

[Back To Alphabetical Index](#)

[Back To Crossover Index](#)

[Back To Other Ford Fiction Index](#)

RAIDERS OF THE LOST CARBONITE

by Carolyn Golledge

This story was written just for fun and is not an attempt to make money or infringe on any copyrights or trademarks. Only the original ideas contained within the works on this nonprofit web site are the property of their authors, and please do not copy or link these stories to any other website or archive or print without permission of the author.

Part 1

"Goddamnit Sallah, it should have been here! I can't understand it." Dr Indiana Jones, temporarily secure from the snakes within the Well of the Souls, slammed the palm of his hand against the stone wall in frustrated, angry disappointment. "It just doesn't make sense. Those readings were correct, this is definitely the Well of the Souls. Where the hell could it be?!"

"I do not know, my friend," the swarthy Arabian digger commiserated. "It is very puzzling. But the Nazis will be no better off than we are."

"Well, I suppose that's some consolation, but what I can't figure is what the hell this thing's supposed to represent. I've never seen anything like it before." Jones moved closer to the strange, upright metallic effigy of a man. He examined it closely. "Weirdest lookin' mummy I've ever seen. Poor guy doesn't even look like he was dead when they put him in there. Looks more like the kind of expression you'd find at Pompeii. Damned if I know how this thing got here. It sure isn't Egyptian. Wonder what could be making these panels on the side glow.

Sallah watched nervously as Jones began running his hands over the odd row of lights. Both men took cautious steps back as the glow suddenly

changed from yellow to green and began pulsating rapidly. An eerie low hum filled the underground chamber. The light became dazzlingly bright.

"Indy, there's something not right," Sallah warned. "This figure is not of this Earth."

The two men watched, mesmerised, as the material melted from around the male figure which then slumped and fell forward.

"Hey!" Jones caught the now limp form before it could be damaged by contact with the stone floor. Carefully, he lowered the unusually cold, oddly clothed mummy. Those look like twentieth century clothes! He thought in amazement. But even this unique find could not overcome his intense disappointment at the loss of the Ark of the Covenant. "Great!" he said bitterly, "All we've got for all our hard work is one dead body, and there's no way we can preserve even that for further study."

The 'body' at his feet moved slightly, moaning and gasping for air.

"Hell! He's still alive!" Terrified, Indiana backed away from his awakening archaeological discovery.

Han Solo was at first aware of nothing but blackness, cold and pain, but he knew he was breathing again, and so it wasn't all bad news. The pain and the cold were too intense to allow him much room for thought as to his likely fate at Jabba's hands. At least, that's where he assumed he was - it felt like one of the Hutt's grimy, stone floors. A sudden severe spasm of muscular cramps and nausea caused him to groan in spite of the fact that he did not wish to give his bloated former employer anything further over which to gloat.

Realising his discovery was human, in considerable pain, and needing help, Indiana overcame his shock, bent back down and lifted the groaning, shivering man into his arms.

"Take it easy, pal. You'll be okay. Just try to relax," he said as reassuringly as he could considering he thought it unlikely that the man would survive for much longer. He looked up to find his Arabian friend still rigid with surprise and superstitious fear. "Sallah, get back up there and rig some kind of a harness for him. He doesn't look too good, but maybe we can keep him alive if we get him to Cairo Hospital fast. He should have an interesting story to tell if he lives."

As Sallah finally snapped out of his trance and left, Jones turned back to the man who was now shivering violently within his supporting

arms. "Translation's going to be difficult. You can't even understand one word I'm saying, can you?"

Han was beginning to recover his wits a little as the worst of the pain receded. Now he wondered what the hell was going on. It wasn't like one of Jabba's henchmen to hold a prisoner in his arms and reassure him he was going to be all right, not to mention talk about hospitals. Maybe he was somewhere else. Why the hell didn't somebody switch on the lights?!

"I c-can un ... der ..s-stand every w-word you're s-saying," he said testily. "Wh-what the h-hell's goin' on here? Wh-where am I?"

Indiana was so stunned that he almost dropped his patient. "Egypt," he answered automatically.

"N-never heard of it." Han began shuddering so violently with the cold, that his abused body responded with more pain. He moaned.

The man was dying in his arms, Indiana decided fearfully. He looked up to the opening in the roof. Still no sign of Sallah. What in blazes was he doing? Taking a tea break? The torches were going out, it was dawn, the Nazis were bound to spot them any minute. "Sallah!" he shouted desperately. "For God-sakes, get a move on!" Still no response.

"Why in Agarith c-can't someone t-turn on the lights?" Han complained. "T□tryin' to save on power?"

Well, he sure doesn't sound like he's dying, Jones thought with amused relief, before realising what the man had said. He felt a sudden rush of compassion for the awakened man, instantly losing interest in what his strange find might be able to reveal to the scientific world. With a sickening sense of the certainty of the outcome, Indiana lifted a hand and waved it only inches in front of the blankly staring hazel eyes. Not a flicker of reaction.

"You lost your voice or s-somethin'?" Han inquired, trying to keep the fear from his voice as he suddenly realised what might be the cause of the continued darkness.

"Look, I can't see any sign of injury, so maybe it'll wear off eventually," Indiana began gently. "But your eyes ... it's not that dark in here. There are burning torches all around us. Can't you see anything at all?"

Jones felt his companion's muscles tense in fear. He watched as the man raised a shaky hand and stared unseeing toward it. "No, nothing," Han said flatly.

"Maybe the doctors at the hospital will know how to treat it," Indiana suggested tentatively. Where the hell are you, Sallah?! He cursed inwardly.

"S-sure h-hope s..so," Han stammered as he surrendered to another wave of icy cold. He tried to hug his arms to his chest to warm himself, but they were still far too stiff to be of much use. Blind, Solo! That's just damned terrific. And you don't even know where in all of Halix Egypt is! This guy sounds familiar somehow. Sure hope I can trust him. Gonna need help from someone. His grim ponderings were cut short by an even more chilling flood of cold and cramps. Seth! How long does it take for this to wear off?

"Hey, you're just about freezing to death, aren't you?" Solo's rescuer's voice proclaimed. Han felt a warm jacket being wrapped around his trembling shoulders. Hell, Solo, he thought in grateful surprise, this guy might not be too bad at that. Better than Jabba by a long shot, that's for sure!

"Th-thanks. Who are you?" Han reached up and contacted the face belonging to the voice. Better make sure he isn't just another bounty hunter. His hand met only a lightly bearded, square-jawed human face. A strong, sure hand clasped his and shook it slightly in the universal human greeting.

"I'm Indiana Jones. What about you?"

"Han Solo."

"Pleased to meet you Han," Jones answered with a smile as he realised the man seemed to be gradually recovering. The convulsions were coming at longer and longer intervals and seemed to be lessening in force. "Sure like to know how you wound up in that metal coffin."

Solo's Corellian instincts took an immediate liking to this Indiana Jones. Those feelings have never be wrong before, he thought happily, Looks like you're in luck. Done Jabba outa his prize again. He found himself smiling ruefully as he answered, "it's a very long story."

Further conversation was interrupted by a malicious laugh. Indiana groaned as he looked up to see that it was too late. They had been found out. Belloq was leering down at them. "Why, Dr Jones, whatever are you and your associate doing in such a nasty place?"

"Why don't you come down here and I'll show you!" Indy replied.

Solo heard a strangely accented voice decline the invitation. "Thank you, my friend, but we are all very comfortable up here." Han was sure by the tone of voice that this man was no 'friend' of Jones'. The Corellian instincts which had easily warmed to his rescuer, took just as immediate a dislike to the unseen foe, who was apparently somewhere high above them. The voice continued its taunting. "I see you have not managed to locate the Ark. Really, Dr Jones, you disappoint me. But never mind. Who, knows, in a thousand years even you might be worth something!"

"Sonofabitch!" Indiana swore as he realised just what his adversary had in mind for them. "Look, Belloq," he attempted to explain. "This man is hurt. He's blind. HE has nothing to do with the Ark. At least let him go."

The Frenchman's eyes glinted with icy blue anger. "You take me for a fool, Jones? Why else would he be down there? This will be a fitting end to your life's pursuit, don't you think? You're about to become a permanent addition to this archaeological find."

Feeling sure he wouldn't like the answer, Han asked, "What's he talkin' about?"

"They're going to ..." Indiana began, but was interrupted by Dietrich.

"We have to be going now, Dr Jones. But I do not want to leave you without your woman."

"No!!!" Indiana pleaded, standing and leaving Solo, but it was too late - Marion was already being cold-bloodedly hurled through the opening thirty feet above.

Solo heard a woman's panic-stricken scream. Jones called frantically to her to hang on. Horrified, Han realised that the woman must have been thrown from somewhere high over their heads. There was another even more shrill scream as Marion lost her precarious hold and fell. A 'whump' and Jones' comforting words assured Han that the woman had been caught and was not hurt.

"It's okay. I've got you," Indiana soothed.

Han was mystified by the woman's reaction. "Get your hands off me, you damned traitor!" she cursed angrily, then screamed, "They're too big!" Solo didn't like the sound of that last comment. His head whirled in weary, aching confusion.

"Will someone please tell me what's goin' on here?" he shouted frustratedly. He put a hand to the floor and struggled to push himself to his feet. It was no use, his legs were unresponsive, rubbery and numb. Jones' hands suddenly grabbed him and helped him to a sitting position, pushing him gently back to lean against a stone pillar. Han noticed the distinctive smell of female perfume. A rustling of soft material told him that the woman was now somewhere close by.

"I think we're in trouble Solo," Jones replied as he checked that the floor upon which the man sat was clear of snakes. "It's not going to be easy to explain."

"Where did you find him?" Marion interrupted, her anger rapidly replaced by curiosity as she examined the oddly garbed man.

"It's a long story," Indiana sighed, wondering how he was ever going to answer both sets of questions. He settled for introductions first. "Marion Ravenwood meet Han Solo."

Politely, Marion reached out her hand in greeting. Solo made no move to take it or even acknowledge her presence. "Well, I see his manners are about on a par with yours, Jones!"

Patiently, Indiana grasped her arm. "Take it easy, will ya, Marion," he whispered. "The guy's been through a rough time. He's blind."

"Oh no, I'm so sorry," Marion apologized gently. Solo felt a soft yet firm hand grasp his. "Pleased to meet you, Mr Solo."

"My pl ..." Han was forced to leave the word unfinished. He pulled his hand back abruptly and flinched as something unseen and definitely reptilian-feeling slid across his leg. "What was that?!"

