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WEDDING DAY BRUISE  
by CAROLYN GOLLEDGE

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The last time Princess Organa-Solo and her husband has visited the isolated world known as Erenda, they'd had no time to enjoy its scenic virtues, as one continent warred with the other. But now, a year later, peace reigned supreme. They were here on a much happier mission and were thus able to soak up the atmosphere like any of the many tourists who wandered about the magnificent forested cliffs and golden beaches of Anny McCarn's small hometown. Anny had returned here so that her family might be present on the occasion of her marriage to an off-worlder who had settled on Erenda some ten years before. Jake Kellahen was Corellian by birth, and therefore a born pilot, spacefarer, and ready-made friend for the man who had hauled him from his sinking, wrecked plane: General Han Solo.

Now, all four friends were gathered outdoors, basking in the wondrous warmth of an early summer season as they enjoyed a picnic lunch in one of the high meadows overlooking a lustrous blue sea. To an outside observer, it must have looked an odd group in a beautiful setting: two men dressed in various mismatched military-looking outfits, armed and lethal-like despite their laughter and relaxed, lazy poses; and two much smaller, delicate-looking women who for all their fragile appearance seemed to be dominating the direction and tone of the conversation. The women had the intent, more serious expressions denoting they considered the task at hand urgent and not to be taken lightly. By contrast, every nuance of their companions' posture, and speech, plus the gleam in near-matching sets of bright hazel eyes indicated mischievous sabotage. The conflict of interest inevitably erupted.

"Oww!" General Han Solo cried, clutching at this wife's tiny, yet deceptively strong fingers as she yanked his head toward her, almost taking an entire swath of his hair out by the roots in the process. Now I

know why she likes it long! Hurriedly he sat up, spat the long tem of wheaten-grass he'd been chewing at, and protested, "I am paying attention!"

"Sure you are!" Leia released his hair. "So what were we just talking about?"

Solo blinked, shrugged, tried a sheepish smile, and said, "The wedding?"

Opposite him, also sprawled comfortably on the meadow-grass carpet, long legs stretched out full-length and crossed at the ankles, Captain Jake Kellahen gave a hearty laugh, then hastily slammed his mouth shut as he realized he'd attracted unwanted attention. His own Lifemate-to-Be turned suspicious, sharp green eyes on him.

"You think that's funny?" Anny accused. "So, why don't you tell us precisely what we were discussing?"

It was Solo's turn to make strangled signs of amusement. Kellahen threw him a deadly glare that had no effect whatever. Anny and Leia looked at him expectantly. "Umm, ahh," he said, waving his hands about helplessly, then turning the fingers in toward his chest. "Somethin' about how the bridesmaids' dresses need to be altered to fit better about the, umm, ahh," he felt his face growing warm, and finished weakly, "here." His fingers came to rest on his upper chest, and Solo's laughter broke free of any restraint. I wonder if there is a precedent for murdering your best man the day before the wedding! Jake thought savagely, watching as the general rolled about, lost to gleeful enjoyment of his friend's suffering.

Solo gained control long enough to splutter, "If that makes you blush, buddy, your face is gonna light up the entire town come tomorrow night!" A fresh bout of laughter was abruptly ended with another "Oww!" as Leia Organa gave her husband a hefty slap on the rear.

Jake was somewhat mollified to see that Solo's ribald comment had at least made a matching pair of his and Anny's faces. He sighed, she looked so incredibly beautiful anytime, but that blush, following the contours of her cheeks and highlighting the red hues of her short-cropped, curly hair...the image set against the backdrop of wildflower-strewn, glossy green spring meadows...took her beyond beautiful into the realms of magic. Her eyes were flashing as she glared from Solo to him, but then widened in pleased surprise as Jake leaned toward her, brushed his lips over hers, and whispered, "I can hardly wait. How about you?"

She surrendered to the kiss, her lips as hot and eager as his own, but aware they had an audience, she drew back, giggled and punched him lightly in the ribs. "We finished talking about those dresses five minutes ago, Captain Klutz!"

The merriment in his eyes belied the insulted expression he tried to muster in response to what was secretly his favorite of her endearing names for him "I resent that!" Kellahen declared, jumping lithely to his feet. "I am completely healed and I'm no klutz. You have me confused with General Hospital over there. Let's see you try this Solo!" With that he took a short run, jumped and performed a perfect cartwheel, then a handstand.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Leia protested as her husband made ready to accept that challenge.

"Right!" Anny put in, going to Jake and pulling him to his feet. "No macho-male competitions. Not on the eve of my wedding."

"Macho-male?" Solo repeated with wounded innocence.

"OUR wedding," Jake reminded Anny, giving her another quick kiss.

"I give up!" Leia exclaimed, "It's impossible to get these two to sit still long enough to listen to the details. They don't the meaning of the word 'PLAN' anyhow!"

The men exchanged mock offended looks.

"How true," Anny sighed.

"Does this mean we're free to go?" Solo asked hopefully.

"Listen to him!" Leia growled. "You'd think we'd been torturing him."

"Look," Solo put in, "what do we really need to know other than that we're supposed to show up at the church on time, properly dressed for the occasion of course."

"Anything else would be beyond their capacity for comprehension." Leia smiled wickedly, sharing this observation with Anny.

Jake looked set to defend his image, but Solo grabbed his arm and said, "Let 'em laugh, buddy, and we can make our escape."

"Not so fast!" Anny called. "The details don't matter too much," she said firmly, "as long as you remember what's most important."

"What?" Solo and Kellahen said in unison.

"I want Captain Klutz to show up on time and undamaged!"

"Right," Leia added, waving a forefinger at her husband. "No horsing around at the bucks' party tonight, Solo."

He gave her a look that screamed, Who me!?? and she rolled her eyes heavenward, beseeching help from greater powers.

"Not a scratch," Jake promised, leaning down to whisper in Anny's ear. "You can check the goods for damage tomorrow night."

"I have big plans for you Captain Cute," Anny rejoined with an equally lecherous tone. "Make sure everything's in working order."

