

As Sulu left the bridge, Chekov was ordering them on their way. Captain Sulu breathed a sigh of relief in his office. He did not look forward to making this report. He may not be able to defend sending the Tray-dah off before consulting command. He hoped Rand could patch him through to Admiral Reese. But he wasn't so lucky. The face of Admiral Alessando Masini appeared on his screen. Sulu did not know Admiral Masini well, but he had a reputation for being by the book.

"Captain Sulu." the Admiral said. "I have just reviewed a report from Captain Uhura regarding the events at Space Station New Freedom. I have also been informed of formal complaints being issued against the Artful Dodger, The Excelsior, and you personally. What do you have to say, Captain?"

"Sir. Since you have already heard from Captain Uhura, you realize we were dealing with possible espionage. My information indicated the spy's accomplices were on the station. I did not feel it would be wise to allow the freighter to land. So I sent it to Starbase Eighteen with three members of my crew. The owner of the freighter is currently charged with assaulting a starfleet officer, possession of an illegal cloaking device, kidnaping, and espionage. As for the complaints issued by New Freedom, we acted within the boundaries of the sanctuary agreement as I understood it."

"Your report agrees with Captain Uhura." Admiral Masini said. "What is your present heading, Captain?"

"The Excelsior is on course for Starbase Eighteen, Admiral." Sulu said.

"Good." The Admiral said. "Report to Starbase Eighteen immediately and await further instruction. There will be a full investigation of this incident, Captain Sulu."

"Yes Sir." The connection terminated. Captain Sulu rubbed the back of his neck. There was nothing left to do. He opened the comline. "Commander Chekov, join me in my ready room please."

"Aye, Sir." Chekov answered. He was followed into the office by Dr. Patrick. They each took a chair in front of Sulu's desk. Chekov reported. "We'll arrive at Starbase Eighteen in six hours or so."

Sulu smiled. Only in private would Pavel be so inaccurate and nonchalant. Since Sulu wasn't volunteering anything, Dr. Patrick asked. "What did command have to say?"

"There will be a full investigation. We are to report to Starbase and wait." Sulu informed them.

"What is there to investigate?" Chekov asked. "What did they expect us to do?"

"I don't know, Pavel." Sulu said. "Am I suppose to ignore suggestions that the Romulans are behind the border skirmishes between the Klingons and Cardasian? Am I suppose to ignore a threat to Federation allies?"

"You did what you had to do." Dr. Patrick said. "That's all they can ask."

"Is it?" Sulu asked standing up. "Never the less, I'm going to get some sleep. Wake me when we get to Starbase."

"Aye Captain." Chekov said as he and Dr. Patrick also stood.

"Looks like you're going to get your shore leave after all, Pat. Sorry about the dancing girls." Sulu said and headed for his cabin.

Dr. Patrick looked at Chekov and asked. "What now, Pavel?"

"There is nothing we can do but wait and answer the questions as they come." Chekov said as they walked onto the bridge together. Pat followed Chekov around the upper circle of the bridge to the communications station. "Janice, do you know where Jimmi Sulu is?"

"Still on Earth as far as I know." Rand said.

"Send her a message that we will be on Starbase Eighteen indefinitely." Chekov ordered..

"No further explanation, Pavel?" Rand asked.

"No." Chekov said. "We'll let the Captain fill her in."

Mr. Kim gave up the center seat. "What did command say, Sir?"

"Only that there is to be a full investigation and that we are to cooperate with it." Chekov said. "We are to report to Starbase Eighteen and wait."

"But the Captain did nothing wrong." Ensign Colbert at the navigation station said.

"We know that." Chekov said taking the center seat. "When the investigation is over, command will know that also. There is nothing for us to do now but follow our orders."

Usually Captain Sulu had no problem sleeping. Today was the exception. After tossing and turning for nearly an hour he got up. He checked his correspondence file. There was one letter. He played it. Demora appeared on his screen.

