

Tomas Smith saw Rosita Gonzoles standing at the bar by herself. He walked up to the bar and ordered a whiskey and water. The bartender handed Gonzoles a wine glass before pouring Smith's drink. She waited, wondering if he knew how wonderful he looked in royal blue.

"Evening, Mr. Smith." Gonzoles smiled and sipped her champagne. "I didn't know you were coming tonight."

"Sure. I knew Jeff on the Lexington a couple of years ago." Smith took his drink from the bartender. They strolled through the party together. "He and Sonya seem happy."

"Yes, they do."

"I must say, Gonzoles." Smith smiled at her form fitting green and gold dress. "I've never seen a senior officer look so good."

"Thank you." Gonzoles laughed. She nodded to his civilian suit. "You look pretty good yourself. I've never had a wedding invitation that read no uniforms before."

"Good idea though." Smith said. "It's nice to know the uniform actually comes off some of these officers."

"I take it that includes me." Gonzoles smiled.

"You should let your hair down more often, Commander. The effect is most becoming." Tomas said. He lowered his voice and added. "But to be honest, I was thinking of the Captain."

"You've been on Excelsior for almost seven months now." Rosita said. "Just what do you have against him?"

"Nothing." Tomas said. "He runs a tight ship. I can not deny that Captain Sulu inspires loyalty. And if I was in trouble, I am confident he'd do everything possible and then some to get me out."

"But..."

"First impressions die hard." Smith said and sipped his drink.

"I'm sorry, but you will have to explain that." Rosita smiled.

"Is that an order, Sir?" Smith asked. Gonzoles just sipped her wine. "Not here. Let's take a walk out on the balcony."

She followed him out to the balcony. The hotel was on the edge of a popular beach. Several couples strolled along the waters edge below them. "What a beautiful night." Gonzoles leaned on the rail. "Risa is a great place to throw a wedding."

"Risa is a great place to do just about anything." Tomas said. Rosita liked the way the sea breeze blew through his black hair.

"Ok. Explanation required." Rosita looked up at him. "What was your first impression of Captain Sulu?"

"It's not really important." Smith shrugged. Gonzoles said nothing. She just waited. Finally he continued. "Ok. When I reported for duty, Captain Sulu was talking to his son. He was mad at the kid and nothing the kid could say made any difference."

"I didn't know parenting style was any basis for evaluating a command officer." Gonzoles said.

"It's not." Smith shrugged again. "He signed off with the kid, turned to me, and never skipped a beat."

"Kind of like you and your father, heh?"

"So, I'm transparent. Forget I said anything." Smith said. "Sulu is a good captain. And you wouldn't believe any different anyway."

"Meaning?"

Smith shrugged and said. "I hear you have a history with Sulu."

"What do you hear?" Gonzoles asked. "And what difference does that make?"

"Just that you knew the captain back when he was on Enterprise." Smith said. "That he recommended you for this ship. That he's shared his experience with you."

"You have some of that right." Gonzoles said. "For the record, Admiral Kirk suggested to me that Excelsior would be a good career move. I was on board from the very first trials. Two years before Captain Sulu took command. He has been generous with his experience and support, but that is all."

"Wait a minute." Smith said. "Did I hit a nerve?"

"I just want to set that record straight."

"It's straight." Smith assured her. "I'm sorry I brought it up."

"Listen. A few years ago someone started a rumor that Captain Sulu and I were more than just business." Gonzoles said. "You did not hear anything like that?"

"No. Nothing like that."

"Good."

"Is that why you tell everyone you don't date your shipmates?" Smith asked. "Been burned by the rumor mill?"

"I never found out who started that rumor." Gonzoles shrugged. "I don't know, maybe it was a joke. I did not appreciate it."

"I wouldn't either." Smith sympathized. "In a situation like that, it is the junior officer who looks bad."

"Right." Gonzoles said.

"But anybody that knows you, Gonzo, knows you've worked hard for everything you've got." Smith smiled. "You are a classic overachiever."

"Gonzo?" She raised her eyebrow at him. "You've been hanging out with Yaz."

"Yeah." Smith laughed. "Although he won't explain the nickname."

"Never mind." She started to take a drink, but her glass was empty. "I seem to need another drink."

"Me too." Smith swirled the ice in his otherwise empty glass. "I'd be happy to go get us a refill."

"All right." Gonzoles smiled and handed him her glass. His hand rested on hers a few seconds longer than necessary. She looked up into his dark eyes.

"Rosita." He said softly, leaning down towards her.

"Yes?" She lifted her face towards him.

"Gonzoles, Smith." Captain Sulu came onto the balcony. Tomas Smith took the wine glass from Rosita and stepped back from her. "Have you seen the happy couple?"

"No Captain." Gonzoles turned towards Sulu. "They were on the dance floor when we came out here a couple of minutes ago."

"They seem to have disappeared." Sulu said.

"I'll be back in a minute." Smith said. "Champagne, right?"

"Right." Gonzoles smiled. Smith retreated with a glass in each hand.

Sulu watched him go then turned back to Gonzoles. "Did I interrupt something?"

"Of course not." Gonzoles laughed. "We both came out for some fresh air and got to talking. It's such a beautiful night, it's a sin to be inside."

"Your religious upbringing is showing, Rosita, but I have to agree with you." Sulu leaned on the railing and looked out over the beach to the ocean. "Makes me wish Jeanie was here tonight. I haven't walked with her on a beach in quite awhile."

"That sounds nice." Gonzoles said. "Why were you looking for Jeff and Sonya?"