"Indy, the torches are going out!" Marion's comment held a good deal of fear. Han did not find it all reassuring.

"We're in trouble," Jones affirmed grimly. "Here Solo. Take this. It's a burning torch." Jones took Solo's hand and wrapped it around the handle. "Wave it around you near the floor. It'll keep the snakes back."

"Snakes! Where?"

"Everywhere," Marion complained. "The whole place is slithering with them."

"Oh great," Han muttered in disgust. So much for Corellian luck! "Of all the places I could have woken up in, why did it have to be one full of snakes! They're even worse than Jabba." Terrified, Han scrambled up onto his knees. Jones assisted him to his unsteady feet.

Tearing off the hem of Marion's dress, which Solo had inadvertently set fire to with his wild torch waving, Jones could not help but react with sympathetic amusement. "You too, huh? What's a Jabba?"

"Jabba's not a what. He's a who - a Hutt."

"Oh." Indiana wondered absently which civilisations had been referred to as 'Hutts'.

"Jones, ya gotta get us outa here," Marion pleaded.

"I'm workin' on it! I'm workin' on it!"

"Well, whatever you're doing, do it faster." Marion was horrified. Her torch was beginning to dim. Unable to see his predicament, but sure he wouldn't like it, Han nodded his fervent agreement.

"Aha! I've got an idea," Jones announced.

"Where are you going?"

"Through that wall. Just get ready to grab Solo and run - no matter what happens to me."

"What do you mean by that?" Marion's tone was fearful.

"Just do it." Han was startled to hear Jones' reply apparently coming from somewhere above his head.

"Jones, don't leave us down here by ourselves!" Marion wailed.

"What's he up to?" Solo asked. He squinted around himself desperately and cursed as everything remained obstinately pitch black.

"Looks like he's decided now's a good time to examine that statue in detail," Marion muttered with calm sarcasm.

Han was only more confused, "What?"

"He's going to topple the statue. Try and smash his way through that wall. Damn fool will probably kill himself."

Alarmed, Han listened intently. He almost jumped out of his skin as an almighty crash resounded about him. Dust suddenly choked the air. He began to cough, finding that this renewed the pain in his chest and lungs. Marion's amazingly strong arms were wrapped about his waist. He ignored the cramping pain as she urged him forward. Han soon found himself being assisted to climb over a mound of rubble. As soon as they had reached the other side, he asked, "Where's Jones?"

"Don't know. It's so dark in here." Marion called, "Indy!"

Solo's heart skipped and his blood chilled even further as Marion began screaming hysterically. Had Jones been crushed? Han flinched as dusty objects began toppling onto him. "Marion! What is it?" he called. Her screams only increased in intensity. Nervously, Han ran his hands over one of the objects. His disgust was tempered with relief. "Ugh! Skeletons. Well, at least it's not more snakes." He tried to find and comfort the terrified woman, but could only curse his lack of sight as he tripped and fell.

Marion's screams ended abruptly. Jones' voice soothed, "Marion, it's all right. Come on. I think I've found a way out." Solo sighed audibly in relief as the archaeologist helped him to his feet. "How are you doing, Solo?" Jones inquired.

"Confused, but breathing," Han summed it up. "You?"

"Not a scratch. Think you're strong enough now to give me a hand to break outa here?"

"Sure." Jones guided Solo a little way further then explained that they had reached a stone block wall, one block being loose should come free if they both pushed against it. Han nodded. He pushed in time to Jones' instructions. There was a dull thud and a sudden nothingness as the block gave way.

"I'll go first, Marion. Take a look around. When I give the all clear, you help Han through."

"Right." Marion's response reflected a return to her normal calm.

A few minutes later, and Han was delighted to again breathe fresh air and feel warm sun on his face. "Guess we're out, huh? Instead of a big dark blur, I see a big bright blur."

Jones couldn't help but smile at the man's easy, wry reference to his blindness. "Stay down, or the Nazis will spot us."

"Nazis? What are they?" Han asked nervously as he wondered what kind of animal was threatening them this time.

"Brother! Where have you been hiding?" Marion responded disgustedly.

"Well ...," Han smiled. "I don't think I've ever been on this planet before."

"What?" Both Earthlings were stunned. They regarded their companion in shock. "Don't you mean in this country before?" Jones suggested.

"No, don't think so." Han ran a hand through the sand at his feet. "This place sure feels a lot like Tatooine, though. You two sure Jabba's not around here somewhere?"

Indiana gave Marion a worried look that said he thought the poor man had gone crazy as a result of his ordeal. They would just have to humour him. "Yeah Han, we're sure," he replied gently. "C'mon, we've got to try to make it to that jeep. Get back to Cairo. Here Han, grab hold of this. Follow me and keep low and quiet." Jones pushed the end of his coiled whip into the blind man's hands. Jones himself needed plenty of freedom of movement in case he needed to defend them. He drew his gun and began a stealthy approach to the empty, unguarded jeep.

A sharp tug on the end of the whip, which was still fastened about his shoulder, brought him to a stand-still. He stifled a curse and turned about to find Han unmoving, scowling straight ahead. "Wait a minute," Solo protested, the weight of his disorientation finally getting the better of him. "Nobody's told me a damn thing! Where are you taking me? Why are these people tryin' to kill us?"

Jones took a firmly reassuring grip upon Solo's shoulder. He could hardly blame the man for wanting some answers; he himself wouldn't mind asking a few questions, but this was not the place. "Han, you'll just have to trust me. There's no time for this now. I'll be only too happy to answer anything you want to know ... later. Believe me, the Nazis are bad news. Belloq's working with them. They want us all dead because I'm on the trail of something they want. They won't wait to hear your side. They think you're working with me; they'll shoot first. I've got friends in the city of Cairo. They'll help us. We can get you to a doctor. Okay?"

Remembering that the opposition had left them to die in a snake pit, that these two had not deserted him as they could easily have done to make a safer, faster escape, Han apologised for his outburst. "Sure. You already saved my life once. I owe you."

"It's okay, Han. It must be frustrating as hell not knowing. We'll figure it all out when we get to Cairo. C'mon."

Han followed silently for some time, simply concentrating on staying upright with only the tension on the whip to guide him. After some moments of thought, he couldn't resist whispering, "What's a jeep? Some kinda speeder?"

"I don't believe this," Marion groaned from somewhere behind him.

A few more stumbling steps, and Solo was advised, "This is a jeep. C'mon, I'll help you in."

Gratefully, Han slumped into what he recognised as a padded seat. As expected, next he heard a strangely noisy, rattling engine start up. He was shaken about as the jeep moved off abruptly, obviously in contact with rough ground, not hovering above it. "It is some kind of weird speeder." Han grinned triumphantly.

Marion took her eyes from the encampment long enough to give the stranger a withering stare, which, naturally, had no impact whatsoever upon him. She looked back to the digging site to see that their escape had been spotted. "Duck!" she warned as she pushed Solo's head down. "Indy, we've got trouble." This observation was punctuated by the sharp pinging sound of a projectile striking the metallic frame of the jeep. Several loud retorts of weapons being discharged were intermingled with the sound of more engines springing into life. The chase was on.

"Those the, uh, Nazis?" Han asked.

"Yeah, keep your head down," Jones called. "Marion, take my gun and give us some cover."

Han was thrown violently to one side as Jones made an evasive manoeuvre. "These creeps must be the Egypt variation of stormtroopers," he muttered. "Wish I had my blaster ... and a pair of eyes."

Marion stopped firing. She called back, "Indy, there's a full crate of dynamite back there."

"Hell!" Indiana yelled back. "If they hit that, we've had it, bound to be detonators in there as well. Han, can you give her a hand to push it out?"

"Sure." Han took a grip on the back of the seat and felt the edging of the box behind it. He began to slide it aft, but was halted by pressure on the other end.

"No wait," Marion suggested. "Anyone got any matches?"

"Good idea," Indiana replied as he fumbled one handed in his pocket, retrieved the safety matches and thrust them over his shoulder. "How long are the fuses?"

"Long enough for those murderers to get right on top of it before it goes off!"

Dynamite was obviously an explosive device, Han decided. "Give me the gun, Marion," he offered, still facing the rear of the jeep. "I'll cover for you while you throw the dynamite."

"What!" the guy really was mad. "You can't even see them!"

Han grinned slyly. "They don't know that. Just point me in the right direction."

Placing the gun in the man's outstretched hand, Marion followed this suggestion gratefully, revising her estimation of the man's intelligence and courage.

A deafening series of explosions and Marion's cheers alerted Han to their victory. "That sure fixed them good!" Marion crowed. "It's gonna

take 'em the rest of the day to shift that wreckage and clear that pass. We'll be well and truly in Cairo by then."

"I wouldn't count on that, Marion," Jones' grim tone instantly deflated his companions' spirits. "They've holed the radiator. We're not gonna make it further than a couple more miles. We'll have to try and find some place to hid up in those cliffs. The Germans will soon have that plane out here lookin' for us. We've got to get as far from the jeep on foot as we can." As he spoke, the engine coughed, sputtered and died. "This is as far as the bus goes, kiddies. Everybody out. I'll carry as much of this dynamite as I can. It should come in handy later. Marion, you take the water bottle and those oranges." He rattled the canteen. "Oh great, the damned thing isn't even half full." Jones turned to study a dismayed Solo. The man was in condition for a long haul over rough terrain under a desert sun. "You think you can make it, Solo? Marion'll guide you."

"Sure." Han was exhausted but he wasn't about to surrender to a bunch of would-be Imperials. "Look, I can carry some of that stuff, too."

Indiana admired the man's spirit. "Thanks Han, but no. You'll need both hands free to climb. We're going up into the cliffs. If you lose your footing ... we'll you'll have only your hands to hang on with."

"Oh." Han was beginning to wonder if Jabba's palace was really all that bad after all.

Marion chuckled softly at the man's crestfallen expression. This guy didn't look too well. What the hell had happened to him back there? Why had Indiana involved him? How had he been blinded? She pushed all her questions aside and reached to help the obviously weakened man from the jeep. "Don't worry, Han," she assured. "I'll hang onto you good and tight."

Solo realised what a burden he was becoming. These two were fighting for their lives. They didn't need a blind man tagging along. "Look, I'm sorry. I'll only slow you down. You'd best ..."

Realising what Solo was about to say, Marion shared a marvelling glance with Jones, then interrupted, "You actually managed to hit one of them, you know!"

