

Captain Sulu walked into the transporter room on Starbase Twelve half an hour after his new ensigns were due to report. The ensigns came to attention. Lt. Briscoe was checking the information on her computer padd. She looked up from her work. "Good morning, Captain."

"Morning Briscoe." Sulu nodded. "Report."

"All present and accounted for, Sir." Briscoe said.

"Then put them to work, Lieutenant." Sulu said and walked up the two steps to the transporter pad.

"Aye Sir." Briscoe answered.

Sulu beamed up to Excelsior and checked in with the bridge. It was a quiet routine morning. The command chair was empty. Lt. Ellis manned the helm station and was the ranking officer on the bridge. Once the new officers had checked in with sick bay, the quiet routine would change.

Sulu hadn't been sitting at his desk in his ready room for five minutes, when the door chime signaled. The door slid open and Lt. Commander Gonzoles walked in. "Reporting as ordered, Sir."

Sulu sat back in his chair and studied her. "I see you haven't found the balance yet, Gonzoles."

"I'm working on it, Captain." Gonzoles said.

"I see." Sulu sighed. Gonzoles stood at attention, looking straight ahead, and waited. Captain Sulu wasn't in a hurry. Finally, he said. "You know I can not tolerate this kind of behavior. You should have kept the argument from becoming physical. You were the senior officer."

"Yes Sir."

"Because of that, if I have to transfer one of you to resolve this." Sulu said. "You are the one who will be transferred."

"Captain." He had caught her off guard. Leave Excelsior? Gonzoles took a deep breath. This was not the time to get emotional. She looked Sulu in the eye. "That will not be necessary."

"Are you sure?" Sulu asked.

"It has already been resolved, Sir." Gonzoles said. "There will be no further breach of regulations between Mr. Smith and myself."

"Good." Sulu nodded. "Until further notice you will be restricted to quarters while off duty. Dismissed."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles left the ready room and assumed her station on the bridge. Lt. Ellis was at the helm station. Commander Smith leaned on the front of the station talking to him. Once Gonzoles was sitting down she relaxed just a bit. She acknowledged the two men. "Good morning, Ellis. Tomas."

"Was it bad?" Smith asked.

"I wouldn't keep him waiting if I was you." Gonzoles said.

"Wish me luck." He smiled at her and walked swiftly to the Captain's ready room door. When it opened, he walked up to the Captain's desk and stood at attention. "Reporting as ordered, Sir."

"Mr. Smith." Sulu finished pouring himself a cup of coffee. "When you signed on nearly

a year ago, you promised me there would be no disciplinary problems."

"Yes Sir."

"And yet, here you are again." Sulu said. "With another personal problem that has become a disciplinary problem."

"Yes Sir."

"I spoke to Captain Piazza this morning." Sulu sipped his coffee and watched Smith. There was no evidence that Smith had even heard him. "She filled me in on the incident on the Lexington. There seems to be a pattern, Mr. Smith."

"Yes Sir."

"That's it?" Sulu put his coffee mug down and stood up. They faced each other across the desk. "As third officer you are routinely in command of the bridge and away missions. If I can't trust your judgement and control, there is no place for you on my ship."

"Yes Sir."

"Yes sir, yes sir." Sulu repeated with annoyance. "Mr. Smith, give me a reason not to transfer you. And be aware that if you transfer out now, it will not be onto another starship and certainly not as a senior officer."

"Captain," Smith remained at attention, staring straight ahead. "Last night Gonzoles and I worked out our differences. The incident at the Café was entirely my fault. It will not happen again. And while my word may not carry a lot a weight right now, I assure you that my personal life will not effect my work."

"Smith." Sulu said "I am not taking your word for anything right now. However Gonzoles has also assured me there will be no more problems. And her word does carry a lot of weight with me."

"Then I can not give you a reason not to transfer me, Captain." Smith said. "But you have previously expressed satisfaction with my work. Please give me a chance to prove that I can handle the situation."

"Up until last night, your work has be exemplary. And that is in your favor. But let me warn you, Mr. Smith, this is your last chance." Sulu said. "Understood?"

"Yes Sir."

"Until further notice you are confined to quarters while off duty." Sulu said. "Dismissed."

"Yes Sir." Smith turned and left the ready room.

On the bridge two young ensigns stood next to the helm station talking to Lt. Ellis. Nodding towards Smith, Ellis said. "That's him. Mr. Smith, new personnel."

"Thanks, Ellis."

The young Asian woman came to attention as he approached. She looked so young to Smith, with her short black hair pushed back over her ears. "Ensign Chai reporting for duty, Sir."

The young man was only slightly taller than Chai with a ruddy complexion and very short sandy brown hair. "Ensign James reporting, Sir."