He laughed. "With motivation like that, how could anything possibly go wrong?"

Later, some time close to midnight, in a now near-empty meeting hall that had recently been loud with the sounds of an all-male party, the scene was much less merry. There had been an accident.

Kellahen moaned again, his face white and drawn with fear as much as pain as he clutched at his ankle, rolling onto his side on the hard, plascrete floor while he tried to examine it without removing his boot. "I am going to kill you, Solo!" he ground out as his probing fingers did no more than double his suffering.

"Good!" Solo spat back at him from where he sat close by, legs crossed and drooping head held in both hands as if he were trying to hide. "I'd rather you do it than Her Royal Revengefulness. She knows all there is to know about torture." Thus reminded of his deadly peril, Solo let out a long, mournful groan. "What am I gonna do? Jabba the Hutt would have been more forgiving."

Jake unclenched his teeth long enough to find a sarcastically sweet tone, his mind working feverishly to think of ways to murder while unable to stand. "I'll be fine Solo. I love pain! Don't worry about me - I might be able to crawl to the first aid kit."

Solo lifted his head, blinked at his friend a moment, then as if only now realizing he should be doing something to try to contain the disaster, he got to his feet and hurried across the wide dance area of the hall they'd rented for Kellahen's bucks' party. The very same hall that was to double as the wedding reception area in less than twenty-four hours. Solo groaned again as he reached the red-banded cupboard on the rear wall, opened it and retrieved the aid kit. At least he'd sent all the half-drunken witnesses home to sleep it off. Well, all but those few who might prove useful. Skywalker, chief among those select as he was the most sober -- not by much -- had been sent in search of help. An aid kit wouldn't be much use - Solo knew that from a wealth of personal experience.

"Bitch, bitch!" Solo responded as he turned back to his prone friend. "It ain't that bad is it? I didn't step on you that hard!" Kellahen gave him a glare that would have done Leia Organa proud. "C'mon," Solo added pleadingly as he crouched down and opened the kit, "please, tell me it ain't broken!"

"Broken!?!!" Jake's jaw dropped. "Of course, it's broken! Stepped? HA! I like that! You didn't step on me Solo. As I recall you jumped. >From up there!" He lifted an arm and waved a shaky finger at a wide, solid wood beam that ran the length of the hall just below the raftered roof. It was a good ten feet up. "Whose idea was it to try a balancing act to prove we ain't drunk?"

"Yours!" Both men said in exact unison and with equal accusation.

Solo had found a spray can of painkiller. He lay his finger to the trigger and aimed it at Kellahen's leg before he realized he'd need to remove the man's boot first.

Watching Kellahen resumed his tirade. "Broken? Ha! Try smashed, pulverized, crushed! You're no lightweight anymore, Solo. Getting' pudgy in fact." That comment earned him less than gentle treatment as Solo tugged at Kellahen's boot.

"Will you shut up?" Han growled, taking advantage of the forced silence as Kellahen winced.

"Tryin' t' knock me cold..." Kellahen did indeed sound faint as he concluded, "t' hide from the truth. Old age has that effect, puts on weight, y'know - OHH!"

Having given the boot a hefty tug and very nearly sent his friend into oblivion, Solo gave up, his eyes round with dismay. "It can't be that swollen already!"

"It is! And it's your fault!"

"MY fault!? Now wait one minute!"

Jake ignored him, continuing as if talking to himself. "If I explain it just right to Anny...yeah." He smiled groggily, "Maybe I'll get TLC instead of a beating." Solo snorted at that and Jake looked up in time to read his expression "What are we gonna do?" he wailed.

Solo shrugged. "Run away and join the Imperial Resistance?"

"Funny. My foot is killin' me, solo. Where did ya leave that brandas bottle? Give me a swig and maybe I'll feel good enough t' get up 'n even the score."

"Nice." Solo muttered, but he obeyed, hunting about until he'd found the bottle. He took a hefty swallow himself before handing it to his less-than-amused friend. He sat back on his haunches and looked hopefully toward the door. "Where is that Jedi when you need him? Surely the great Master of Hocus-Pocus ain't havin' problems doing somethin' as simple as finding a doctor."

"In the middle of the night?" Jake wheezed as he choked down another gulp of brandas. "In this hick town? And--" he met Solo's and they concluded together, "-- drunk!"

"Who says I'm drunk?" Luke Skywalker announced with all the cheerfulness of one who was exactly that as he came striding in. A small, overweight, bald man carrying a medical case gasped and panted in his wake. "Meet Doctor Martinell."

"Well it's about time!" Solo scowled, waving the fellow closer. "Where's Wedge and Chewie?"

"The doc asked them to wait outside," Luke smiled. "I think Wookiee's make him nervous."

"Wrong," Martinell put in succinctly as he bent to tend Kellahen. "Anything that big and drunk and liable to fall on me makes me nervous. And I don't need a bunch of drunk spectators. Would you move back a little please, General? Your breath leaves a lot to be desired."

Solo's jaw dropped in outrage. "We're not that drunk!"

Luke had moved to close the door - it was cold out there - but he paused and listened awhile first. He was grinning as he returned to the group about Kellahen. "They're taking bets on whether Jake'll make it or Anny'll kill him."

Kellahen groaned louder than ever, lay back, and closed his eyes.

Carefully finishing slicing Jake's boot from his foot, the doctor put down the knife, then pointed at the overhead beam. "Is that a flask of beer I see up there? You fell Captain?"

"Naah," Kellahen suddenly sounded carefree -- or bordering on hysteria. He nodded toward Solo. "He did. On me. This all the thanks I get for savin' his lousy neck. Next time, don't count on me to catch you buddy!"

"I should hope you've both learned your lesson and there will be no next time," Martinell lectured, blinking in amazement as he gauged the distance from the beam to the plasi-crete floor. "If you're not drunk, you're insane!"