Han was amazed. He grinned, pleased to think he had helped after all. "I did?"

"Yeah. Now c'mon, handsome, give me your hand."

Han looked in what he hoped was the direction of Marion's face and gave her a romantic wink. He was rewarded by the sound of her laughter.

* * *

After what had seemed an eternity of exhausting climbing broken only by the need to hide from their aerial hunters, and several painful but not serious falls, Han could not keep the relief from his face as Jones announced that they had reached their destination.

"This place looks okay," the archaeologist decided. "Besides, it's getting dark, and you look like you're about ready to drop dead, Han."

Solo managed a weak laugh. "No, I'm okay."

"Sure you are!" Marion agreed sarcastically. Solo was patently ill, shivering and sweating alternately and clutching his stomach as he was racked by cramps. Must be malaria, she decided, wondering how he had stayed on his feet all this time. "Here you'd better sit down before you fall down - again."

"Right." Han smiled tiredly and lowered himself thankfully to the rock strewn ground. Sith! He's never ached so much in his entire life.

Jones observed the man's exhaustion with concern. There was no telling whether he had been seriously hurt by the strange entombment he had survived. He shoved the canvas water bottle into his hands. "Here, have some water." He watched as Solo drank thirstily yet with well disciplined self-control. Solo took only two swigs before handing back the water.

"Thanks. How long do you think it will be before the local variety of stormtroopers track us down?" Solo asked.

"Sometime tomorrow morning I'd guess. We've got a good high spot here and this dynamite will hold them up a bit, but they've got the advantage, they can just wait for us to get good and thirsty. First thing tomorrow I'll go back to the foot of this ridge and find myself a hiding place. If you and Marion can divert their attention, I should be able to steal another vehicle. After that, well, I guess we make it up as we go."

"Yeah," Han agreed with a grim sigh. "They'll get a good run for their money. How come they're after you two, anyway? You Rebels or something?"

"Rebels?" Indiana laughed, interested. "No. They must think I have the Ark or that I know where it is."

"The Ark?"

Marion halted her peeling of an orange to stare at Solo. He wasn't working for Jones? What was he doing in the Well of the Souls then? How could he therefore not know of the Ark? The guy must have taken a good whack in the head. Must be why he's blind and can't remember things. He should be in the hospital.

Indiana ignored Marion's confusion. She'd never believe him in any case. He explained, "It's a religious artefact that the Nazis think they can use as a powerful weapon. I was trying to get it before they did. Their leader, Hitler, thinks it will make him invincible in battle."

"Sounds familiar," Han groaned. He winced as another cramp grabbed briefly at his abdomen.

Indiana held off on any further questions of his own, though he was thoroughly intrigued. The man needed rest and time to sort out his own problems. He nodded to Marion as she finished on the orange and passed it to Solo. "Here, Han, eat this," she instructed gently. "Maybe it'll help those cramps."

"What is it?"

"An orange, of course!"

"Ah! Oranges are some kind of food. I thought they must be more weapons - you know, like thermal detonators."

Marion gave Indiana an exasperated glance, but Jones was thoughtful. Ignoring him, she spoke again to Solo, "Oh, come on Han! You can't seriously expect us to believe that you've never even heard of an orange before!"

"Well, no. Maybe not," Han admitted laughingly. "If you won't believe that I'm from off-world it would seem a little strange." He

paused and frowned, to ask hesitantly, "Don't you people even have interplanetary space craft?"

"No Han, we don't," Indiana replied. He saw by the expression on Marion's face that she thought their 'humouring' had gone far enough, but he was fascinated ... maybe, just maybe ... "We have only recently developed aircraft."

Han's stomach lurched, his heart pounded. He struggled to control the fear that filled him. No, it couldn't be. Fett got here, didn't he? Must be some contacts. "Your own people stay planet bound then, but ... you do have a spaceport somewhere, don't you?"

"Spaceport?" Indiana repeated, puzzled. "What's that?"

Fear and sickness flooded into Han's mind and body. Where was he? He couldn't be completely cut off. Stranded, exiled for the rest of his life. Was this what Jabba had in mind by way of revenge? Oh Sith no. Han's head spun, images of Bespin whirled in his mind and he felt himself again falling, so cold. Shakily, he brought a hand to his head.

Alarmed as he saw Solo's cheerful expression vanish to be replaced by one of utter sadness, desolation and shock, Indiana hurriedly reached out, grasping his shoulder to steady him. Solo looked ready to pass out. "Han? What is it? You sick? Get your head down. Take a few deep breaths. Easy."

Han followed this advice automatically as Jones helped him. His mind was stunned, he couldn't think straight. Eventually, the dizziness receded and he sat back up, still supported by Jones.

"You okay now?" Marion was concerned; if it was malaria the man could be dead by morning. He had over exerted himself, maybe all he needed was food and rest. "Han, try and eat something. It'll give you some strength."

"It's not that. I'm not sick." Han tried to smile reassuringly but found he couldn't quite manage it. "You don't have any contact with spacers? You've never heard of anyone being from off world?"

"No Han," Indiana answered with gentle compassion. The man's shock at this news was genuine. There could be no doubt that he was from another world. There was no way of even telling him how long he had been frozen solid, deserted on an unknown world by a space-faring people. No wonder

the man felt ill. "Han," he said with as much confidence as he could muster, "It'll work out okay. We'll find some way to get you home. We've got some pretty good astronomers. Maybe you could show them how to send a signal to your friends." Silently, Indiana decided to steer well clear of the fact that Solo's friends may all have died thousands of years ago.

Of course, Han thought with renewed hope. They've got some technology. There's gotta be some way I can rig a transmitter. This man is a Professor. He should be able to help me.

Jones was astounded and happy to see Solo rediscover his broad, self-assured grin.

"Thanks Indiana, Marion. Sure, we'll figure something. Jabba's not gonna have the last laugh. There's someone who means a lot to me out there. Nothing's gonna stop me from getting back to her. Chewie'll never find me, even if he's gotten off Bespin. I'm sure Egypt's not listed in the vid-atlas. I'll have to reach him."

Marion wondered if Jones had done the right thing, reinforcing the man's wild delusions, but as she saw Solo's smile return, she was only glad that the archaeologist had been able to help him. She couldn't help but admire Solo's courage - blind, ill, dragged around under fire in a totally unfamiliar place, and now believing himself to be isolated perhaps forever from those he loved, he could still manage a smile. Maybe his delusions would wear off once he had received hospital care. She certainly hoped so - what a waste it would be otherwise.

"Eat your orange, Solo," she advised, finding her voice rough with an odd, gruff affection.

"Oh, yeah." Realising how weak he was with hunger and thirst, Han eagerly bit into the juicy flesh of the fruit he held. His eyes widened in pleased surprise. "Hey! These things taste great! You should really do a good trade in them on Tatooine or Bespin, and I know they'd be mad about them on Kashyyk!"

Indiana was amazed and curious at the sound of so many place names, but he could see that Marion still thought the man mad. She had however obviously decided to go along. Laughing, she asked, "What's your lady's name?"

Solo's features seemed even more handsome as a soft smile touched His lips and eyes. "Leia."

"Leia. That's a lovely name. What's she like?"

"Well ..." Han thought for a moment, feeling a sudden pain as he saw again the deeply ingrained last glimpse he had had of the woman he loved. Her beautiful face totally devastated by grief. He had to get back to her somehow.

Marion frowned; maybe she had hit on a sore spot. "Han?"

Solo's smile returned as he thought further back to their time on the Falcon together. "She's beautiful, really beautiful ... lovely long red-brown hair, so soft ... wish she'd let it down more often. Her eyes are so dark, but shining. Besides her looks, she's got real class she's a Princess. She's got plenty of spirit, even stood up to Vader. That's spirit's what I like about her most, I guess. She's really got a temper; calls me some interesting names. You should see those dark eyes flash when she's mad! But she's so tiny ... sorta fragile-lookin'." Han laughed shortly. "She'd probably thump me one if I ever said that to her face. She's a fighter; handles a blaster with the best of 'em."

"A blaster?" Indiana asked, amused at the enthusiasm of the description.

"Yeah. You know - a gun. Only it fires laser bolts not ... what do you call them?"

"Bullets."

"Right. Leia does a great job as leader of the Rebel Alliance. Guess I can't pretend that I'm not involved with them now."

"Rebel Alliance? There some kind of war going on out there?"

"You mean you don't know?! You've never even heard of the Empire?!"

"No," Indiana joked. "Not likely you mean the Roman Empire?"

"No, the Imperials. Palpatine's bunch." Han's downcast expression returned. "This Egypt planet must sure be a long way out. Exactly where is this planetary system in relation to the rest of the galaxy?"

Jones was momentarily stunned. That was something he hadn't thought about much. He strained to remember his high school astronomy lessons. "Well, first of all, this planet is called Earth. It's just this country that's called Egypt."

"Oh," Han said. "Earth, no, still never heard of it."

"If I remember correctly," Indiana continued, "We're right out on the edge of one of the spiral arms."

Han was aghast. "The other side of the Rim! Nobody ever goes this far out. It's unexplored space. Fett must have been caught in an energy warp in hyperspace!"

Jones decided, wisely, to ignore the last words and concentrate on the name mentioned to take his friend's thoughts away from his apparent exile. "Fett?"

"He's a bounty hunter. Was supposed to be going to turn me over to Jabba for the reward."

"Reward? You an outlaw or something?" Marion enquired, interested in spite of the fact that she thought the poor man was out of his mind.

"No," Han laughed, then added a little self-consciously, "Well, I am a smuggler. It's a long story. I've got a bad debt hanging over my head. After I met up with the kid, I never did get 'round to paying it."

"The kid?"

"Luke. Guess he's not a kid." Solo's expression again softened as he thought of his friend. "Closest I've ever had to a kid brother. He's kinda innocent, you know, but when he looks at you with those big, blue eyes - well," Han chuckled, "I reckon he can see right through you, knows everything you're thinking." Han fell suddenly silent, finishing eating the fruit as he wondered where Luke was right now and if he had escaped Vader's scheming. There was nothing he could do to help him right now. There was no point in dwelling on it. The fruit was deliciously sweet and seemed to be just what he needed to settle his still nauseous, protesting stomach. Swallowing the last mouthful, he looked up with a grateful smile. "Thanks. I do feel better now. Oranges are delicious but ... messy!" He grinned and grabbed a handful of sand with which to rub the stickiness from his hands.