"Hi Dad. I've only got a couple of minutes but I had to let you know. I just qualified for the precision flight team. I am so excited. We start flying tomorrow. Oh, and I also aced my computer analysis exam. I am working really hard, Dad, and I'm really enjoying it. But I hardly see my old friends at all anymore. Wendy is mad at me because of that. I talked to Mom about Wendy coming up to Starbase this July. We were thinking of going to Rigel after that. Both Mike and Harry said it's a great vacation spot. But Mom said I had to talk to you about it. I think she's worried something will happen to us. But we can take care of ourselves, Dad. Would you talk to her about it? After all what's the difference of going to the beaches on Rigel and going to the beaches on Earth? I mean besides the sand and sky being a different color. I've got to go. Commander Kyle is a stickler for being on time. I love you, Dad."

Dee's letter had made him feel better. He wondered how she spoke so fast and why he still understood her at that speed. But he still didn't feel like sleeping. He wandered down to sickbay. Dr. Patrick was in his office.

"Things get boring on the bridge?" Sulu asked Pat leaning in his doorway.

"Routine enough that I came back down here." Pat said. "I thought you were going to get some sleep. You need it."

"Needing sleep and getting sleep are two different things." Sulu said coming in the rest of the way and sitting down.

"You want something to help with that?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"Nah." Sulu dismissed the idea. He never liked the idea of taking a sleeping aid. "I'll have plenty of time to sleep when we get to the Starbase. I should go back to the bridge and let the crew know what's going on."

"Chekov took care of that." Pat said

"Oh?"

"When Mr. Kim asked what was going on." Pat said. "Chekov said that there would be an

investigation, we would cooperate, then we'd get back to work. Simple, strong, sure. We should all be so sure."

"You'll get no argument here, Doctor."

"So Captain, you did not come here for a sleeping aid or to discuss the crew." Pat said "What does bring you to my door?"

"It seemed the logical place to go, Pat." Sulu smiled more to himself than at the doctor. "You have been giving me a hard time about Matthew Brady since we first met him. So Doctor, tell me, am I out of line?"

"You know regulations better than I do." Dr. Patrick said. "Are you?"

"Regulations don't cover everything. Especially when it comes to command privilege." Sulu said. "I can't help but wonder...."

"Captain, let the bureaucrats and diplomats second guess you. You can't stop them." Dr. Patrick said. "But you know you acted honestly and according to regulations. There is no point in second thoughts now."

"Easier said than done." Sulu said.

"You don't usually have a problem with this aspect of the job." Pat said. "Why is this incident different? Is it the investigation? Is it Brady? Is it Uhura?"

"Interesting choice, Doctor." Sulu looked surprised. "Why do you bring in Uhura?"

"She brought the problem to you." Pat said. "But we were not in your command sector, so Uhura was not under your command. If some one is to answer for anything, it will be both of you. You are used to accepting that responsibility yourself. And on top of that, she's an old friend."

"Yes." Sulu admitted. "Uhura is an old and dear friend. She brought me into this because Brady used my name. Captain Uhura was following up on information about the Cardasian arms build up, which she is under orders to do. She acted correctly."

"You say that with utter certainty." Patrick smiled. "And yet you question your own actions. I wonder what Captain Uhura is thinking right now. Do you think she is as certain of her actions as you are?"

"Interesting." Sulu said. "I knew there was a reason I came down here."

"Will the Dodger also be reporting to Starbase Eighteen?" Patrick asked.

"The Admiral did not say. Although it makes sense." Sulu said. He abruptly changed the subject. "Too bad you are not a parent, Pat. You could give me some advice on this letter I just got from my daughter. She wants to vacation on Rigel with her cousin this summer. Evidently her mother is opposed. Demora wants me to give her permission to go."

"How old is Dee now?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"By this summer she'll be twenty."

"And she's still asking your permission?" the doctor asked surprised. "I know I never asked my parents for anything but money at that age."

