I glanced up to see an old man dressed in some sort of religious clothes standing in front of our table. I was just about to tell Chewie to toss him to the other side when he sat down. Either the man was real drunk or didn't have much to lose..."

"You weren't invited to sit, old man, so I suggest you leave or I'll have my friend help you to move." Han indicated the Wookiee with his drink.

"I will be dead by moonrise so it doesn't matter."

Han sat up and glanced around, looking for the person or persons that were gunning for the old man. He didn't want to get into the middle of a fight. "I think you better leave."

"You need not worry about yourself. Only I am in danger. I just wanted to spend time here doing what I love -- that's drinking, if you haven't figured it out. It's my one weakness and that's why I was kicked out. By the way, my name is Nagenn Viras, once Temple Priest to the Goddess of our planet." The old man extended his hand towards Han.

Han decided to be friendly, for a moment anyway. "I'm Captain Han Solo and this is my co-pilot, Chewbacca."

Nagenn looked at his hand after Chewbacca released it. It looked to be in one piece but it felt much smaller. "It is nice to meet you both."

Han was curious in spite of himself so he asked, "How do you know you're gonna die?"

"Do you know the history of Grianlen, Captain?" The Corellian shook his head then drained his glass. He poured more from the jug he and Chewie had bought and added some to the old man's glass. Savoring the flavor of the atabi brandy elixir, Nagenn began to speak. "Ages ago this planet was first colonized. Quite a few years after the initial settlement, people started to die. All ages of people from infants to elderly. There were no marks, no signs of disease, nothing. Everyone began to panic. Hundreds died each night. At this time there was no transportation off Grianlen because the supply ships only came around, once a season.

"The leader of the people tried to keep everything under control but it was hard. No one could be trusted. This leader had suggested that some deity had been angered so a Temple was built to appease this deity. Sacrifices of animals and, unfortunately, some people, were carried out.

"This leader also happened to be a deeply religious man. One night he decided to sleep in the Temple, hoping to call the deity to him. Just after moonrise, she appeared to him. She was the Goddess of Death and her name was O'Gunnye'Ararshganah. Her son had been stolen from her and until such time as he was returned, the deaths would continue."

Nagenn stopped to finish the rest of his drink. Han refilled it, interested in the ending. "So what happened next?"

Smiling, the old man continued, "The leader informed the people of his vision and a cry went out through the galaxy. If this creature were indeed a Goddess and her son would then be a God, then they knew her son was not on Grianlen. A few days later, a man landed on Grianlen. He talked for a few minutes with the leader then disappeared into the Temple. Two days later he reappeared and left the planet. The killings stopped that night. According to the leader, the man set out in search of the Goddess's son and the killings would stop until he returned or until the length of time of ten years had passed.

"Life returned to normal for the most part for everyone. But as six years turned into seven, people began to worry and make plans to leave. Some folks got it into their head that if they left, she couldn't touch them. They were wrong. She found you no matter where you went and took care of matters.

"Anyway, just into the ninth year, the man returned to Grianlen. He arrived at night and held a sword of light to guide him to the Temple. Word spread that the stranger had come back and the crowd grew outside the Temple. Just before dawn, the Temple glowed with an unusual light that some said outshone the sun. The man never left the Temple again.

"The leader spoke to the assembled crowd. The stranger had indeed found the Goddess's son and that life would be normal from now on. However, as she was the Goddess of Death, she would continue to take those whose time had come. The crowd cheered and there was much celebration for days to come."

Stopping the narration, Nagenn looked around then leaned closer to the Corellian and the Wookiee. His voice became lower as he spoke. "However, what I am about to tell you, no one outside the Temple knows. From that day onward six people and a leader were chosen to tend to the Temple and the Goddess. It is a job for the rest of your life. The priests know that the Goddess granted the stranger a request. Aside from limiting the deaths to only those whose time had come, O'Gunnye'Ararshganah granted the stranger with the glowing sword an additional request. She felt she was indebted to him for her son's safe return until such time as he chose to ask something of her. He refused this at first but she would not relent so he let it go."

"Has the debt ever been called in?" Han asked.

"Not to this day. We spend our days sometimes wondering what it might be. Ah, I see by the moon that my time is almost here. I must go now to see Ny'A."

"Ny'A?"