"You're a mess, Solo," Marion commented cheerfully as she surveyed the evidence of his many falls. "Here." Tearing yet another piece of material from her rapidly diminishing, expensive gown, she began dabbing at the numerous cuts and abrasions covering the man's face, arms and hands. Solo winced as she wiped blood from a deeper cut. "Too bad we can't spare any water to clean you up properly," she laughed.

"I'll live!" Solo's words were almost lost in an immense yawn.

"You're worn out, Solo. How about you try and get some sleep. You're gonna need your strength come morning."

"Yeah, I am pretty beat." Han lay down on his side and drew one arm up under his head. Despite the uncomfortable surface, he was asleep within seconds.

"Poor guy is exhausted. Don't know how he made it this far. He isn't fully recovered by a long shot. He was trying to hide it, but he was really hurting there for a while." Indiana took the Arabian robes he had taken as a disguise. Bending down, he wrapped them warmly around the sleeping man. Moving back, he found Marion eyeing him with wry surprise. "It's getting cold, and it's gonna be a lot colder before dawn. He looks feverish to me." He explained defensively.

Nodding with a teasing, yet understanding smile, Marion wriggled closer to the archaeologist. Inwardly touched by his gentle, considerate act, she rested her head on his broad shoulder. Indiana stiffened a little in surprise, then encircled her waist with his arm. She snuggled down more comfortably against his chest. Well, damnit, it is getting a little chilly, she excused herself, and hell, maybe it's time the war was ended.

"That's quite a story, huh?" she broke the oddly uncomfortable silence. "You don't truly believe all that outer space nonsense, do you?"

Jones pondered. "Well Marion, hard as it is to accept - it's the only explanation that makes any sense."

Marion pulled back from his embrace and stared at Jones incredulously. "What? Jones, you've been out in the sun too long!"

Indiana's only reaction to this suggestion was a soft chuckle. Gently, he drew her back into his arms, further surprised by the lack of resistance. "Yeah, I'd probably think that too if I hadn't been there when Sallah and I found him. That was the damndest thing, Marion. I still can't figure how he can be alive at all. He was encased in some kind of metal sarcophagus." Marion stiffened and looked set for another protest. "Just let me tell you how it happened first, okay?" Indiana pleaded with a broad grin. She settled back, eyeing him warily. "Whatever process was used to get him in there can't have been too pleasant - his face was all twisted up with pain. He was frozen solid, unmoving, coated with metal. He couldn't possibly have had any air in there and he couldn't have been breathing because he wasn't when we first got him out." Marion drew in a startled breath. Jones tightened his grip

about her reassuringly and plunged on. "I was so sure he was dead. He was in a lot of pain when he first came 'round and he was scared when he found out he couldn't see, thought I'd never have known if I hadn't had hold of him. Talk about calm! If it had been me, I would have been climbing the walls."

Marion couldn't resist. She smiled mischievously. "As I seem to recall, you did climb the walls."

"Very funny," Indy groaned.

"C'mon, Indy, are you sure he was a sarcophagus. Maybe it was an illusion or something? I mean, he couldn't be alive, not if ... Jones, do you think, you don't suppose ..."

Jones could not stifle his laugh as he realised Marion was now staring at the sleeping man as if she expected that at any moment he might turn into some hideous alien creature. "He's as human as you and I, Marion. That's real blood he's bleeding. Sallah and I were going to get him to a hospital before that cursed Frenchman showed up."

Marion's tone now revealed only concern. "You think he'll be all right?"

"Yeah. He seems to be getting stronger all the time. The cramps are fading. All he needs is some rest. Don't know about his eyes, though. The suspension process must have done that. He obviously wasn't expecting it. The thing he was trapped in must have been some very sophisticated hibernation contraption. It's way beyond Earth's present technology, that's for sure. He must actually come from up there somewhere."

Following the tilt of Jones' head, Marion also looked up to the now brightly gleaming stars. "It would be nice to think we're not all alone in such an immense universe," she said quietly.

"Mmm," Jones agreed. Sighing disconsolately, he lay his cheek atop the softness of the woman's lustrous, dark hair.

Sensing his unease, Marion asked, "What is it, Indy?"

"From what Han says, there's a war going on out there. We'll have another one here soon by the looks of it. Makes you wonder about human beings, doesn't it? I always thought of the stars as being a peaceful refuge. I hate to think of battles being waged out there, too."

Much to Jones' delighted surprise, Marion gently drew his face down to hers and kissed him softly. He returned the kiss, but she broke away with a rueful chuckle. "Wait a minute, Indy," she admonished a little breathlessly. God, how could she ever have forgotten that kiss? Knowing he was grinning that damned arrogant grin of his, she hurriedly tried to remember what it was she wanted to say. "I was just trying to make a point ..."

Jones nuzzled her neck. "I'd say you made it rather well," he teased.

Exasperated, she punched him in the ribs, not as hard as last time, but hard enough to get his attention back to the subject under discussion. "Not all people are warmongers. You heard the gentleness in Han's voice when he spoke of Luke and Leia. He really cares for them and it's not hard to tell he's in love with that 'Princess' of his. They must care deeply for him too. Sounds to me like there's a lot of love out there, too. I hate to think what that poor woman's going through, not knowing whether he's alive or dead.

A low groan behind her brought Marion's attention back to their unusual companion. Solo was mumbling and tossing in his sleep. With a playful shove, she broke free of Indiana's renewed caresses and crossed the few paces to Solo's side. Bending down, she resettled the robes about the man's shoulders. He continued to stir restlessly, mumbling unintelligible words, seemingly in pain. Now worried, Marion placed her hand upon his forehead. "I hope he's all right. He looks like he's in pain and he's awfully warm," she whispered back to Jones.

As Indiana joined her and began checking Solo's condition, a shaft of light from the full moon rose above the rock ledge behind which they were sheltering. Jones was bent over Solo, also testing his forehead for fever. The two men's faces were close together and silhouetted at a similar angle by the silver light. Marion's mouth dropped open as recognition dawned. "Indy, it's incredible!" she gasped. "We've been so busy running I haven't had time to notice it."

"Notice what?" Jones mumbled distractedly as he felt Solo's rapid but strong pulse.

Marion sighed plaintively, "Don't you see anything strange about him?"

Sure that Solo was not seriously ill, Jones got to his feet and again took the dark-haired woman into his arms. "Oh no, Marion," he teased sarcastically. "I meet people from outer space every day." He winced and

rubbed his arm as Marion responded to his taunting by punching him none too gently. He was going to collect some fine bruises if ever they resumed their relationship.

"That's not what I meant, Jones," she scowled. "Don't you see it? Once he grows a three day beard like yours, he'll look enough like you to be your twin."

"Oh, c'mon, Marion," Indiana laughed. "Now who's been out in the sun too long?" Seeing her set for another punch, he turned back and reluctantly humoured her by studying the sleeping man's profile. Damned if she wasn't right! "Well, maybe we do look a little alike at that," he admitted grudgingly.

"More than a little," Marion insisted firmly.

They both jumped at a sudden movement behind them. Turning, they saw Solo sit bolt upright, bringing his arms up protectively before his face. With a sharp cry of 'no!', his eyes flew open and he stared blankly ahead, sweat dripping from his dazed face.

Both Indiana and Marion moved quickly to him. Jones grasped Solo's shoulder. Having suffered through many eerie adventures of his own, Indiana was well able to understand what had happened to the man who had only hours earlier escaped a living entombment. "Han, are you all right?" he asked. "You were having one hell of a nightmare."

For a moment, unable to understand why everything was so totally dark, or recognise the concerned voice speaking to him, Han continued to blink hard. "What?" he mumbled. Suddenly, he remembered the events of the past day. "Uh ... that you, Indiana?"

"Yeah. You going to be okay?"

Solo tried to recover a smile, but the taste of fear and pain was still too bitter in his mouth. "Sure. It was just a dream. I'll forget it soon." Shakily, he drew his sleeve over his dripping brow. Damned well better be the last time! Too many more that like and I'll go crazy!

"Maybe you should tell us about it, Han," Jones suggested. "Get it off your chest for good."

"No. I'll be okay - really," Han insisted, but a bout of shivering did not help support his words.

"Hey, you'd better just relax for a bit," Marion advised as she draped the Arabian cloak about Solo's shoulders.

Amused by all this attention, Han found the shock of his horrific dream fading. He smiled. "Is it much longer to dawn? How long have I been asleep?"

"All of half an hour," Indiana answered wryly.

"An hour?" Han inquired. "How long is that?"

Jones grinned. This spaceman stuff was a continual source of problems. "Ah, about twice as long as we were in the jeep."

"Oh. Not long, then, huh?"

"No." Indiana decided to persist. "Han, if you could only get that little sleep before having it all come back, especially as exhausted as you are ... well, believe me, I've been through some pretty weird experiences and the same thing happened to me afterwards." He paused, not knowing how to phrase his next words and unsure of the effect they would have. Maybe the man was trying to suppress the memory. "Han, you were remembering being put ... into that ... metal coffin thing, weren't you?"

"Carbonite," Han corrected.

"Huh?" was Indiana's monosyllabic reaction.

Solo's blind eyes still managed to accurately convey an air of impish self-satisfaction at catching the 'Professor' out. "The casing was carbonite. It's not really a metal," he explained.

"Oh. We don't have anything of that kind here. Is it common where you come from?"

"No, not really. It's a very rare and expensive substance used in the manufacturing and freezing of inert gases. That's where I was captured - Bespin is an industrial centre, a gas planet."

"But Han," Indiana felt an icy finger at his spine as the implication of Solo's words registered. "You ... why did ... how did you wind up in that stuff if it's only for ..."

Solo's lips pursed into a thin, hard line as he answered tersely, "I was an experiment. They wanted to see if a human could survive being carbon frozen."

Marion did not fully understand the processes being discussed, but she did understand that a living man had been used as a guinea pig and was blind as a result. She was horrified and stunned. "That's barbaric!" she cried, outraged. Indiana remained silent but his expression clearly revealed his feelings on the matter. His eyes were ablaze, his fists clenched so tightly that the white of the knuckles shone in the gloom.

Sensing the disgust and horror of his friends' reaction to this news, Han joked, "Yeah, it's not much fun, either." Apparently, neither Marion nor Jones found his fate anything to laugh about. The silence continued. Finally, Jones' ominously quiet voice asked, "How?"