"Some choice," Solo muttered. He flinched as he glanced back at Kellahen's ankle just as the doctor peeled back the man's sock. It was not a happy sight - something sharp and unnatural-looking was pressing up from beneath Kellahen's already darkly bruised flesh. "C'mon," Solo sighed, looking back at the doctor, "put me outta my misery - tell me it ain't as bad as it looks."

"Put you out of your misery. HA!" Jake lifted his head to scowl. "I'm the one in agony here Fumblefoot!"

"I don't doubt that, son," Martinell said in a gentler tone. "I'll give you a shot." He reached into his medical kit and produced a hypodermic. Kellahen, as scared of needles as was Solo moaned again. "I'm afraid, General," Martinell continued, "the injury is in fact worse than it looks. The least movement now and this would be a very nasty compound fracture. As soon as this painkiller takes effect, I'll immobilize the break, then we'll need to find some transport to get your friend to the city hospital - two hours drive from here by groundcar."

Solo and Kellahen were becoming very good at chorus. "Uh-Uh! No way!"

"I can't go to the hospital," Jake continued, definitely near hysteria now. "I'm getting married tomorrow."

Preparing the hypodermic, the doctor froze, wide-eyed with astonishment. He stared from his patient to Solo as if wanting confirmation and the general helpfully added, checking his wrist-chron, "It already IS tomorrow."

"This was a bucks' party?" Martinell gaped, then sighed, tested the syringe and jabbed Kellahen with it as he concluded, "HIS bucks' party?"

"I already told you that..." Luke frowned at the man. "Didn't I?"

"No." Martinell gave him an exasperated look. "You weren't making much sense at all at the time." Skywalker blushed. The doctor checking his patient, asked, "Feel better now, son?"

Jake shrugged. "What's it matter? I'm a dead man."

"Now, now." Martinell patted his shoulder in paternal fashion. "It's not as bad as all that."

"You don't know Anny," Jake said glumly.

"And Leia," Solo added even more grimly.

"That's the lass you're supposed to be marrying tomorrow...er, today?" Martinell asked as he pulled a package of Ready-Cast from his bag.

"Anny, yeah," Kellahen responded, his voice growing more and more slurred with the effect of the painkiller. "But it's not 'supposed' to, it's I am marrying her. Today. I've already waited long enough...just excaped from one hospital." He made the effort to lift his head and meet the doctor's eyes as he concluded firmly, "So, no hospital! Got it?"

"Without immediate expert attention...." Martinell began, equally firmly, but Solo overrode him.

"You don't understand, Doc," the general woozily did his best to explain. "I'm dead, he's dead, if our women find out about this."

Jake drifting on a consoling tide of alcohol and drugs, hiccoughed and nodded sorrowful agreement.

"You can't be serious," Martinell sighed, unfolding the wet cast.

"Technically, we'll still be breathin'..." Solo responded. "But in every way that really counts - if you get my drift - we'll be dead in the water."

"No way t' start a honeymoon," Jake moaned. "Anny's so damned religious 'bout these things...she wouldn't let us...y'know...until after the wedding!" Desperately, Kellahen propped himself up so as to grab at the doctor's arm. "I'm tellin' ya, Doc, I can't stand it another day! You're a man. You know how it is. Please! Ya gotta help me!"

Martinell nodded sympathetically while at the same time trying very hard not to grin - the farcical nature of this entire situation just beginning to hit him. "I am helping you, Captain! Just lie back and relax. This won't take more than a minute. General, could you hold his leg steady for me, please?"

Seeing that the doctor was set to wrap the sodden cast about Kellahen's ankle, Solo moved to obey, but Jake sat up further, wincing with pain as he protested urgently, "A cast? What are ya tryin' t' do? Get me murdered? Ya can't put that thing on me!"

Martinell's amusement was already turning to impatience. "Fine. I'll just go home, back to my nice warm bed and my own wife...and leave you here. I'm sure your intended won't mind marrying you right here -- in this state!"

Jake blinked at him, moaned, and flopped back to the floor. "This can't be happening to me!" He let out a scream of sheer frustration. Chewbacca stuck his head in the door to see what they were doing to the man, but was in time only to hear Kellahen very calmly ask the doctor if he could borrow his knife.

"Now, now," Martinell summoned all his medical training to try to sound soothing, "suicide is a coward's option."

"Give me the knife!" Jake growled. "I'm not gonna kill myself, I'm gonna kill him!" He made a lunge for Solo, jurt himself and the doctor reached to force him back. Chewbacca stepped into the room with a blood-curdling roar of protection of his Clan-Cub.

Looking up, horrified at the fangs-bared, towering Wookiee, Martinell went as white as a sheet. "That's it," he whispered. "I think I will go home."

Solo waved Chewbacca outside and Skywalker shut the door after him. In the ensuing silence, all they could hear was Kellahen's moaning. "You

have to have this cast," Martinell told him, getting to work. "But after that, do what you want. I don't care! I warn you, this ankle need surgical attention - soon - if you don't want to be crippled."

That item of news sobered Solo completely very quickly. He glared at Martinell as if his friend's suffering were all the doctor's fault. "What kind of hokey medicine have you people got on this backwater hole? As I recall, your medics didn't do Jake much good the last time he had the misfortune to get hurt down here."

Martinell equaled him glare for glare, but Kellahen paid the price in the doctor's rougher handling as he secured the cast. "If that's the way you feel," Martinell snapped, "you take care of him then! We may not have your off-worlders' fancy medicine, but then we don't have up-to-date methods of maiming and killing our enemies either!" He slammed his case closed, gave Kellahen's vital signs a cursory check, and noted the pilot was very nearly asleep under the effect of the medication. "If you're not taking him to a hospital, at least get him off this floor and into a warm bed. He could still go into shock" With that dire warning, he turned his back on them all and strode angrily from the room, calling back, "I won't wish you all a good-night, but do give my sympathies to your womenfolk."

The entire hall shook as Martinell slammed the door behind him.

"Nice going, Han," Skywalker scowled.

"It's not my fault!" Solo argued.

Luke sighed and looked down at a sleeping Kellahen. Skywalker shrugged out of his heavy black coat and draped it over the injured man. "Maybe we should take him to the hospital," he said.

