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INTO THE WOODS

by Z P Florian

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Princess Leia Organa stared at the computer screen. "This is positively eerie," she said to herself. The screen showed the fourth report on a missing diplomat. Since the establishment of the New (Interim) Galactic Government on the Green Moon of Endor, some two months ago, three ambassadors had somehow disappeared. And now, the fourth. Leia knew that rumors already circulated about the New Government quietly assassinating diplomats who proved themselves difficult to handle. "The last thing we need," she sighed. The Alliance, now the New Government, tried to establish a friendly relationship with every system, planet, race, species ... Even the choice of their headquarters showed that they were not obsessed with Standard Human superiority, like the Imperials. The Endor Moon, with its furry inhabitants, seemed to be a wise choice. "Who knows," grumbled the Princess. "Four missing diplomats!"

She glanced at her door. Her brother stood there, in his usual black uniform, looking serious.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

"Good, I want to talk to you, too."

"It's about the missing ambassadors."

"Even better: I wanted to talk about them, too."

Luke came in and settled himself in a chair. "You start," he said.

"This cannot go on. We must find out what had happened to them. We can't afford rumors of assassinations."

"I read all the reports of the disappearances. There is one thing common in all three cases."

"Four," Leia corrected sourly.

"Four now? This is getting worse. Well, all three I've studied had something in common. They all went for a walk in the woods."

Leia shrugged. "This is not exactly a well-patrolled forest, you know. It's full of animals, and not all of them are cute and furry."

"The investigations, so far, were remarkably unsuccessful. I'm going to see to this myself. And now, I'm going for a walk, too."

Leia smiled. "If you disappear on me now, I'll tear your ears off."

"I'll keep that in mind."

* * *

The forest, with its rich green life, did not appear threatening to the young Jedi. He walked slowly, trying to imagine where a visiting ambassador would go, and how could anyone disappear in this paradise. Small, rarely traveled pathways beckoned among the trees; they led to picturesque ponds, chattering streams, dancing waterfalls, and, deeper in the woods, to Ewok villages.

Luke smiled when he saw a group of Ewok children playing in a clearing. They noticed him, and ran, squealing, to the wooden ladders. "Ata hub, ata hub!" they screamed, climbing fast. Luke followed them. Up among the trees, the usual Ewok walkways surrounded the tree village. The children shyly hid in the huts, behind their mothers, and a few adults came out to see the visitor. One of them recognized the Jedi, and hugged him with great fervor. The others hurried to bring him gourds of drinks and a large wooden bowl with food. Luke accepted their hospitality, and sat down to eat with them. He didn't understand their language, except a few basic words that most Rebels had learned already, but he enjoyed their friendly chatter anyway. He resolved to bring Threepio with him the next day.

He stayed in the woods till dark, but neither saw nor sensed anything that could shed a light on the mystery of the missing diplomats. Dismayed, he started walking back. A little nagging feeling flickered at the back of his mind, as if he had forgotten something.

He found Leia in her room. Threepio was there, too.

"Great," Luke said, "I need you tomorrow. You'll have to translate for me. Well, today was wasted. By the way, Threepio, what does *ata hub* mean?"

The golden droid hesitated. "If I can trust my memory, Sir, it means something like a drumstick."

Luke went pale as a sheet. "I see. Leia ... do you remember what was the first thing you'd done when we met in the Ewok village?"

"Yes -- we tried to convince the Ewoks to help us find the bunker." She smiled at the memory. "And they did."

"No, not that. What did you do before?"

"Hm, there was quite an uproar about Threepio being a God ..."

"Almost there. Remember: what was the first thing you told the Ewoks about us?"

"That you were my friends!"

The Jedi slammed his fists on the table. "Your friends, and not ..."

The Princess sank into her chair. Luke finished his sentence with a triumphant cry. "And not dinner!"

"The missing diplomats! My stars! The Ewoks ate them!"

"Uh-huh. Our friendly little allies. I'm afraid we've forgotten that they are carnivores."

Leia shivered a little. "Well, then, we just have to make this public and warn all visitors not to wander into the woods. At least this assassination rumor can be cleared up." She looked at her brother. "So ... drumstick. Which reminds me, Luke, have you eaten yet? Would you like to join us for dinner?"

Luke shook his head. "I had a meal with the Ewoks ... some stew with mushroom sauce .." His voice trailed off, and his eyes widened with horror.

"Master Luke!" Threepio wailed, "Master Luke, this must be an exceptionally unpleasant moment for you. Let's all hope it was not someone we knew."

"Threepio, you are not helping," groaned Leia, as the bathroom door slammed shut behind the Jedi.

End

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