Han wasn't at all sure he wanted to answer that question. Well, he didn't have to go into the details. "There's a platform," finding his mouth suddenly dry, Han licked his lips before continuing. "It's lowered into the cryonic gases. You're frozen solid. The molten carbonite is poured over ... to seal ..." Again feeling the moment his breath had been snatched from his body in a blast of unbelievable cold, Han shuddered involuntarily and drew a steadying breath to reassure himself that it really was all over. His words were clipped and brisk as he finished. "It had to be done at exactly the right moment to avoid burning or hibernation leakage."

"God, Han," Marion whispered as she noted that Jones was again speechless with anger. "Why?"

Han sighed and answered tiredly. "Luke. They wanted Luke. Vader said something about not wanting the 'emperor's prize' damaged ... so they tested the carbon freeze on me." Han felt a sudden dread flood through him; maybe Luke too had been ... "Maker! I don't even know what happened. If the kid's still alive, frozen, the Emperor's prisoner ... hell, they could all be ... Damn Vader and damn Calrissian!"

"Vader and Cal ... who?" Indiana inquired.

"Calrissian ... my friend!" Solo made the word an expletive, "Damned traitor handed us - me, Chewie, and Leia over to Vader. Vader's the Emperor's right hand man. Blast Calrissian! He sure conned me good. Said he was sorry. Can you believe that ... sorry! Leia, Chewie and probably Luke handed over for Imperial interrogation and he's sorry! I

swear if they're hurt, I'll ... Lando's going to pay. Kreth! I've got to get off-planet and help them somehow!" His emotions now fully unleashed in spite of his determination not to reveal the depth of his feelings of frustration, Han slammed his fist into the sand, now more speaking to himself than to his two friends. Up until now he had been feeling too ill and disoriented to give serious thought to what needed to be done; only now did he realise the urgency of the situation. "Kreth!" he cursed himself. "I can't even see and this place doesn't have so much as a hovercraft!" Suddenly feeling self-conscious as he realised he had involuntarily unburdened himself and must sound as though he were ranting, Han took another deep breath and apologised. He snorted self-derisively and smiled hesitantly. "Sorry, I guess I got a little carried away."

"Oh for God's sake!" Marion cried disbelievingly. "After all you've been through and not knowing ... God Almighty, he's actually apologising! I don't believe it!"

Indiana laughed as Solo's eyebrows raised and he too grinned at this outburst. "She's right, Han," Jones supported, winking back at a fuming Marion. "A little loud maybe, but right ... owww!"

Solo chuckled as he realised Marion had taken revenge for this crack.

Jones continued undaunted, "Most people'd be doing a heck of a lot more than a little yelling." Indiana's voice lowered and his hand came to again rest on Solo's shoulder. "Han, I'll find a way. Somehow we'll get this mess cleared up." He shook his head and smiled at the sound of his own omniscience. "I'll be damned if I know how ... but I'll think of something ... and," he added for good measure, figuring he might as well go the whole hog, "I'm gonna get the Ark back as well!"

Solo brought his own hand up to clasp Jones' arm. He grinned broadly, for some inexplicable reason he actually believed the man. "I'll bet you will at that. Just like back in the snake pit, huh? That must have been some stunt, wish I could have seen it."

"Well, I'm not gonna give you a repeat performance," Jones laughed and released his hold. "Scared myself silly."

"I have the feeling that if I hang around you long enough I'm bound to see something just as spectacular."

Marion groaned and threw a sidelong glance at Indiana. "Oh, you can count on that Han ... believe me."

Realising that he was now laughing where moments before he had been angry and afraid for his friends, Han sobered to comment sincerely, "Hey, you two hardly even know me. Don't know what I would have done ... how long I'd've been ..." Han shrugged; he never had been any good at saying thanks. "What I'm trying to say is ... well, I doubt Jabba would have been so understanding. Thanks for everything."

"Anytime Han," Jones acknowledged. "I can't speak for Marion, but anything I can do to upset those Imperials is fine by me!"

That goes double for me," Marion announced.

Solo laughed shortly. "Leia'd love to hear that!" he shook his head in amazement. "I think I've just one two new recruits for the Rebellion."

"We're going to get you outa here first thing tomorrow and get you to a doctor, Han," Jones promised seriously. "You'll be seeing the sights of Earth in no time. But we're going to have to be on our toes come sunup. Do you think you can sleep now?"

"Sure. Talking about it did help. Thanks. If Marion points me in the right direction, maybe I can settle the score with a few of these Nazis of yours." Han lay back down and pulled the robe around himself. "Don't forget to wake me good and early - wouldn't want to miss any of the action!"

* * *

A sharp elbow poking him in the ribs brought Indiana Jones awake with a start. Marion had rolled over, leaving the comfort of his totally numb arm, to seek the warmth of his chest. She now lay sprawled face down across him, her hair in his face, one arm draped over his left shoulder, the other tucked into his ribcage. Her face in sleep was almost childlike, bringing back the memories of the Marion he had known ten years ago. They had been so much in love.

Indiana suppressed a rueful chuckle - Marion may look innocent at the moment, but she sure had changed. Idly, Indiana brought up his right hand to brush away a tickling strand of hair from his mouth. He began softly stroking the sleeping woman's cheek. Marion stirred but did not waken. Damn you, Abner, Jones thought, Look at what you've done to her, leaving her in that hell hole all those years. She could have been with me; I would have ... Indiana closed his fist tightly about a long curl of black hair. Don't fool yourself, Jones; you know damn well you didn't want a

lovesick college girl following at your heels back then. Abner saw that, made it easier for her and gave you an excuse. No wonder she slugged you when you showed up. You sure deserved it.

Well, she's no lovesick child now, he observed, remembering the events of the past few days. God, she really knows how to handle herself! And ... he grinned, still feeling the stiffness of his jaw. She sure throws a good right! Marion shifted her position again, her arm catching Jones a glancing blow on the side of the head. Indiana rolled his eyes beseechingly. Hell, she's even pummeling me while she's asleep. She's changed in more than temperament, he mused, enjoying the feel of her fully rounded soft curves against his body, she's so full of life, a little spitfire. If she had been killed in that truck explosion ... Jones again felt the pain that had weighed at his heart, the immense sense of loss and guilt that had driven him to seek solace in a bottle. That's where you would have wound up Jones, a worthless drunk. You need her and you're gonna have to admit it. She'll probably turn you down though, she's no fool, no longer hanging on your every word ...

Jones' gaze moved from the young woman's face to the glowing red on the horizon. Dawn soon, he frowned, Snap out of it, Professor! We've still gotta get outa this one yet before you can go gettin' all romantic. I'll be damned if Renee's gonna win this round. Gently, he shook Marion's shoulder.

"Huh ... wh..what?" Marion mumbled as she awoke. Jones grunted as she used his solar plexus as a handy leverage point as she sat up and stretched. "They coming yet?" she inquired on an indrawn yawn.

Also sitting up, Indiana kissed her forehead. "I certainly hope not. I've gotta get down there before they show up or we'll have no chance. I'd better get moving." He nodded across to a still sleeping Solo. "You think you can manage okay up here? You're gonna have to look out for Han too."

Marion's formally beautifully soft sleepy expression became a somewhat contemptuous scowl. "You goin' soft in your old age, Jones? I know how to look after myself and Han's no coward. You just worry about your end of the plan, okay?!"

"Yes, ma'am." Indiana gave a mock salute, then hastily clambered to his feet to avoid any retaliation, but Marion's touch was gentle as surprisingly, she hugged him as she too got to her feet.

"Just keep your mind on the job down there, Professor," she advised with a sarcastic tone which failed to hide her concern. "Don't want to have two cases for the Cairo Hospital."

"Don't worry, I'll have that truck before you know it," Indiana responded. "If Renee tries to push his luck, don't hesitate to light those fuses we set last night, okay?" Marion nodded. "Good. I'd best get going. Keep your head down. I'll see you later."

Marion watched for some time as Jones' figure became smaller and smaller then finally disappeared totally from view amongst the boulders at the foot of the ridge. The sun was now visible above the horizon. Marion squinted toward the canyon mouth at the far end of the valley, waiting for the least sign of movement. Sure enough, not long after, she saw the first flash of light reflecting from the glass and metal of approaching vehicles. "Creeps did know that tank was ruptured," she muttered angrily, then began checking and gathering her defences.

Both increasing warmth upon his face and the sound of a soft voice and scuffling movements, awoke Han Solo. He was immediately aware of the bright glow of daylight through his eyelids. Holding his breath hopefully, he opened his eyes, then cursed against the well of bitter disappointment and frustrating sense of helplessness.

"You always wake up so cheery, Mr Solo?" Marion's teasingly cheerful voice greeted him. "How are you feeling this morning?"

"Great," Han muttered, not bothering to keep the self-directed anger and sarcasm from his voice.

At first puzzled by the uncharacteristically sharp tone of the reply, Marion realised the man must have been hoping that his eyes may have recovered by now. "Still can't see, huh?" she asked gently.

Solo shrugged, then let out a long sigh. "No, not a thing, just light." His serious expression was transformed by a lopsided smile. "Can't complain - this is my first morning outa that tin can. Fresh air sure feels good. How are we doing? Indiana gone yet?"

"Yes, he's been gone about an hour. He's settled in down there somewhere. I can't see him now. The opposition has just entered the valley. They'll be here in a few minutes. Come over here and I'll show you where we've piled the dynamite."

Solo crawled to her side. Marion placed his hand upon the prepared charges and explained that more were laid in a defensive arc some yards below them. She shoved some matches into his left hand, at the same time indicating the slope of the land and the direction in which to throw.

"Look, I hope it doesn't come to this, but if things get really hectic you should have some way to defend yourself. Indiana didn't want to, but I made him take his gun. It wouldn't do us much good up here once we used up the last few bullets and he'd have no way to get near a truck if those guards spotted him too soon. So you'll just have to be ready to light and throw some of this stuff if I give you the word, okay?" Solo nodded.

"Wish I still had my cigarette lighter, it would have been easier for you to handle. You think you can manage to strike a match on that rock and light the end of the fuse without blowing us up?"

Han laughed, "Sure. Don't worry. I've got a friend who always defends himself with his eyes closed," he joked, then added seriously, "It'll be okay, I'll put my hand around the length of the fuse so only the end is showing. Besides, a few blasts from you and they'll probably turn tail and run, if they're anything like stormtroopers! I'm sure we'll be able to hold them off until Indiana comes through."