Just then the door opened again and Chewbacca and Wedge came in. "Boy that doctor was really steamed," the dark-haired pilot commented. "What did you say to him?"

"Nothing!" Solo snapped. Then to Skywalker he repeated, "We ain't takin' him to no hospital."

Wedge and the Wookiee came up to stand over the sleeping man. "He's gonna be okay then?" Wedge asked, noting the still sticky cast. "It was just a simple break?"

"Oh, shut up!" Solo said sullenly. "Chewie pick him up - carefully. We'll take him back to the Falcon."

"The Falcon!" Luke protested. "We haven't got time to take him to an off-world doctor!"

"I know that!" Solo roared, causing Kellahen to stir in his sleep.

"It's bad then?" Wedge asked diffidently. "He is gonna be okay, isn't he?"

Solo calmed down, gave Luke an apologetic squeeze of the shoulder. He sighed. "Not if Anny sees him like this on their wedding day. There's gotta be a way to fix him up."

\*Don't they have bone-fusers here?\* Chewbacca asked, cradling Kellahen's leg firmly as he carried him toward the door.

"And bacta," Wedge put in. "That'd have him able to put some weight on that foot in time for the wedding."

"There's no advanced medicine on this planet," Luke explained.

Wedge's eyes widened, "Uh-oh," he said.

"Uh-oh, big time," Skywalker seconded as they stepped out into the cold night air.

Solo suddenly halted, snapped his fingers and turned to them with an all-too-familiar gleam in his gold-brown eyes. "Wait! I got an idea."

All three of his friends groaned loudly in response.

"No it'll work," Solo insisted. "Trust me!"

They groaned louder.

The weak, yellow-red dawn light that reflected from the small town's transport station's stone walls nonetheless promised a hot day ahead. It also clearly indicated time was passing much too fast for General Solo's peace of mind. Not that there was much peace of mind left to lose, he thought sourly. He climbed the three steps that led from the air-car bay up into the street, checked for signs of life, saw no one - Leia wouldn't be up at this early hour, surely. She liked to sleep in whenever they were off duty.

"All clear," he whispered back to his companion, waving an arm for her to follow him. "C'mon we've only gotta make it to Field 7, not far."

"I know where the Falcon is, Solo," the tall, shapely blonde woman muttered as she appeared from the shadows. "You've already told me a hundred times!" She came up beside him, watching exasperatedly as he checked the street again. She wore a matching white trouser suit marked with the blue stripes and circled insignia indicating she was a member of the Allied Worlds medical staff. The same insignias adorned the bulging medical case she carried on a long strap over her shoulder. That strap pulled tight across her coat front, clearly delineating some very full, rounded curves. Doctor Alicia Meredith was a strikingly beautiful woman.

Even if he hadn't been married, Solo was in no mood to note that fact, however. He turned to her, taking her elbow to hurry her along. "Maybe I should take your med-kit," he offered, knowing it had to be heavy if she'd brought all the gear he requested. Thank all the Gods, he'd remembered she'd been sent down - well, to the neighboring continent known as Zalina - to lecture the natives on the very medical advances he'd so recently informed Martinell were urgently needed. Still, it had been a four-hour round trip to get her here. She must be tired, and she still had to treat Kellahen. Gotta keep her fresh, Solo thought, making to take the heavy burden of her kit.

Meredith pulled away from him. "Stop fussing, Solo! I'm perfectly capable of carrying my own kit. You'd only drop it anyhow."

"Shh!" Solo hissed, lifting a warning finger. "Do ya wanna wake up the entire town?"

"Oh, for stars' sake!" She rolled her eyes heavenward, ignored him and marched quickly around the corner into the main avenue. "I will not be party to all this ridiculous sneaking around. Oh!" She stopped suddenly, causing Solo to bump into her as she lifted a hand to shade her eyes. She peered into the low-rising sun and said, "Isn't that Her Royal Highness - your wife, coming this way?"

"Don't make jokes like that unless you want cardiac arrest..." Solo didn't finish, his mouth dry and his heart very nearly performing the aforementioned condition as he stepped around Meredith and saw she wasn't kidding. "Kreth! I don't believe this." It was too late to hide. Leia Organa had the sharpest eyes in this or any other galaxy. She was already heading their way. "Quick!" Solo urged, turning to Meredith, "give me that kit." She did so. He looked about for some place to hide it, found none, was out of time, so he shoved it behind him, between his legs and

the nearby wall. "Does she know you?" he asked Meredith in an urgent whisper as his wife hurried closer.

"I don't think so," she said slowly.

"You don't think!" Solo tried to keep quiet and explode at the same time, turning to glare at her. "Struth! Can't you be..." Meredith elbowed him and he heard Leia come to a halt at their side. "Good morning sweetheart," he greeted, hoping his voice and his smile didn't show his nervous state as he turned about to face her.

"It might be," she said warningly, raising an eyebrow at the tall, beautiful stranger at her husband's side, "if you introduce me."

"Oh, ahh, sorry," Solo mumbled. "This is Alicia. Ahh, she's a friend of Jake's."

"Pleased to meet you, Alicia...?"

"Meredith," she smiled, taking Leia's offered hand. "It's an honor to meet you, Your Highness."

"Thank you." Leia's eyes went to the insignia on the woman's coat. "You're with the Medical Corps? Is that how you met Captain Kellahen?"

Meredith opened her mouth to answer, but Solo laughed and spoke for her. "Sure was! Jake meets all his friends in the hospital. That's how I met you, remember?"

Leia gave him a suspicious look. "I wouldn't talk about hospital records if I were you, Solo." She stepped closer and Solo backed up. She frowned at him. "Don't I even get a good morning kiss?"

"Uh, sure." He leaned forward and gave her a quick peck on the mouth.

"That's the best you can do?" She cocked an eyebrow at him. She noted his feet seemed rooted to the spot since he hadn't moved to embrace her.