"Nice to meet you James, Chai." Smith nodded. "You both come highly recommended. Take a break, Mr. Ellis, I want to see what these two know."

"Aye Sir." Ellis nodded. He locked the station and left the bridge.

"Chai, take the helm." Smith ordered. The young woman nodded and sat down. Gonzoles looked at him with raised eyebrow. "Ladies first, Mr. Smith?"

"Alphabetical order, Gonzoles." Smith winked at her. Turning his attention back to his new ensigns, Smith said. "Pay attention James. We are going to go over all Excelsior command codes and protocols. Plus important standing orders."

"Mr. Smith." Captain Sulu said from the upper bridge. "Aren't you off duty?"

"I have the orientation of two new helm officers, Captain." Smith said. "I believe that will take less than an hour. Then my next duty shift begins at sixteen hundred hours."

"Very well, Mr. Smith." Sulu nodded and left the bridge. He rode the turbo lift down one deck to the main science labs. The labs were full of new officers undergoing orientation. Sulu did not bother to signal, but walked into Chekov's office unannounced.

The office walls were covered with pictures of Chekov's family, including one of Cathy with her parents and brother. There were baby pictures of Peter and the twins. Pictures of family vacations on Rigel. A picture of Peter at the piano and one of the six year old twins posed in their soccer uniforms were the latest additions. Chekov kept putting up the new ones, but couldn't seem to take the old ones down.

Chekov looked up from his computer screen. "How'd it go?"

"I believe I got their attention. I must admit, I've never seen Smith stand at attention for so long." Sulu sat down in the chair across the desk from Chekov. "I don't know Pavel. I don't need this."

"It has not been a problem up until now." Chekov shrugged.

"I spoke to Tazianna Piazza on the Lexington this morning." Sulu said.

"About Smith's record." Chekov nodded. "What did she say?"

"It seems our boy, Smith, has a little problem with jealousy." Sulu said. "While on the Lexington he was involved with a civilian working at a research station. When she ended it, he went AWOL. Missing for three days. He came back on his own, full of apologies. It is Tazianna's opinion that he went on a bender. There were reports of fights, but no one caught him in the act.."

"Captain Piazza did not do anything?" Chekov asked.

"She convened a field court martial." Sulu said. "None of the civilians showed up for the trial. Except for the missing days, all the evidence was circumstantial."

"And he's the son of an admiral." Chekov said. "That gets him a slap on the wrist and trip to the bottom of the promotions list."

"Have you ever mentioned Admiral Smith to his son?" Sulu asked. Chekov just shook his head. "Not his favorite subject."

"Do we tell Rosita?" Chekov asked.

"I don't know." Sulu sighed. "Maybe he's already told her all about it. And it's not really any of our business."

"Perhaps not." Chekov said. "But she has been our friend for a very long time."

"It has been my experience that friends don't always want to hear objective and rational opinions of their lovers." Sulu said.

"Bridge to Captain Sulu."

Sulu leaned across Chekov's desk and opened the comline. "Sulu here. What is it, Gonzoles?"

"A distress call, Captain." Gonzoles reported. "From the Artful Dodger."

"Issue emergency recall to all personnel on the base." Sulu said. "I'm on my way."

Captain Sulu and Commander Chekov were on the bridge in less than a minute. Smith was still talking to his two new ensigns. Gonzoles stood next to Lt. DuBois at the communication station. He looked up at her. "That's all, Commander. She's not responding."

"Report." Sulu stopped next to Gonzoles. Chekov went immediately to the science station.

"We received one transmission from the Dodger, Sir." Gonzoles reported. "We've hailed her, but she's not responding."

"Let's see the transmission." Sulu said.

"It is audio only, Sir." DuBois said as he touched the controls necessary to play the recording.

"This is the U.S.S. Artful Dodger." Uhura's voice was steady and calm. "We have been attacked by unknown forces without provocation. We have sustained substantial damage. We request assistance from any Starfleet vessel. I recommend that all civilian Federation traffic stay clear of the Arcyba system."

"What is she doing there?" Chekov asked.

"Has any other Starfleet vessel responded?" Sulu asked.

"The U.S.S. Denver, a Yorkshire class transport can be there in thirty two hours." DuBois said. "And the U.S.S. Shantung, a Oberth class science vessel presently at Starbase G-7 offers to I respond. But they are undergoing repairs and won't be ready to launch for five hours."

"How soon could we be there?" Sulu asked Chekov.

"Seventeen hours at maximum safe speed." Chekov said.

"Continue to try to raise the Dodger, DuBois. Inform the Denver and the Shantung that we are on our way." Sulu said. The communications officer nodded. "Chekov, how many crew members are still on the base?"

"They are starting to report in now, Captain." Chekov said. "Roughly two thirds of third shift opted to go to the base. The transporter chief is bringing them on board as quickly as possible."