"Let's hope so," Marion agreed grimly. "They've just spotted our jeep. They're headed this way. Looks like two are staying behind with the transport. Renee's used to Indy's tricks. Hey," she added with a mischievous grin, "You do know what a match is, don't you?"

"Some things even spacemen can't do without," Han laughed.

"Well, that makes me feel a little less backward." Marion smiled. "They're about half way to that little plateau where we rested yesterday. Looks like they're not having too much trouble tracking us; they've got an Arabian guide with them. They're supposed to be able to track a scorpion over solid stone."

"Oh wonderful," Han groaned.

Some minutes later, Solo jumped slightly as a new, male voice called harshly from somewhere not too far below. "All right, Jones. We know you're up there. Let's be reasonable about this. All we want is the original staff of Ra, and any further information you have regarding the Ark's location. It should have been in the Well of Souls, Jones. The only person who could have moved it from there is you. Where is it now, Jones?"

There was silence for several long seconds. "Jones? You and your friends can't last long without water, but even so my men and I have no

intention of sitting out here for days awaiting your surrender. Either all three of you come out now with your hands over your heads, or we start firing."

"Friendly type, isn't he?" Han commented sarcastically. "Guess this is where the fun begins! Can you tell what Indy's doing?"

"I'm not sure but I think I saw him moving toward the ... duck!" Marion warned. Instantly, Solo flung himself face downward. There was a tremendous cacophony of noise and the whizzing and ricocheting of bullets very close by. To this noise was suddenly added the sound of dynamite blasts as Marion began throwing. The fusillade of bullets abruptly ended.

As the ensuing silence stretched out, Han became suddenly fearful. "Marion, you okay?" He flayed out a hand in her direction, making contact with a soft, bare back which jolted violently at his touch.

"God Almighty! Don't scare me like that! Sure I'm okay." Marion's voice was startled; she had forgotten Solo as she continued her keen observation of the activity below them.

"What's goin' on down there now?"

"Renee's waving a white flag. Looks like he's going to try to con us into one of his no good deals."

"Sounds a bit like Calrissian's style to me."

"Right," Marion agreed.

"Jones? Jones? This is ridiculous. Surely you do not wish to again endanger Marion's life for some archaeological relic? The Germans have grenades down here. I do not think I can prevent them from using them. Come now, surely you can be reasonable, Jones?"

"Han, we've got no chance against grenades. Indy's making his move. I just saw one of the guards drop. We can't let Renee know Jones is not up here. You'll have to answer him."

"Me? But won't he ..."

"Your voice is almost identical to Indy's," Marion assured him.

"Really?" Han was surprised.

"It sure as hell sounds more like him than I do! Go on, make it good. Another few minutes and Indy might have a truck for us. Keep your head down; we can't trust 'em not to take potshots."

"Right," Han answered, feeling amazingly pleased to find that for once he could do something to help. "Look, Renee," he called down, "even if I did know where the Ark was, why should I tell you? What guarantee have we that you won't just kill the lot of us once you've got what you want?"

"Now Jones," Belloq sounded miffed, "What kind of man do you think I am?"

"Let's not go into that," Han called back. "It'd take too long and I don't think you'd like my opinions. We could start with leaving us to die in that snake pit, for one."

Marion giggled. "Keep it up, Solo. You're getting him awfully frustrated. Pity you can't see his face."

"Jones, that was not my doing," Belloq replied. "You have both my word and Dietrich's. We don't want to see anyone hurt; all we want is the Ark."

"Han," Marion whispered. "Tell him that's not the way it was in South America."

"Huh? South what?"

"Am-er-i-ca!"

"Okay." Solo turned back toward the ledge. "Sure Renee, just like South America, right?"

"Now Jones, that was different. Those Hovitos felt their sacred Temple had been desecrated. I couldn't have prevented ..." Belloq's voice trailed off.

"Sounds familiar," Han muttered, then asked, "Why'd he stop so suddenly?"

"The Nazi officer is speaking to him."

"Jones, Dietrich has grown tired of this debate," Belloq resumed. "His men are tired and hungry. They have no desire to await your

surrender. Dietrich will order the use of grenades if you do not come out immediately."

"Come on," Marion urged. "We're getting outa here. Indy's got the truck. They won't hear it over the detonation of our little mine field. With a bit of luck it should start a landslide that'll keep them busy so we can get away. Ready?"

"Whenever you are."

With the beginnings of a deafening series of explosions, Solo found himself hauled to his feet, his hand placed upon Marion's arm as she guided him hastily over the rough ground along the ridgetop toward their rendezvous point with Jones. Han did his best to stay on his feet, but the surface was treacherous even for a sighted man. At the pace they were travelling, it wasn't long before he went down, striking his head a stunning blow. Feebly, he tried to struggle back up. He felt the warm flow of blood running into his eyes.

"Come on Han," Marion pleaded as she got her shoulder under his arm and heaved with all her might. "It's not far now. Come on. They've reached the top of the ridge. They'll be within firing range soon."

Desperately, Han leaned some of his weight on her shoulder and pulled himself up with his free hand. It was no use; his knees buckled after he had taken only a few lurching steps. They both went down with the sound of gun fire again in their ears. Han fought simply to remain conscious as the pain in his head increased and he felt himself drifting towards blackness. He was dimly aware of Marion's fingers tugging frantically at his arm, her tone strident as she pleaded with him to get up. Knowing he would be doing well simply not to pass out, let alone walk, Han tried groggily to fend her off, indicating that she should go on without him. Marion was having none of that; she redoubled her efforts to haul him up.

"Marion," Han found even his voice was difficult to control. His words were so thick and slurred that he doubted the woman could understand what he was saying. "G'on, won't kill me. Don't know anything. Please go."

"No way!" Marion's tone was flatly insistent. "They'll set Toht and his toys on you just to make sure. I'm not leaving you. Now come on!" The final words were a gritted command.

Solo continued to mumble incoherent protests while at the same time responding to her struggles. Finally, he managed to force his rubbery legs to take some of his weight. Several bullets pinged off rocks

dangerously close. Han realised the woman was practically dragging him. They would be sitting targets. "Too slow, Marion, it's not gonna work. Go! I'll stall 'em. Tell 'em anything. I'll be all right."

"Oh save your breath, Solo," Marion snapped. "You're coming with us and that's final!" This command was punctuated by the sound of a ricochet. Small pieces of stone stung them both in the face. "Damn, that was too close," Marion gasped. "Come on, we're gonna have to jump off this ledge. It's the only way we'll have any cover. It's about an eight foot drop. Ready?"

Too out of breath and dizzy to ask how far was eight foot, Han simply nodded, waited until she guided him to sit on the rock rim, then jumped on her command. He curled his arms about his head protectively and rolled as he hit. The jarring thud completely knocked the wind out of him. Eight foot isn't much, he thought abstractedly as the darkness finally washed over him and he lost consciousness. The unyielding surface had come up and hit him much sooner than he had expected.

Unrelenting hands shook him. He wanted to tell whoever it was that his head hurt, he wanted to sleep, leave him be, but perversely, his tongue refused to help him out with anything more than a few groans.

"Come on Solo, you've got a hard head, you can do it." The voice was so wonderfully sure and familiar, that Han felt the blackness instantly recede. He forced his eyes open and then wondered why he had bothered. "Indy?" he asked hopefully.

"You don't seem to be having much fun visiting Earth," Jones commented dryly as he propped up the still only partly conscious man.

Sure he was going to be sick any moment, Han fought the urge to retch and tried to help Jones by getting his feet to do what they were supposed to. "Wh-where'd you come from?" he asked groggily.

"The truck's only a little way down from here," Jones explained. "There's an overhanging ledge hiding this spot. The Nazis are still hunting for you. Marion couldn't move you. I was on my way up but I wasn't sure exactly where you were. Marion saw me and climbed down to me. She's got my gun; I sent her back to guard the truck. It's the only one that's in operating order at the moment. I took the distributor caps from all the rest. Once we get to the truck we're home free. Think you can make it?"

As Jones spoke, they had covered some rough terrain, always moving downward. Han grinned. "Seeing as how you're practically carryin' me, I don't think I'll have too much trouble."

"Good," Jones laughed. A few minutes later and Indiana's cheerful optimism was replaced by a frustrated curse. "Damn! Dietrich must have spotted the truck from up there. They've been circling. They've got us cut off. We'll have to ..."

Whatever Jones had in mind was cut off as his words were drowned out by a deafening roar and the rush of a burning blast of air as something huge made a pass not far above their heads. Han was not sure whether he should cry or laugh. Never before had he felt such a tremendous upsurge of joy. He settled for giving an almighty Corellian victory cheer.

Recovering his wits a little, and finding to his amazement that his voice still worked, Jones stared open mouthed from the rapidly disappearing flying vehicle back to his now, beyond any shadow of a doubt, spaceman friend. Solo was grinning a grin that belonged only on a Cheshire Cat, even though blood almost completely masked his contrastingly pale face.

"Friends of yours, Solo?" Indiana asked the obvious.

"You bet!" Han answered gleefully. "I'd know the Falcon's engines anywhere!"

"Well, they sure saved our necks. Come on, we can make our move now. The Germans are a little distracted, to say the least."

"I can imagine," Han chuckled. Jones began to guide him onward. A sudden thought occurred to Solo. He halted. "Wait, Indy," he advised urgently. "Chewie must be homing in somehow on the carbonite. Where's the Falcon now?"

"Looks like it's hovering over the digging site."

"Right. If I can get him back here, Chewie'll give us all the cover we need - and something that moves a lot faster than a truck."

Jones frowned. "Han, you haven't got a radio or anything with which to communicate our location."

"There's another way. At least," Solo winked a blood-smeared eye, "it works for Luke. Just let me concentrate a second."

Jones' expression became grave as he wondered just how badly rattled Solo had been by the blow to his head. He watched as the man closed his eyes, became oddly limp and relaxed, concentrated and mumbled soft words which Jones strained to hear.

"Chewie, come on, this way, ya big lug. I'm back here. Come on, turn her around. Chewie, come on, listen to me, back here."

Jones' supporting grip about Solo's shoulders loosened in stunned astonishment as he saw the distant saucer shaped aircraft bank sharply, catching the early morning sunlight as it swung back toward them. Remembering to close his mouth, he looked wonderingly back at his battered, blood-soaked companion.

"Well,?" Solo inquired hopefully.

Jones licked his lips. Well, you've seen things just as inexplicable by any tenets of science, he told himself in an attempt to assure himself that he wasn't going mad. Solo continued to stare blankly at a point somewhere beyond his friend's right shoulder. "Indy?" he prompted.