Solo grinned weakly. "Sorry. Best man jitters. Trust me I'll make it up to ya tonight when all this fuss is done with." He shook his head, trying to avoid her piercing eyes - she was on to him. "Good thing we don't have a lot of weddings to go to. I swear, this stuff gets me on edge more than any battle nerves."

"Oh, really?" she said skeptically. She nodded toward the wall behind him. "Are you hiding something back there, Solo?"

"Uh...yeah," he hedged. "A wedding gift."

"So...I'm not the one getting married." She made to push him aside. He stood fast. "What's going on here?" she demanded.

"Nothing!" Solo summoned every ounce of his famous boyish charm and innocence. He should have known better...that act only made his wife a hundred times more suspicious.

Meredith came to the rescue. "Well, it's not exactly a gift," she put in. "It's sort of a surprise for the reception party. I've worked hard to get it ready in time...I'd like it to be a surprise for you too, Your Highness...if you don't mind."

Leia forced polite smile. "Of course."

Solo let out a relieved breath. "Meredith is part of the surprise herself, in fact," he played along. "Jake hasn't seen her in years."

"Indeed." Leia knew they were up to something, but she also knew she no way of getting at the truth. Just now. "I'm pleased to see you aren't hung over at least, flyboy." She stretched up on tiptoe to give him another quick kiss. "I'll see you later then. I've got a million things to do."

"Yeah, me too," Solo agreed. He was sure his legs were about to buckle with sheer relief as he saw his wife turn to go. Then, she stopped and looked back at him.

"Is Jake up and about yet? I hope you didn't get him too drunk last night."

"Uh...no, no." He's fine. He's already workin' on getting' himself all duded up."

"Good," she nodded. "Make sure he stays that way. Keep to the game plan. We want this to be a special day for him and Anny both."

"Oh, it will be," Solo said under his breath.

"What was that?"

"Special," he looked up at her, smiling brightly. "Got it!"

She frowned suspiciously one last time, but gave Meredith a farewell smile, turned and marched off toward Anny's cottage.

Solo turned to Meredith. "Thanks! Boy, you really save my neck."

She sighed. "I feel like a traitor to my own kind. Come on, let's get this over with." She hefted the kit back to her shoulder. "Your neck and Kellahan's foot. It's going to be a long day."

"I tell you, they're up to something!" Leia repeated, watching as Anny McCarn, her hair wrapped in a towel and her body draped in a less-than-flattering cottinna bathrobe, lifted a stunningly beautiful white lace wedding dress from its hanger and held it up against herself, smiling as she caught her reflection in the wall mirror.

"Well, you did say they said it was a surprise," Anny commented absently.

"Oh, I don't doubt that," Leia muttered. "Exactly what kind of surprise is what worries me. That woman looks more like a stripper than a medic."

That remark earned Anny's full attention. "Really?"

"Top-class stripper," Leia amended. "Holomodel maybe, for one of those sporting goods places or something. Legs up to her chin, boobs out to here." She indicated.

Anny frowned. "A friend of Jake's, huh? What did you say her name was?"

"Meredith. Umm, Alice, I think it was."

"Never heard of her." Anny fell silent, thinking, her frown pulling at the towel on her head. "If she's such a good friend that she's been invited to the wedding...it's a wonder Jake's never mentioned her. Unless...."

"Unless what?"

Anny looked down at her slippered feet. "She's one of his old lovers."

Leia couldn't think of any reassurances. It sounded like something Solo would do all right...try to embarrass the life out of one of his friend on the most important day of Kellahen's life. "I'll murder him!" she growled.

"Jake?" Anny looked up at her.

"No. Solo!" she scowled. "My low-down, conniving, prankster of a husband. An ordinary, civilized service would be too boring for his tastes. Well, he's not going to get away with it this time! Whatever they're up to, I'm going to stop them!" She turned to leave the room. "Right now!"

"Wait!" Anny called. "I'm coming to. I want to ask Jake a few things about this blonde bimbo."

"What do ya mean you can't fix it?" Solo wailed in utter despair as he stared down at Kellahen's injured leg. It was still encased in the starkly white, bulkily accusing cast. The pilot lay propped up on Solo's bed aboard the Falcon. Kellahen was awake, more rested-looking than Solo, who'd been travelling all night, but other than that his expression matched the general's.

"Oh, come on, you two," Meredith chided as she packed away her scanner. "You're supposed to be the Rebellion's greatest heroes. You too, Skywalker," she amended, giving the young Jedi an appreciative look where he stood leaning up against the doorframe. "Can we have a little less hysterics? Chin up, boys! You're just going to have to take your punishment like the brave, stoic warriors we've all heard so much about."

"But they'll kill us!" Solo gaped at her.

"No sex is hardly a matter of life and death," Meredith informed him unsympathetically.

"On your wedding day?" Kellahen squeaked, utterly horrified.

Trying desperately not to smile as she turned to him, Meredith patted Kellahen on the head and suggested, "Remind your wife-to-be that it was all Solo's fault. She shouldn't find that too hard to believe."

"Hey!" Han cried out indignantly. "I thought you were on my side."

"I'm a doctor," she told him smugly. "It's my job to care for and protect the injured party."

Kellahen would normally have enjoyed Solo's predicament, but his own was yet to be defused. "She'll still be mad as hell at me." He looked up at the attractive doctor, tried his little-boy-lost and his forlorn puppy-dog looks all in one. "Come on, Doc, I can't show at my own wedding in this thing." He waved a hand at his heavily weighted foot. "Surely you can improve on that at least."

"Well," she let out her breath in a long, thoughtful sigh, checked the scanner printout a second time. "I was only going to leave the cast in place because there's no time for the fusing to take properly...but maybe there is a way round it...if I..."

Solo and Kellahen had both craned forward, hanging on every word, but she was unable to finish, interrupted by a warning growl from Chewbacca who'd been stationed on guard duty by the ramp - Solo knew Leia was bound to come sniffing around sooner or later looking for answers to the morning's charade. He'd hoped for later. He got sooner.