"I guess I should count myself lucky." He laughed. "I'll have to ask Jimmi why she's against it. Dee may not be telling me everything."

The Excelsior came into orbit around Starbase Eighteen. They transferred their prisoners

to the security office on the base. Brady was not officially a prisoner. Sulu had him brought to his office.

"Come in and sit down, Mr. Brady." Captain Sulu said.

"Captain." Brady said. "I understand we returned to Starbase Eighteen. I wanted to go to New Freedom."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Brady. But they aren't too happy with Starfleet in general and me in particular right now." Sulu explained. "We left rather abruptly."

"So where do we go from here?" Brady asked. "Am I left to my own devices?"

"Starfleet is conducting an investigation regarding the incident and the information coming from it." Sulu said slowly. He did not like being put in the position to ask Matthew Brady for anything. "I can not compel you to stay. If you do, I will get you back to New Freedom myself when I am free to do so."

"Wait a minute." Matthew leaned forward. "You're telling me you bring them news regarding a threat to a major Federation ally and they are arresting you?"

"No. I said there is an investigation and I am under orders to wait here until it is over." Sulu clarified. "You are not required to stay. However there may be some questions that you are best suited to answer."

"Sulu, you need me." Brady laughed. Sulu did not respond. He did not want to admit that possibility. "What's the charge?"

"Obstruction of justice is all I know so far." Sulu said. "I have not seen the official complaint yet."

"Starfleet must be crazy."

"The charge comes from the dockmaster of New Freedom." Sulu explained. "An official complaint requires an investigation."

"Joreed himself is just a lot of hot air." Brady said. "But some of those he reports to can be very dangerous."

"Really?" Sulu said. "Who are we talking about?"

"Nobody you don't already know about." Brady evaded the question. "How about taking this ID bracelet off, Captain? I'm not going any where."

Sulu took a minute to consult his computer console to get the device's access code. He removed it from Brady's wrist. It had never really been necessary any way. Sulu had just wanted Brady to know he was being watched.

"Thanks. Now am I free to go?" Brady asked. "I could really use a drink about now."

"That is a good idea." Sulu said. "Follow me."

He took Brady out the door that led to the bridge. Commander Chekov was in command. He stood when the captain came on the bridge. He was obviously surprised to see Matthew Brady on the bridge.

"Have we heard anything else from Command, Mr. Chekov?" the Captain asked adding to Chekov's confusion. Sulu knew he would have been notified if anything new came in.

"No Sir." Chekov said.

"Good." Sulu smiled. "We may as well take advantage of the situation. I'm sure the department heads can order the proper maintenance and diagnostic work to keep us busy while we are here. Grant shore leave to all off duty personnel. If you need me, I'll be at the Fly By

Night."

"Aye Captain." Chekov said.

"I assume you'll be off duty soon, Commander?"

"I'll join you shortly." Chekov said.

Sulu and Brady left the ship together but they didn't say much as they walked into the Fly By Night Bar and Grill. It was close to twenty one hundred hours and the bar had a small crowd. A few Starfleet officers gathered at the tables. The regulars were at the bar. There were a couple of civilians. As usual, Mike was behind the bar.

"Well Captain, it's about time you got here." Mike said as Sulu took a barstool. Brady sat down next to him. "Back again so soon, Matthew?"

"You knew I was coming?" Sulu asked.

"Not me, your wife." Mike explained putting a beer in front of him. "She wants you to call her. What will you have tonight, Matthew?"

"I'll have the same as the Captain." Matthew said.

"Will this be a quick visit?" Mike asked. "Or can I expect a big night?"

"Excelsior will be here for at least a couple of days. I've authorized shore leave." Sulu said and took a long drink of his beer. "Can I use your office?"

"Sure."