"Sorry Han. You just left me speechless," Indiana replied. "You did it. You actually called them back. They're on their way. Coming kinda slow, hovering every now and then, as if they're looking for you."

"Great!" Solo whooped. "Is there anything we can use to signal our position?"

"Couple of sticks of dynamite do?"

"Just the thing."

Indiana lowered Solo to sit with his back to the shelter of a boulder, waited until the spacecraft was almost immediately overhead, lit the fuses and hurled the remaining two sticks of dynamite to the valley floor, thirty feet below and some distance from the truck. Unfortunately, this action also returned the unwanted attentions of the Nazis, who had apparently decided to ignore the hovering monstrosity in the belief that it was some kind of unusual desert mirage phenomenon. Soon Jones and Solo were pinned down by heavy fire. The Germans were suddenly forced to reconsider the reality of their 'mirage' as it came about, hovered

directly above them and proceeded to drive them scurrying for cover as brilliant white beams of light flashed from a protruding weapon on its underside. The beams exploded with devastating destructive power within yards of the cowering opposition.

Hearing the unmistakable sound of laser cannons, Han cheered. "Go get 'em, Chewie!"

Somehow, Indiana seriously doubted that they would have too much trouble from that quarter. He only wished he could see the expression on Belloq's arrogant face. "Come on, Han," he urged happily, as he hauled his still weak friend once more to his unsteady feet. "We've got a clear run down to the truck now. I think your friends have spotted us."

As the sounds of laser fire ceased and did not resume, Han lifted his aching head and squinted uselessly around himself. The pounding within his skull was now so loud and painful that it was hard for him to distinguish between it and the noise of the Falcon's engines. "Where's the ship now?" he inquired.

"Uh ..." Indiana again had to swallow back his disbelief before replying. "They're landing in the canyon below us. It's not far now. They're about a hundred yards beyond the truck."

Han groaned at the mention of yet another unfamiliar measurement, but said nothing as he concentrated solely on putting one foot in front of the other. Each step seemed to jolt right through his protesting head.

Jones halted as he reached the truck and found Marion still staring disbelievingly toward the downed craft. She had not yet come out from under the truck. Her face was grimy and her eyes at least the size of dinner plates. Jones grinned. "You okay, Marion?" he asked.

The dark-framed face slowly turned to regard him. Marion's mouth opened but no sound came out. Jones' grin broadened.

When there was no answer to Jones' query, Solo became alarmed. "Indiana, she's not hurt, is she?" he asked fearfully.

Marion overcame her shock somewhat at the sound of Solo's concern. "What the hell is that thing?"

Jones could no longer hold back his laughter. "I'd say that's Han's ticket home, Marion."

Solo sighed in relief as he suddenly realised everyone was all right and he was about to go home. The relief rapidly became exhaustion. His knees began to buckle. Jones' steadying grip tightened. "Come on, Han," he said softly. "We'd best get you to your friends while you can still say hello for yourself."

"Right!" Solo agreed with a weak smile.

Marion remained unmoving, not too sure she wanted to get any closer to something that had come from outer space. Jones noticed and called back over his shoulder. "Come on, Marion. If they're friends of Han's they can't be all that bad."

Hearing the hissing of the hydraulics as the Falcon's ramp lowered somewhere not far ahead, Han swallowed against a strange lump in his throat. Hastily, he brought up his sleeve to wipe some of the blood from his face. He didn't want Chewbacca making too much of a fuss. The Wookiee's roar of welcome was enough to cause pain to any head, let alone one that already felt set to split in two. Han winced. The joyous roar turned to a concerned rumble.

Solo suddenly found himself left to stumble forward alone, as his friend's supporting arm stiffened then withdrew altogether. Han chuckled, "Hey, it's just Chewie, my friend, the Wookiee." Suddenly Solo remembered that he had not actually described his partner. His grin broadened as he imagined Jones and Marion's reactions and realised they were backing away. "Guess he is a bit much at first!"

Any further words of reassurance were halted abruptly as two steel-sinewed arms clasped tight about his chest, causing his ribs to creak dangerously and the air to be expelled forcefully from his lungs as he was lifted from his weary feet to the sound of further welcoming bellows.

"Hang on, Han!" Jones shouted, alarmed as he saw his friend about to be crushed to death by some terrifying alien creature who had obviously stolen Solo's ship. "I'll get it off you ... somehow." He uncurled his whip, the only weapon remaining to him.

"Chewie ... Chewie," Han gasped, "Put ... me ... down .. quick! He thinks you're tryin' to kill me!"

With a rumbling laugh, Chewbacca lowered his weakened friend, still maintaining contact with a shaggy paw draped about the Corellian's

shoulders as support. Solo's human friend appeared placated as he recoiled the whip he held in his hand. Chewbacca growled a friendly 'hello'. The man merely backed further away. The Wookiee shrugged and turned back to observe the moment he had long awaited.

The next voice Solo heard brought tears to his eyes which he hastily blinked away.

"Han!" Leia cried joyfully. Another pair of much gentler arms wrapped about his body. Han felt Leia's chest heaving with mute sobs and, as her lips met his, he felt wetness upon her cheeks. Relief flooded through him so strongly that for a moment he again swayed. Chewbacca's steady paw increased its pressure.

"Leia!" he croaked as they parted. "You're all right?"

"Me!" The Princess' voice was suddenly delightfully familiar as it reclaimed some of its characteristically admonishing, exasperated tone. "You're barely able to stand, bleeding all over me, and you're asking me ...? Oh Han."

Solo grinned lopsidedly. "Leia, I'm just so glad you're okay. I didn't know if ... if ... Vader had ..." Protesting Wookiee howls cut him off. "Sorry Chewie," he apologised as the noise subsided. "Yeah, I know I told ya to take care of her, and I knew you would, it's just that, hell, pal, you were up against some pretty tough opposition."

The Wookiee rumbled an acceptance of this apology and added that it was time they got Solo in to the medi-scan. Han held back. "Stars Chewie, you scared the life out of my two friends here." Han realised anxiously that he had not heard a sound from their direction since. "Indy? Marion?" He turned and called to them. "You still there?"

Both Earthlings were only feet behind him. Jones was the first to find his voice. "Yes, Han, we're still here," he acknowledged.

Han felt a gentle touch as Leia's hand caressed his cheek. "Han, your eyes?" she asked softly.

Solo shrugged, hoping she would not take it too badly. "Can't see a thing, Leia. Wasn't too bad up 'till now. I'd give anything to be able to see you now, though."

A third voice and Solo's face was again a picture of pure delight. "Don't worry, Han," Skywalker said cheerfully. "It's only an easily reversible after effect of the carbon freeze. The doctors told us about

it. We've got an injection on board that will start the cure, but the rest will have to wait until we get you back to the Medical Frigate."

"Luke? You okay, too? What are you doing in the middle of this mess?"

"Wouldn't miss it." Skywalker added his own embrace to Solo's welcome. He released him to ask, "Hey, Han, that jacket's not exactly your style. Your new friends lend it to you? You going to introduce us or not?"

"Sorry," Han apologised. "Come on you two, get over here so I can make formal introductions."

"I think that might have to wait, Han," Jones advised anxiously. "We're gonna have company real soon."

Luke, Leia and Chewbacca followed the man's indicating arm to see Some kind of ground attack force approaching them. "Come on," Luke advised. "We'll all be safer inside and away from here."

Jones took Marion's arm and began to guide her toward the spaceship. She pulled back. "Now just one minute," she protested. "I'm not stepping foot inside that ... that ... piece of junk."

Overhearing this description as Chewbacca helped him aboard, Han laughed ruefully. "Not another one."

An exploding grenade nearby brought Jones' grasp back to Marion's arm. "Come on, Marion. There's no time to debate. Let's move." He hustled her up the ramp which immediately swung shut behind them.

Once inside the spaceship, Indiana and Marion froze in their tracks, staring around themselves in amazement. They were standing in the entrance to a sizeable roughly circular room, in the middle back of which was a small round table marked with what Jones was surprised, but also somehow reassured, to see looked much like a chess game board. To their left, against the opposing wall, was a large swivel high-backed chair facing a bench top. Above the bench was the craziest assortment of dials, panels and lights that Indiana had ever seen. The remainder of the walls were covered with a lesser variety of instrumentation and draped with what seemed like miles of conduits. Several corridors led off from this central couch and another bulkhead covered with instrumentation.

Here, Solo was feebly protesting as the mountain of fur who, incredibly, could only be his co-pilot, pushed him down with gentle but

firm pressure, forcing Solo to lie still and submit to the ministrations of what Indiana deduced was the medical scanner. Solo's description left no room for mistake as to the identity of the young woman who hovered anxiously nearby, retrieving swabs, an unrecognisable probe-shaped instrument and an oddly shaped container with a stray nozzle from a medical kit. Leia was indeed beautiful, somehow giving a combined impression of delicacy and resiliency. Jones likened her to the qualities of a diamond - exquisitely sculptured, finely poised beauty which was also immensely strong, durable and commanding. At the moment the stern control which Indiana was sure would be normally present in the woman's dark eyes, had softened to reveal only tender concern as she bent over a recumbent, drowsy Solo, gently washing the blood from his face and examining the head wound.

The young, fair-haired man whom Solo had addressed as 'Luke', re-emerged from the passage into which he had disappeared and which Jones assumed led to the cockpit. His blue eyes were also anxious as he joined the small group about the medical couch. Concerned about the severity of the profusely bleeding head injury and keen to find out what was to be done about Solo's blindness, Indiana ushered an overawed Marion across the compartment. The two Earthlings stood slightly to one side of the medical alcove, rather hesitant about getting to close to the gigantic, shaggy being referred to as a 'Wookiee'.

Although Leia's touch was deft and light as she continued to cleanse blood and dirt from the gaping three inch gash upon Solo's right temple, she was also precise and determined to do the job properly. As a result, Solo occasionally winced and mumbled unintelligible protests. Moments before, Jones had seen what looked like a needle of some sort appear from the array of panelling in the wall beside the bunk to jab an indignant Solo in the arm. As the man was now very drowsy, almost asleep, Jones assumed it had contained a mixture of anaesthetic-antibiotic. Nevertheless, as the Wookiee clamped Solo's head immobile between two hefty paws, and the young woman began drawing the edges of the wound together, probing at them with the now glowing tip of the long thin cylindrical tube, solo roused a little and flinched.