"I knew it!" Solo exclaimed. He went to the cabin door, meeting up with his first mate as he came charging down the corridor. "Get him into the hold, quick!" he ordered.

"It's worse than that," Skywalker put in, having reached out to touch his sister's presence in the Force. "She's got Anny with her and I get the distinct feeling they're looking to speak to Jake, too."

"WHAT?" Solo's jaw dropped. He hadn't felt this panicked even as he'd dumped Jabba's spice with a Star Destroyer on his tail. He gaped at Skywalker a moment, then put standard battle stations into practice. "You stall 'em. I'll think of something."

"You're not thinking at all, Solo!" Luke rebutted. "You know I can't go anywhere near Leia. She can read me like a vid-screen."

Solo glared at him. "You're gonna have t' learn how t' lie to her someday, kid."

"Well, not today," Luke threw back. "Not unless you want to give away this entire mess - which is all your fault!"

They stood glaring at one another 'til Chewbacca roared at them to do something fast. He could smell the women's scent much closer as they crossed the field toward the Falcon.

Solo ran a hand through his hair, trying to squeeze a solution from the brain beneath and not finding one. "Hell, I don't know! I'll go stall 'em. You think of something." Not giving Skywalker the chance to argue with that plan, he hurried away, wanting to meet the women before they could board the ship. As he reached the outer hatch, he heard Kellahen yelling, "Will somebody tell me what the hell's gone wrong now."

"Shut him up!" Solo shouted back to Chewbacca. He looked around again as he arrived at the foot of the ramp and came face to face with the two most suspicious and keenly determined female faces he could ever have imagined in all his worst nightmares. "Hi!" he smiled shakily. Leia was glaring blue murder at him. Hurriedly, he glanced at McCarn. "I thought you'd be busy getting all dolled up." Her glare was only slightly less hostile. They couldn't have found out already...could they? After all, Leia had that same mumbo-jumbo witchcraft that her brother liked to spook him with on a regular basis.

"Shut who up and why?" Leia demanded, still eyeing him critically.

"L-Luke," Solo shrugged. "You know I can't stand it when he starts singing the same tune non-stop. This morning it's 'Get Me to the Church on Time'."

"Uh-huh," Leia said skeptically. "He's here then. Good, I want to talk to him, too."

"You can't!" Solo squeaked, trying to block her, but not daring as her glare intensified and she pushed him, Anny close behind.

"And why not?" she demanded, peering into the cockpit on her way to the common room as if looking for a stowaway.

"Umm, he's, ahh, in the shower," Solo lied. "That's why he was singing so much."

"I see." Leia stopped as she entered the common room, turned in a circle to examine it thoroughly. "What happened to your lady friend from this morning?"

"Oh, she's around...y'know, getting her surprise ready."

"Which is precisely what we're here to talk about." Leia folded her arms over her chest and looked up at him. "C'mon, Solo, give! I want the whole truth."

"The whole truth," he repeated, not knowing what else to say.

"We want the whole truth," Anny put in. "But I want it from Jake. Where is he?"

Solo swallowed hard - a neat trick for a man whose throat was as dry as a Tatooine desert. "He's...getting ready." Anny turned towards Solo's cabin. He flung out an arm to block her. "You can't go in there. He isn't dressed."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "I was his nurse, Solo, remember? I've seen it all before." She pushed by him, palmed the lock on the door. It remained closed. "What's the code?" she asked him.

"Never mind." Leia reached around her husband and slapped the lock that had long ago been reprogrammed to take her palmprint too.

The door whooshed open. Solo closed his eyes, trying to summon the courage to die like a man.

"There's no one here," he heard McCarn say a moment later.

"Where are you hiding him?" Leia demanded, turning back to Solo just as he opened his eyes, round with astonishment as he saw that, yes indeed, there was no trace of life in his now-empty cabin.

"H-hiding him?" Solo stuttered. "I ain't hidin' no one. He was here a minute ago, I swear!" At least that much was truth.

All three jumped as Chewbacca's deep voice rumbled out behind them further down the corridor. \*If you're looking for Jake,\* the Wookiee called, \*he's in here.

"Did ya have t' tell 'em, Chewie!" Kellahen could be heard responding in immediate complaint. "This is sorta embarrassing, y'know."

Anny and Leia exchanged expressions and turned in unison to eye Solo accusingly.

Han decided this one time in his life he'd do well to keep his mouth shut. He shrugged, smiled sheepishly, and waved the women out into the corridor. I hope you know what you're doin' Chewie, he prayed silently. Why in blazes had the Wookiee taken Kellahen to one of the unused engineering bays?

If the ladies' expressions were comically astonished as they entered the small engineering storage room and gaped down at Kellahen, Solo's was infinitely more amusing. Chewbacca couldn't hold back a whuffling series of chuckles. Hearing him, Solo managed to scrape his jaw off the deck, but he couldn't stop staring. There, in a makeshift bathtub, sat Kellahen, immersed to his naked armpits in what looked like thick, black engine grease! Some kind of sickly sweet perfume filled the air.

"Just tryin' t' get all the kinks out," Kellahen smiled u at his wife-to-be. "Chewie here swears this stuff works like a charm. We did a lot of dancing and such last night, and you know..." he shrugged. "A man's gotta be limber on his wedding night, right?" Jake was immensely relieved when that comment had the expected result of making Anny blush from head to toe, completely shaking her so that - he hoped - she'd forgotten all about the intended inquisition. "As I said before, you look real beautiful when you blush like that, sweetheart. You gonna give me a kiss or are we supposed to save 'em all for the ceremony or something?"

"No, of course not," Anny said, still thrown. She moved forward, bent down and wrapped her arms about his neck, then gave him more than an adequate kiss.

Solo found his voice. "Maybe we should give them some privacy, huh?" he suggested. Leia gave Kellahen one last suspicious glance, eyed Solo then followed him and Chewbacca from the room.

"That is the craziest thing I ever saw," she whispered to Solo, not wanting to offend theWookiee. "Did Chewie make you take on those ridiculous grease baths before we married?"