It took just a minute or two for Jimmi appeared on the screen at Mike's desk. She didn't bother with any greeting. "What is going on? I get a cryptic message from Excelsior saying you are going to be on Base18 with no further explanation. I know this message didn't come from you. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, Baby. We've just been ordered to wait further orders here." Sulu said. "You're right. I didn't send the message. It must have been Rand's idea. "

Jimmi knew something was wrong. He was obviously covering. She changed the subject. "Well, then I'll bring you up to date on the kids. Although I'm sure you probably know more about Dee's activities than I do. I know she keeps you informed. Brian's grades are up. Not great, but a definite and sizable improvement. He is trying very hard. His attitude is variable. Some days he is my sweet little boy and some days he barely talks to me. And remember! Junior will be graduating in August. He's in the top ten percent of his class. Of course there is no surprise there. Of course you will be there....Right?....Harry?"

"I'll do my best." Sulu said distractedly.

"Harry?" Now she was worried. He hadn't even given her a hard time for calling their oldest son Junior.

"Yeah?"

"I know it's classified and you're not going to tell me, but is it that bad?" Jimmi asked.

Sulu smiled. "I'm sorry, Jeanie. I am distracted. And it is classified. But no, it's not that bad. Don't worry about it."

"You weren't thinking of starting a war or anything like that?" She teased him.

"No, no wars today." He laughed. "But next time you see him, say hello to Captain Kirk for me. I'll call you again soon."

"I love you." Jimmi said as the screen went blank. Jimmi turned and looked at her father who was sitting in front of the fireplace of his San Francisco home. "It's not good."

"Call Jim." McCoy said.
"James T. won't tell me anything." Jimmi said.
"I know. Call him."

Captain Sulu returned to the bar. It was starting to fill up. All Excelsior people, so the Artful Dodger hadn't come in yet. Sulu saw Chekov walk up to the bar ahead of him. Mike reached for Chekov's usual beer.

"Vodka, neat." Chekov ordered. Mike didn't question. He knew when to shut up and pour the drink.

Captain Sulu joined his first officer at the bar. He hadn't seen Pavel with a glass of vodka in his hands in years. Sulu put the empty beer bottle on the bar. Mike replaced it with a full one. He had already called in the rest of the bar's staff, but it was obvious this was not going to be the normal party night of a starship in for repairs.

"Vodka?" Sulu asked quietly.

"Why not?" Chekov asked. "A few minutes ago we received a transmission from the JAG office. They are sending a special investigating officer. An expert in the Cardasian situation. They felt he was a good choice because he used to be a field officer."

"You got a name, Pavel?" Sulu asked.

"Captain Jacob Habib." Chekov said. "He should be here in thirty three hours."

Captain Sulu just stared at him for a minute. Then he laughed. It was ironic. He took his beer and slowly walked over to the pool table. The Captain racked up the balls and practiced the game he hadn't played in years. Other Excelsior officers were coming into the bar. No one interrupted the Captain.

"What's going on, Pavel?" Mike asked Chekov.

"Politics, Mike." Chekov said. "Nothing to worry about."

Dr. Patrick came into the bar and joined Chekov. Matthew Brady was sitting a few bar stools away being abnormally quiet. He appeared to be oblivious to his surroundings, but he was listening to every word.

"Hi, Mike." Dr. Patrick said pleasantly. "Give me one of those drafts."

"Right away, Doc." Mike said.

"Doctor, do you remember Jacob Habib?" Chekov asked. He certainly remembered all the talk that went around Enterprise. There were a lot of questions. A lot of second guessing. The only thing that was clear was that Sulu's actions had cost Habib his command. Habib had stayed in the service but was in administration now.

"Sure. That was Excelsior's first mission." Pat said. It was also the first time he had met Matthew Brady. "You don't forget your first mission as CMO. Why?"

"Captain Habib will be the investigator." Chekov said.

"Now who's bright idea was that?" Dr. Patrick complained.

But Chekov just shrugged. He downed the rest of his vodka. "Mike, mind if I use your office to call home?"

"Go ahead." Mike said. "She'll be waiting."

As Chekov went into the office Pat asked. "Why would she be waiting?"