"Ow," he objected sleepily. "Take it easy will ya, Your Highness?"

Marion and Jones exchanged interested glances - could this young woman who was now performing a nurse's duties with obvious proficiency, actually be a Princess?! The delicately boned face seemed even more beautiful as the soft lips turned up in an apologetic smile, while not for an instant did Leia's gaze move away from her careful work with the probe.

"Sorry, Han," she responded. "Just lie still. I'll be finished in a minute. You're the one who wouldn't let us give you a full tranq shot."

Solo's wry lopsided grin reappeared and he winked mischievously though taking care to keep his head perfectly still. "Just keep a steady hand, Your Worship. Wouldn't want to spoil such a gorgeous face, now would ya?"

Leia's laugh was light yet husky. "Nothing will ever change you, Solo," she chided. The light on the tip of the surgical instrument finally extinguished. Leia gave a relieved sigh and drew back to study her handiwork.

Curious, Jones could not resist inching closer to peer at the results of this medical procedure. There was now only a thin, slightly swollen white line in the centre of a vivid bruise where before there had been ragged torn flesh surrounding an ugly deep bleeding wound. Hell, these people could advance our medical science a hundred years, he thought wonderingly. A wound like that back in an Earth hospital would have taken weeks to close over and heal fully and would certainly have left a jagged scar.

Leia finished her first aid by applying a dressing which, to Jones' surprise, hissed out in the form of a pressurised spray from the canister she held to settle and form an instant elastic graft over the healing edges of the wound. He smiled ruefully as the lesser cuts and scratches on Solo's face and hands began receiving the more common place and stinging attentions of an antiseptic soaked swab. The Wookiee had now released Solo, who definitely was not enjoying this last phase of his treatment. It can't be much fun not knowing where that swab's going to descend next! Jones grinned sympathetically.

Finally, Solo could take no more. Realising the laser cauterisation of the gash was complete, Han struggled groggily to sit up and escape any further torture. Chewbacca's furry hands once again pushed him back to the pillows.

"Will you relax, Han," Leia admonished sternly. "The medication won't wear off fully for another quarter yet and we haven't even seen what the medi-puter has to say.

"Okay. Don't go gettin' all fired up on me, Your Holiness," Han retorted, enjoying the resumption of their normal manner with one another. "I was just wondering what you've done with my new friends." Despite his desire to ease any misapprehensions his none-spacefaring companions might

be feeling in what must be to them an overwhelmingly environment, Han could not find the strength to resist any further. He was just too tired and sore; he lay back quietly. The medication had eased the ache in his head down to a dull throbbing, but moving hadn't helped. Knowing his eyes were of no use in any case, he closed them, finding absurdly that this action seemed to ease the renewed pain. Wanting, however, to make sure no one thought he was asleep, he called. "Marion? Indiana? Where are you two? Come on, you have to be introduced sooner or later. I promise Chewie won't bite."

Jones laughed. "We're right here, Han. How do you feel?"

"Kinda groggy, thanks to this damned overeager medi-puter. Guess you've probably figured out who's who by now, anyway." Solo waved an arm roughly in the direction of his assembled friends. "Princess-Senator Leia Organa, Commander Luke Skywalker, Chewbacca," he intoned with comic solemnity. "I have great pleasure in introducing you to the two people who saved my life back there - Marion Ravenwood and Professor Indiana Jones."

There was a clashing of various voices as all present attempted acknowledgements simultaneously. Before they could sort themselves out, there was a muffled explosion from somewhere outside and the Falcon shuddered slightly. Solo immediately opened his eyes, sat up and swung his legs from the bunk before the Wookiee again prevented further escape.

Stay here, Han, Chewbacca rumbled. *I will see to it.*

The sudden impulsive movement had brought a vicious resumption of pain as the painkilling injection also began to wear off. Han resisted the urge to nod agreement. He lay back down.

Seeing Solo's face pale, Luke reassured him. "It's okay, Han. We'll give them a warning out there and make a short hop into the desert before they can so much as put a scratch on the Falcon. Now just take it easy, okay?"

"Sure kid. Thanks," Han said quietly.

Leia had been alarmed as she observed the medi-puter's reaction to Solo's movement. He was feeling far worse than he was letting on - as usual. "Han, you've got the medi-puter going wild. It's insisting that we give you a knock out dose of painkillers and if you don't keep still, I'm going to do it."

"I'll be good, I promise, Your Worship," Han winked.

Jones grinned as he saw the young woman blush.

"Marion, Indy," Solo turned unseeing eyes in their direction. "You'd better strap in. Looks like you're going for a little ride."

Marion and Jones looked around in confusion. Princess Leia smiled and showed them to the seating encircling the small chess board surfaced table. As the three of them sat down and fastened safety belts, Jones realised Marion hadn't said a word since they had entered the spaceship. That was very unlike her. He looked at her anxiously and took her hand. It was cold and clammy. "Hey Marion, it's okay," he reassured her. "We're a lot safer with Han's friends than back out there with Dietrich and his men after us."

Marion managed a weak smile. "I'm okay, Jones. Just need a little time to adjust. It's not every day that I go for a flight in a spaceship, you know."

Jones returned her smile, then tensed slightly as they heard and felt powerful engines roar into life. Seeing their unease, Leia spoke up in an effort to make them more at home. "I know this bucket of bolts doesn't look like it can get off the ground, let alone out of orbit, but the Falcon's not too bad once you get to know her."

Hearing the deliberately loud remark even from the other end of the compartment, Han felt his jaw drop in surprise. He wasn't sure whether that had been meant as a compliment or an insult. "Well, thanks a bunch, Your Worship," he called back sarcastically.

Leia giggled. "Han, I thought you agreed not to call me that any more."

"Yeah well ... Leia," Solo mumbled. "It's hard to break old habits."

Seeing Marion now much more relaxed and smiling, and realising that both of them had barely noticed the lift off because of this comic exchange, Jones turned gratefully to the white-suited woman across from him. "Thank you, uh, Your Highness."

The beautiful dark eyes closed momentarily as Leia winced then smiled back at him. "Not you too!" she laughed. "Please just call me Leia." Leia's eyes narrowed as she studied the rugged, somewhat scruffy-looking but handsome man opposite her. Her eyes widened in surprise as she realised why that face was so familiar. She drew in a small gasping

breath of amazement. "Professor Jones ...," she began, but was interrupted by a wave of the man's hand.

"Indiana," Jones smiled.

Leia regained some of her composure as she smiled again. "Indiana ... you and Han, you're so ... so ..."

Marion came to her rescue with an expression of great self-satisfaction. "They look almost identical, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," Leia said softly, trying to resist the urge to stare rudely at the man.

Jones chuckled. "Guess I have to believe you then, Marion." He returned his attention to the Princess. "You really are a Princess, then?"

The young woman's face clouded, a shadow of deep pain showing for a brief moment in the dark depths of her eyes, before she managed to find a hesitant smile. "Oh yes," she replied in a carefully light tone. "The Organas were the Royal Family of Alderaan. Of course, I was adopted, but nonetheless the title was still officially mine." Leia gave up her pretended nonchalance and looked down at her tightly clasped hands, the smile now completely faded. "I am the last of the Organas and one of only a handful of surviving Alderaani. The Empire totally annihilated my home planet. It is ... nothing more than floating pieces of cosmic debris now."

Shocked yet again by this further news of the atrocities committed by the Empire, Jones could only grasp the tiny clenched hands in a show of compassion. "Your Highness ... uh ... Leia ... I'm truly sorry."

Marion was similarly appalled. She did not believe she could ever cope if Earth was taken from her forever, so many millions destroyed so coldly, loved ones among them. No one could ever be more exiled, more alone. Never one for decorum, she put her arms about the young woman comfortingly, recognising the harsh restraints Leia had imposed voluntarily upon her emotions in a valiant display of courageous leadership. "Leia, honey, you've got guts, you know. I'd never be able to handle something like that."

Jones was at once slightly embarrassed to hear a Princess addressed so informally, and at the same time deeply touched by and proud of Marion's

spontaneous comforting gesture and words. The Princess lifted her head, her dark eyes surprised and strangely happy.

"Thank you very much, Indiana, Marion." Never before had anyone other than Han and Luke understood so well and responded so naturally to her pain. She felt more comforted than she had in a long while. It was good to have a woman to share and understand feminine emotions. She had known only male companionship for too long. She took an instant deep liking to Marion and she could see that Indiana was more than just physically similar to Han. She gazed intently back into soft, dark eyes very like her own, smiling softly, knowing that Marion shared her female insights into the two men. "Han was very lucky to have found you two to help him." She said quietly.

Hearing the turn of the conversation, and knowing full well that Alderaan's destruction had caused a deep abiding wound within the woman he loved, Han was halfway to his feet to offer comfort when he heard Marion and Indiana's words. He felt his affection for his two new friends increase as he sensed how very well they had helped to ease Leia's pain. It would be good for Leia to have a woman to talk to for once. He called across to her, "don't know what I would have done without them, Leia."

Glancing up, Leia saw Solo in defiance of 'doctor's orders', sitting on the edge of the medical couch, his feet on the deck as if about to stand and come to her. She was simultaneously annoyed and touched, realising he had also heard, ignoring his pain in his desire to also reach and comfort her. Smiling, and feeling the slight jolt as the Falcon touched down again, she got to her feet. "Han," she warned lightly, "if you aren't lying down again by the time I get back over there, you'll regret it."

"Charming," Han responded with a grin, pleased to hear her recovered and back to her old, bossy self. He had insisted on being given only a short-lived tranq injection as he had wanted to explain the events of his rescue, ask a million questions and plan their next move. Now he began to regret his decision as the painkillers wore off completely, and the sharp aching of his head and still carbon-stiff body reasserted themselves. He lay back down with a muffled groan.

Now close by, Leia observed this reaction with some concern. Han had after all been an ... experiment, the doctors could not be certain about side effects. Anxiously, she turned her attention to the medi-puter printout controls, wanting an assessment of any internal damage. She began pressing the buttons which would activate the various sensors in the medical couch to provide a thorough scan of Solo's condition. Skywalker,

Chewbacca and the two Earthlings had again gathered about as the medi 'puter completed its electronic mutterings and came up with its findings. Leia studied the impregnated disc and breathed a huge relieved sigh before translating the symbols aloud.

end part 1

[Continue To Part 2](#)

[Back To Alphabetical Index](#)

[Back To Crossover Index](#)

[Back To Other Ford Fiction Index](#)