"Un, yeah," Solo snorted wryly. "Chewie reckons it's a great aphrodisiac."

The Wookiee barked an answering laugh and it was Leia's turn to blush, but she also smiled slyly, took Solo's hand, squeezed it and said, "Anny best get some rest this afternoon then. You all but wore me out."

"Ha!" Solo let out a breath - he could barely believe that somehow they were going to make it through this unscathed. "As I recall, Your Passionateness, it was the other way 'round."

Back in the common room, Leia questioned Solo again about Meredith and he assured her there was nothing uncouth or embarrassing planned that would mar Anny's enjoyment of her wedding day. She seemed reasonably convinced by the time that Anny emerged from the makeshift bathroom.

"Jake says Chewie'll kill him if he climbs out of that awful goop one second before time." McCarn smiled shyly at them, then shrugged. "Whatever! Just as long as he has it all washed off when he shows up at the altar this afternoon." She looked so radiantly happy that Solo felt a stab of guilt. "Well," Anny continued, "my husband-to-be is way ahead of me in the beauty treatment stakes. I better start playing catch-up." She turned for the outer corridor. "Coming, Leia?"

"Behave! And be there on time," Leia threw one last warning as she got to her feet and made to follow McCarn.

"Hey!" Solo admonished, "I got everything on schedule here, Your Royalness. Looks to me like you and Anny are lagging behind." Leia gave him a wary look along with a kiss, then disappeared down the ramp.

Solo collapsed into the nav-seat opposite the game table. "I don't believe it!" he cried. "God does love me after all."

His victorious moment was short-lived as two voices shattered the peace. One a sultry, amused female called, "You're not in the clear yet, Solo, so don't get cocky!" The other, a less-than-happy Kellahen begged, "Will someone get me outta this stuff?"

When Her Royal Highness, Leia Organa-Solo, entered the church at the appointed hour that afternoon, two paces behind a bride who looked even more the princess than the real thing, she was still certain something wasn't right. Her brother, the galaxy's only Jedi Master, would have referred to that unsettling intuition as a "bad feeling". Leia preferred to think of it as a woman's innate understanding of the male psyche. Solo was trying to hide something - something that made him very nervous-and Leia, tried and true leader of the Rebellion, was sure the moment of truth was at hand.

The fact that everything looked perfect would have had anyone else relaxing. Leia, by contrast, was more on edge than ever, vast personal experience telling her the more a situation looked perfect, the more likely it was about to disintegrate into total disaster. She cast a suspicious glance up at her husband who stood beside Jake Kellahen at the head of the aisle by the altar where the priest and Threepio - who would act as translator for those non-human friends present - also waited. Solo winked back at her, telling her silently that she looked stunningly beautiful. Pleased, she gave him a small smile that was also a warning. He responded to that with an eyebrows-raised, wide-eyed innocence that set

the final touches to what was a ravishingly handsome figure dressed in his best, royal blue general's dress uniform with the red and gold piping. Leia was even less immune to Solo's charms than the other women in the congregation - who had to be relishing the veritable feast spread before them. Kellahen, Skywalker and Antilles also looked the epitome of heroic warrior-gods, freshly descended from Paradise. Leia's heart melted into a warm flood of love and pride at the same moment her brain screamed red-alert! Solo was giving her his innocent look, the ceremony seemed to be going without a hitch - something was very wrong!

Relax, dammit! Leia ordered herself. You're getting paranoid. She watched as Anny McCarn, glowing as much with happiness as with the effect of dappled sunlight falling through tall, stained-glass windows onto her pure white satin and lace gown, took the last pace to her husband-to-be's side. Kellahen couldn't restrain a broad, proud grin as he moved to take her hand. Leia could have sworn there was something odd, unnaturally smooth about the way the groom crossed that short distance to stand before the priest, but she was distracted as Solo came up beside her, bent and gave her a quick kiss. He looked so damned blindingly handsome it was making it almost impossible for her to concentrate on that warning feeling. Curse him! She gave him another smile as they came to a halt to stand behind the newlyweds, prepared to act as their witnesses.

Swept up by the joy and beauty of the ceremony, the simple yet eloquent vows that Anny and Jake had composed themselves and were now being given back to them to repeat after the priest, it took a moment for Leia to realize that Solo was fidgeting with something in his left-hand coat pocket. If he'd lost it, she'd kill him on the spot! Her own fingers closed about the broad gold circle she was to pass to Anny to give to Jake - she had her job covered. She watched nervously as Solo's left hand continued to struggle within the pocket.

"-these rings," the priest was saying, echoed by Threepio, "are circles, representing the never-ending, eternal bonding of your love each for the other, your gift, your souls exchanged, united and made one, forever." He paused, looking expectantly to the Best Man and Matron of Honor.

Anny turned to Leia. Jake somewhat clumsily turned to Solo. Threepio took a jerky step forward to get a better look, tripped on the carpet, and fell heavily against Solo who instinctively made a grab at him. Something dropped from Solo's left hand and fell clattering to the tiled section of the floor behind him. Threepio, trying to reclaim his balance and given a shove by Solo at the same time, stepped back and kicked the fallen object further away as Solo bent urgently to reclaim it.

Captain Jake Kellahen, arm still outstretched for the ring, suddenly shot skyward - or more accurately, floated rapidly up toward the arched, vaulted timbers of the church roof thirty feet above the slack-jawed heads of the congregation.

Anny McCarn found her voice first. "Jake!" she cried. Futilely, she reached up to grab at his dangling feet, but he was already well beyond her desperate fingers. She may have, therefore, been the first to notice that his left foot, cleverly disguised by a fake boot-top and long trouser leg when looked at from above, was in fact encased in what could only be some kind of medical support. "Jake!" she repeated, this time threateningly. Angrily, she shoved her veil back from her eyes as it threatened to fall forward and obscure her view of her still ascending husband-to-be.

"Get me down!" Kellahen wailed faintly from high above. "I hate heights."