"Because the Boss already knows Excelsior is here." Mike explained. "And telling her is the same as telling C.J., and visa versa."

The Doctor nodded and headed over to the pool table. Captain Sulu had cleared the table of balls three times and no one had bothered him. He was glad it was a game that could be played alone. He was starting to enjoy himself. He could almost forget about the investigation. All he needed now was a good cigar.

"Ever play pool, Pat?" Sulu asked as he made a shot.

"Nope." Pat said watching the Captain play. "You heard the good news? About the special investigator?"

"Uh-huh." Sulu made his shot. Dr. Patrick was making a habit out of bringing things up that Sulu did not want to talk about.

"So Habib made captain after all." Patrick commented.

"Just took him another five years." Sulu said. "Not bad...considering."

"Do you think he holds a grudge?" Patrick asked.

"I don't know." Sulu answered leaning on his pool stick. "But you don't make Captain just by putting in your time. He's worked hard to get where he is. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt and hope he gives me the same."

Chekov came out of the office. He saw Sulu and Patrick talking and joined them. Cassie, the waitress, came by and picked up the Captain's empty beer bottle. She smiled sweetly. "Can I get you gentlemen anything?"

"Give us a round of those." Chekov indicated the empty bottle as he picked up a pool stick. Cassie nodded and left. "I haven't played this game in over fifteen years."

"Making excuses already, Pavel?" Sulu laughed.

"You'd like to place a small wager?" Chekov asked. Sulu hadn't played in a long time either.

"Not really." Sulu laughed. He racked the balls. "How's Cathy?"

"She had a message for you, Captain." Chekov said. Both Dr. Patrick and Captain Sulu stopped and stared at him. Cathy never sought out Hikaru's company. They barely tolerated each other. "She said to tell you that Captain Kirk says hello."

"It would seem that C.J. and J.M. have been busy." Sulu commented. When Cassie came back with their beers, they ordered dinner. It was late but none of them had taken the time for a meal earlier. They had time for two full games before their dinner was served. After they had finished their meal, Sulu left the bar. Once in his own bunk he had no trouble falling asleep.

Captain Sulu reported to the bridge in the morning as usual. He knew he had at least a full day before the investigation would start. There was no information he could gather. The prisoners were in the custody of the station security. Undoubtedly they were being interrogated for the JAG investigator. His crew had returned from the Trah-dah. Excelsior personnel were not to have further access to that ship.

Lt. Commander Gonzoles was at the navigation station as usual. "Gonzoles, join me in my ready room." Sulu said.

"Aye Sir." She replied, locked her station, and followed him.

"Sit down, Rosita." Sulu said as she came in. "How's it going?"

"So far so good." She smiled.

"Can you tell me any more about the Tray-dah?" he asked. "Anything I don't already know?"

Rosita Gonzoles thought for a minute. She wanted desperately to give her Captain the piece of information he needed, but there really was nothing. So she would tell him everything she could think of. "Commander T'Penn had down loaded the information she felt she needed to study. So there is nothing there I can tell you regarding the computers. The Trah-dah is a Della Mir ship and so everything is not always obvious. She was a freighter but I wonder about her cargo."

"Why is that?"

"The cargo area seemed to be rigged for live cargo." Gonzoles proceeded carefully. "Like a troop transport or, prison transport."

"Prison transport?" Sulu asked. Perhaps there was something else entirely going on here. "What makes you think that?"

"I have no hard evidence, Sir." She said. "But in the cargo area there were a lot of restraining devices. It didn't make sense to me. The ship is equipped with full interior security fields. I don't know why the restraining devices would be necessary."

"I wonder if it will make sense to Matthew Brady?" Captain Sulu thought out loud. Perhaps it had something to do with Pulteel. "Did it seem ready to accommodate many people or just one or two?"

"I'd say the cargo area could have held ten to fifteen humanoids." Gonzoles said. "At least that's how many bunks there were."