Captain Sulu walked down to the command chair. Standing in front of it, he asked. "Mr. Smith, where is Lt. Ellis?"

"I gave him a break, Captain." Smith said. "I'll take the helm."

"Ensign?" Sulu asked looking at the young woman who sat at the helm station.

"Chai." Smith said.

"Ensign Chai, can I assume you know what you are doing?" Sulu asked.

"Yes Sir." Chai nodded to the captain.

"You are relieved, Mr. Smith." Sulu said. Smith hesitated only a second. He nodded to Ensign James to follow him to the turbo lift. "DuBois, call Ellis to the bridge."

"Aye Sir."

"Chekov?"

"Five more minutes, Captain." Chekov said

"Gonzoles, set course for the Arcyba System." Sulu sat down.

"Course calculated and laid in, Captain." Gonzoles said.

"DuBois, inform Starbase flight control that we will be leaving in five minutes." Sulu

ordered.

"Aye Sir." DuBois nodded. After a minute, he added. "Control advises two transports on final approach to base. We are cleared to use departure pattern Delta Four."

"Delta Four?" Chai asked looking to Gonzoles for help.

Before Gonzoles could say anything, Sulu got up and leaned over Chai's shoulder. He touched two control pads that brought up departure patterns lists from the database. "Each Federation Base has several different patterns for safe departures. Just choose the appropriate pattern from the list and pay attention."

"Thank you, Sir." Chai said as she selected Delta Four from the list.

"My old station." Sulu smiled. He straightened up and looked at the communication station. "Mr. DuBois, send a message to the Café. Had to go, will explain later."

"Aye Sir."

"The crew is all present and accounted for, Captain." Chekov said.

"In record time." Sulu nodded to Chekov. "All right. Let's go. One half impulse until we clear Starbase Twelve Controlled Space."

"Aye Sir." Chai said. "Leaving orbit. Half impulse."

Lt. Ellis came onto the bridge. He could see from the main view screen that Chai was guiding Excelsior around the fifth planet in the Gamma 400 System. He waited on the upper bridge until they had past the thirteenth moon of the fifth planet. It was a complicated maneuver, but Chai had no trouble. He walked down to his station and tapped Chai on the shoulder.

"Just a minute, Lt. Ellis." Sulu said. "Take her to warp nine, Ensign Chai."

"Aye Sir." Chai said and, with a big smile on her face, took the Excelsior to warp speed.

"Thank you, Ensign." Sulu said. "You are relieved."

"Yes Sir." Chai secured the station and left the bridge.

Ensign Chai wasn't sure exactly where to go this first day on the ship, but she had to talk to someone. She went to Ensign James's new quarters. His roommate was sleeping, so she asked him to take a walk.

"It was great, Rog." Chai said as they walked. "I got to take the ship out of orbit, through the system, and up to warp nine."

"What about the Captain, Ling?" Ensign James asked. "I mean he practically threw Mr. Smith off the bridge."

"Maybe that had something to do with what happened at the Café last night." Chai said. "Captain Sulu was absolutely nice to me."

"I missed whatever happened last night. But the fight was all anybody was talking about when I got there." James said. "That was Smith?"

"Yes." Chai nodded. "And the officer who was at navigation this morning, Commander Gonzoles."

"They seemed awfully friendly today." James observed. "Lover's quarrel?"

"I think so." Chai nodded. "What did Mr. Smith say about scheduling?"

"He said he'd let us know. He didn't say anything else." James said. "I don't think he liked the way the Captain ordered him off the bridge."

"Let's get some lunch." Chai suggested. "I'm starving."

James and Chai were almost finished their lunch when Chekov and Patrick came into the mess hall and chose a table close to the new ensigns. Dr. Patrick started right in on his lunch. Mr. Chekov was uncharacteristically quiet.

"Problems, Pavel?"

"Not really, Pat." Chekov smiled and picked up his fork. "I just don't like leaving the base without a word to Cathy like that."

"You did not get a message to her?"

"Hikaru sent one to Jimmi at the Café." Pavel shrugged. "And telling Jimmi is telling Cathy."

"Is she still angry about the bet?" Pat asked.

"No." Pavel shook his head. "We should have known something was wrong when Uhura did not show up for the poker game last night."

"It wasn't the first time a ship has been late to pick up new personnel." Patrick said.

"These things happen."

"You are right of course." Chekov shrugged. "But..."

"I know, this is Uhura." Pat nodded.

"Yes."

The Captain ordered a change of schedules so that senior staff would be on duty when they arrived at the Acryba System. So both Captain Sulu and Commander Chekov went to bed after first shift. Neither found it easy to sleep. Each kept going over memories of Uhura and their time together on Enterprise. The three of them had been close friends for all of their adult lives.