"Solo!" Leia yelled. "You are a dead man."

"Forget that," he yelled back. "Help me find the anti-grav remote."

Luke, Meredith and Wedge leaped from their seats to join the fray - being after all only too aware of what had happened and thus not overcome by shock as was the rest of the congregation - many of whom had never heard of anti-gravs, much less seen what could happen to someone wearing a lifter-belt gone awry because in its controls had been left in the hands of a madman.

"Solo!" Leia repeated, more furious than ever as she was forced to drop to her knees, dragging her expensive gown over the tiles as she too poked and probed in the shadows under the bench seats in search of the remote. She struggled against a rage that made her nearly incoherent, then finally found speech sufficient for an entire sentence. "When did he break his foot?" She grabbed at her husband's arm, hauled him away from the search, leaving the others to it. Chewbacca had joined them and was bodily lifting benches, horrified spectators and all, out of the way.

Solo dared to look up into his wife's dangerously glittering eyes. It was worse than he had imagined. He flinched and looked away as he mumbled. "Last night." He lifted his hands helplessly. "It's not my fault!"

Leia stared at him, her own hands lifting toward his temptingly exposed throat, but her eyes leaving that target to look high above as she heard a communal gasp of amazement and fright from the congregation.

Kellahen had finally come to rest, stopping only because there was a roof available to prevent him drifting ever upward all the way offplanet. They could all hear a faint cry of pain as the groom's head made solid contact with one of the wooden arches.

"Arddh!" Leia screamed, now reduced to such primitive verbalization. Her hands closed about Solo's throat. She squeezed.

"Oh, thank goodness!" Threepio cried. "I've found it." Clutching the slender device, he hurried forward, apparently intending to return it to Solo, but alas and alack - he tripped and fell heavily over Skywalker's kneeling form. Worse, he landed atop the fragile device, his metal-clad body smashing it beyond recognition.

A shrill, genuinely terrified scream rang out above all the mayhem. It was Anny, watching as Kellahen, no longer buoyed by the anti-grav beam, suddenly, rapidly dropped, racing toward the stone floor. McCarn's horrified scream was instantly joined by many others as the congregation too saw what was happening.

"Anny!" Kellahen cried despairingly as he fell.

Solo issued a foul curse and charged forward in unison with Chewbacca, prepared to catch the man, but the milling spectators slowed them.

Skywalker, and the Force, saved the day. Calm, sure, eyes closed, hand outstretched toward Kellahen, Luke sent that mysterious power outward, casting an invisible net about the stricken man. Kellahen's break-neck speed ended up mid-air, so suddenly that he was jolted enough to send the fake boot galling free of his broken foot, leaving the white of a thin bact support bandage clear for all to see. There was a ripple of relieved, sighing breaths from the formerly horror-frozen crowd. Then a wave of whispering voices, the closer one clear enough to reveal such comments as, "Why, look at his foot." "There's something wrong with..." "No wonder he..." "How did they..."

Amid all the fuss, Skywalker demonstrated what a Jedi was all about. Unfazed he continued serene, undisturbed, his hand lowering, smoothly, slowly, and Kellahen followed it, coming safely back to ground as light as a feather.

Solo swallowed hard, got his heart to start beating again, reached out and clapped the Jedi firmly, gratefully on the shoulder. "I owe ya another one, kid," he said sincerely.

Luke merely nodded and smiled, opening his eyes to turn toward center stage.

There stood Kellahen, grinning shakily, overcome by relief as he balanced himself somewhat precariously on his good foot. Several paces forward of him Anny McCarn stood stock still, crying quietly, still too shaken to move as she stared at her miraculously rescued lover. "J-Jake!" she sobbed. "Oh, Jake!"

"Aww, geez, Anny," he said contritely, his grin vanishing, his dark eyes wide and liquid as he regarded her distress, "I'm sorry, babe." Wanting desperately to comfort her, he took an unwise, hobbling step forward, stumbled and almost went down.

"Hold it right there!" Doctor Meredith shouted, moving forward, "Don't you dare put any weight on that foot!"

Solo grabbed her before she could intervene and spoil what was rapidly becoming a very touching moment - not to mention the kind of emotion that could save his hide. "Leave 'em be," he said softly. "She's got him."

Anny did indeed have him. The moment Kellahen had stumbled, wincing with pain, she'd charged forward, grabbing at her long skirts, then letting go again as she reached him. His arms reached out to envelop her just as hers did him. They came together in a heartfelt embrace, kissed once passionately, quickly, then drew back to look long into each other's eyes.

"I love you so much, Anny," Jake said, his heart revealed clear and true in the simple words that echoed about a church suddenly gone absolutely hushed, everyone enthralled, watching.

"I love you, too," she sniffed. She smiled; he smiled; they leaned closer, and lost themselves to a kiss that looked like it would never end.

"Ahem." The priest cleared his throat, shook his head, and tugged at his robes, trying to reclaim some semblance of decorum. Loud into the stillness, he called, "And so, by the power of God, and before these witnesses, I now pronounce you man and wife."

The congregation burst into spontaneous applause.

Doctor Meredith's eyes were misted with tears as she turned to Skywalker and kissed him on the mouth by way of celebration. Skywalker responded happily enough, wrapping his arms about her buxom figure.

Watching, Solo raised an eyebrow, turned to find his wife wearing the same expression as she met his gaze. "The kid's had a good example," Solo drawled, a slow grin tugging at his mouth, "but he ain't got it quite right. It goes more like this." He bent down, took his wife in his arms and gave her a long, warm kiss.

When at last the embrace ended, Leia was a little breathless, but still determined Solo would not entirely escape punishment. "We're going to discuss this, hotshot," she told him warningly, waving a finger at him. Laughing, he leaned forward and kissed it.

"Well, that all turned out for the best, didn't it?" Threepio put in immediately behind them.

Solo swung about, intending to tell the droid his plans for dismantling him very, very slowly, but Leia jabbed him in the ribs.

"The rings, flyboy!" she urged. "Come on, they're waiting for us."

End

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