Nagenn nodded. "Yes, that is the name the priests give her. A more familiar name, and it seems to amuse her, or so I'm told. As I told you, this job is for life and they told me to leave as I can not keep my mind on my work. I have weaknesses that they cannot tolerate any more so tonight Ny'A will come to me and I'll finally see her as she

truly is. I'd like to think she is as beautiful as her Temple wall holo.'

"That's her? Wow, she is gorgeous. I wouldn't mind meeting up with her." Han's hazel eyes glinted in the dim light as he remembered that same holo.

"Do not wish that, Captain. If you see her, then it is your time to die." Standing, Nagenn said, "My thanks for the drinks and the time to let an old man ramble. Clear skies to both of you."

"Yeah, and to you as well." Han watched the old man stagger out the door of the cantina.

"Chewie and me left soon after that and I haven't been back until this trip with you," Han said, concluding his story.

"A man with a sword of light. Umm, do you think he was a Jedi? It certainly sounds like one," Leia remarked.

"A Jedi? It figures you'd see one of those in it. But, I guess it could be.' Han reflected back on Kenobi and his duel with Vader. He could almost see Kenobi in that role of the stranger but it had happened long before Kenobi's birth.

"After what you just told me, I guess she really did visit us and that the sparing of our lives is the debt that has been repaid.' Perhaps the Alliance will win the war against the Empire and we are to a part of it." Leia's thoughts jumped ahead to a possible future and a victory.

"Don't get your hopes up too much, Your Worship. It's possible we'll end up dying on another planet," Han stated.

"Must you always be so damn pessimistic?"

"Hey, I'm just being realistic. But it is interesting to think that I'm headed for some bigger and better things." Han smiled at the thought.

Leia sighed. Sometimes there was no getting through to that thick-headed Corellian.

The beeping comm brought the princess back to the matter at hand. She waited until Han had finished with the 'Port Control and they were safely in space. -"There is one thing I forgot to mention. We are not to set foot-orr-Griarden--again-or we-- won't see the sunrise."

"No problem." Han turned to work on the navicomputer. He punched in the coordinates for their meeting with Luke and Chewie and while those were being processed, he put in an alarm alert which would sound whenever Grianlen would come up on the screen. Maybe the Goddess was getting back at him for knowing a little too much information about her. It's not like he had mentioned it to anyone else. He'd tell Chewie just in case it might extend to him, too. Getting the ready signal, he pulled down the hyperspace levers and the Falcon shot into the whirling colors. "I'm rather hungry. I'm gonna fix me something. How about you?"

"Fine. I'll be there in a minute.

"Suit yourself." Han left the cockpit and headed towards the galley. Best to forget about the incident all together. The strange appearance of a Goddess ranked right up there with the Force and all that hokey religious stuff. He probably should've had Chewie dump old man Nagenn out the door before he had uttered a word all those years ago. Oh well, too late now. Best to look forward to the future. After he and Chewie collected their payment for this Alliance run, he should think about heading out, though General Rieekan had asked him to stay and help them settle the new base. Luke had discovered a nice place to hide out on a planet called Hoth and Han really did like the General. He'd discuss it with Chewie later and see what happened.

Pushing the processor selections, he called out to Leia, "Are you coming?"

"Yes, I'll be right there," Leia called back in response. She had been watching the hyperspace colors and they reminded her of Ny'A's swirling gown.

Everything was going to remind her of this for a long time to come. It brought home how close she had been to death. Not that waging this war against the Empire didn't do it every day, but somehow this was different. It wasn't her life for the Alliance but her life for a man. A man who cared less for her than he did a piece of leather. She stood and stretched. She really couldn't give up the fight. The entire galaxy would be at stake if the Alliance lost this war. Her

strength, her courage and her drive were major moving factors in this war, a war she would win.

As she made her way out of the cockpit, something made her turn around. There in the swirling colors was the face of Death, the Goddess Ny'A. Leia backed up a step about to argue that they had left and would certainly never return. when she realized it was just a reminder. "Don't worry, you won't ever see us again," she whispered. Ny'A nodded and faded from view.

Leia felt it best not to tell Han about this. She didn't think it would set well. Taking one look back out at hyperspace, she suppressed a shiver and went to join Han and whatever her future held.

END

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