"Just to say goodnight." Sulu said. Smith returned with two drinks. "I'm on my way back to the ship."

"A little early, isn't it Captain?" Smith asked.

"Perhaps, Mr. Smith." Sulu nodded. "But the junior officers don't need the captain putting a damper on things. Once I've said my goodnights, I am sure the party will really get under way."

"Interesting theory." Smith said. "I just saw the newlyweds. They are on the edge of the dance floor talking to Mr. Chekov."

"Thank you, Mr. Smith" Sulu watched as Smith handed Gonzoles the glass. He reminded himself it wasn't any of his business. "I'll see you in the morning, Gonzoles?"

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles nodded. Sulu left them to say good night to the hosts.

"Well." Smith leaned on the rail very close to her. "I now have a legitimate complaint against Captain Sulu."

"Oh?" Gonzoles asked.

"He has lousy timing." Smith smiled at her and put his drink down on the railing. She smiled too. He was now standing very close to her. "If he hadn't interrupted, I think I might have kissed you."

"You're not sure?" Gonzoles whispered.

Smith leaned down so that his face was just inches from hers and whispered. "I'm not sure you want me to."

"Take a chance." She whispered back. Tomas gently laid his hand on her cheek and kissed her. When she responded, he kissed her again. He took her in his arms. Eventually, Rosita put her hand on his chest and gently pushed him back. "Tomas. This is a little too public for me."

"Yeah." He felt like he could barely breath. "Let's get out of here."

They left their drinks on the balcony and returned to the wedding reception. Gonzoles suddenly felt like everyone was looking at her. Looking at them, together. She turned to Smith. "I'm going to get my evening bag and say goodnight. I'll meet you in the lobby."

"Um..." He hesitated. "All right."

He watched her walk over to Dr. Patrick and the newly married couple. They laughed together about something. Tomas Smith turned and left the party without a word to anyone. He felt conspicuous waiting in the lobby for her. Finally she joined him. He wanted to ask her why she couldn't be seen with him, but starting a fight was the last thing on his mind.

"Hi." He smiled. "I thought maybe you were going to stand me up."

"No." Gonzoles said. "I'm not very familiar with Risa. Any suggestions?"

He took her hand and started for the door. "Come on." As they walked, he explained. "I know an intimate little Cafe that plays me-epo music all night long."

"Me-epo?"

"Slow sexy dance music." He pulled her close and put his arm around her as they walked along. "A bit like jazz, but...well, you'll have to hear it for yourself."

The Cafe was small. A three piece band played softly in the corner. Two couples danced slowly in front of them. There was a small bar and six tables. Tomas didn't wait or sit down. He led Rosita to the dance floor and wrapped his arms around her.

"What do you think?" He asked as they danced.

"When you say intimate, you mean intimate." She smiled. They barely moved as they held each other on the dance floor. "I like it."

"I've told you before, Commander." Tomas held her tightly. "I mean what I say."

"So you have." Her fingers played in the hair at the back of his neck. She couldn't stop smiling at him. "I must have had too much champagne."

"Why?"

"I'm breaking my own rules."

"Flexibility, my girl." He kissed her as they danced. "Do you know how much I have wanted to hold you?"

"All I know is I have thought about you a lot." Rosita said. "And I want to know you. I want to know everything about you."

"Everything?"

"Everything." Rosita said. "Didn't you say this place was open all night?"

The band stopped playing and announced they would take a break. Tomas and Rosita commandeered a table. They ordered a couple of drinks and some food. As the night wore on they danced and talked about everything.

Somewhere in the early morning hours they were the only customers left in the Cafe. The band continued to play and no one suggested they call it a night. As they danced, Tomas looked in her eyes. "I want to make love to you."

"Yes." Rosita smiled. "I was thinking the same thing. But..."

"But?"

"I'm on duty in three and a half hours." Rosita said. "It doesn't make much sense to get a room here. And..."

"Your quarters, mine." Tomas kissed her again. "It doesn't make any difference to me."

"Tomas..." Rosita said slowly.

He stopped dancing and stepped back from her. "Rosita Gonzoles! You are afraid. Afraid to beam up with me and to be seen going into your quarters with me. Afraid of what people will say."

"Tomas." She looked down to avoid his eyes.

"I thought you weren't afraid of anything." Tomas said. "I guess I was wrong."

Rosita just watched as he walked up to the bar and paid their bill. Without looking back, he left the Cafe. Rosita waited a minute before picking up her evening bag and walking out into the cool evening air. Tomas was nowhere in sight. She took her communicator out of her bag and contacted Excelsior.

Ensign Chiang was on duty when she materialized. "Nice party, Commander?"

"It went way too late for me, Bill." Gonzoles said. "I have to be on duty at oh eight hundred."

"That's pretty much what Dr. Patrick said when he beamed up about half an hour ago." Chiang smiled.

"Oh goody. We can compare headaches." Gonzoles smiled and headed for the door. "Good night, Bill."

"Good night Commander."

Gonzoles walked slowly to her quarters. She couldn't get Tomas Smith out of her mind. Perhaps she should have thrown caution to the wind. Maybe no one cared if the second and third officers of a starship were sleeping together. Maybe she had lost a chance at something real.

She was dead on her feet. All she wanted to do was take off her dress and fall into bed. Gonzoles was not prepared to find him sitting at her desk. "Tomas?"

"No one saw me come in." He stood up. "Do you want me to go?"

"No." She walked into his arms. "Stay."