"I'd like to know more about that." Sulu said. "Was there anything else that seemed out of line?"

Again she took time to think. Sulu appreciated her care. "I can't think of anything, Sir."

"Thank you Commander." Sulu dismissed her. She started to leave. He stopped her at the door. "Gonzoles, well done."

She went back to her station, smiling to herself. There wasn't much to do at navigation but monitor. They were still in orbit around Starbase Eighteen. Normal traffic was coming and going. It was a heavily traveled sector. Captain Sulu came back on the bridge. There was no real reason for him to be there except to show his crew it was business as usual. Engineering was using the time to do a complete overhaul of all engine systems. All departments were doing similar maintenance work.

Finally the Artful Dodger came into orbit. The Excelsior bridge crew watched as the smaller ship performed the maneuvers necessary to align herself and dock on the base's outermost docking ring.

"Captain." Lt. Foot reported. "The Dodger is hailing us."

"On screen, Mr. Foot." Sulu ordered. Captain Uhua appeared on the bridge's large main screen. "About time, Captain."

"I've been busy." She smiled at him. "If you'd like to hear about it, you could buy me lunch."

"There's an offer I can't refuse." Sulu said. "I'll meet you at the Fly By Night. I believe Mike is opening for lunch."

"That's just like you, Hikaru Sulu. Take a girl to a place where you don't have to pay."

She teased him. Before he could respond, she added. "Dodger out."

Chekov looked at him from the science station. "You going to let her get away with that, Captain?"

"Probably." Sulu shrugged coming over to Chekov. "Why don't you join us? The three of us haven't taken our lunch break together in years."

"Why not." Chekov said.

"Mr. Kim, you have the bridge." Sulu said as they left. When they got to the Fly By Night it was just opening. Just Mike and Paco were there. Mike was talking to a young woman at the bar. He excused himself and came over to the table the three senior officers had chosen.

"Back again?" Mike asked pleasantly. "What can I get you?"

"Since when do you wait tables?" Sulu asked.

"Since the waitress hadn't shown up for work." Mike said. "We're not real organized around here yet today."

"How about some coffee for now." Uhura suggested. "Let us know when you are organized."

"That I can do." Mike said. After he brought their coffee and left, they became more serious.

"So what's up, Uhura?" Sulu asked.

"I took our information to the Klingon high command. General Frowlk to be exact." Uhura reported. "They had been expecting something along these lines. They had some information of their own telling them to watch out for Romulan intervention in the Cardassian matter. But he wasn't willing to share the details. The interesting thing was they had several key military and civilian leaders disappear without explanation from their border settlements. The disappearances coincide exactly with the times the Tray-dah visited those settlements."

"And where did the Tray-dah go after these visits to the Klingon settlements?" Sulu asked.

"Space Station New Freedom." Uhura said. "Every time. She never stopped anywhere else."

"How many missing Klingons are we talking about?" Chekov asked.

"Five, maybe six." Uhura said. "Frowlk was still looking into the last one, which happened about a week before I ran into Mr. Brady."

"How do you know Frowlk?" Sulu asked. "Can you trust him?"

"I've run into him three or four times since I've been Captain." she explained. "In every instance he has acted honorably. I'll trust him until I am given a reason not to."

"Brady warned me that the people behind the people at New Freedom could be quite dangerous." Sulu said.

"What is that suppose to mean?" Chekov asked.

"I don't know." Sulu said. He looked at Uhura. "Have you been informed of the investigation?"

"Yes." Uhura said. "And of the investigator. More is going on here than meets the eye. Do you think Habib will be a help or a hindrance?"

"Only time will tell." Sulu said. "But I haven't received any further orders regarding the investigation."

"What did you expect?" Chekov asked.

"The way things are going, I half expected to be told not to talk this over with anyone from the Dodger." Sulu said.

"I wasn't planning on tampering with any evidence, were you?" Uhura said somewhat surprised.

"Of course not." Sulu dismissed the idea "It just feels like someone doesn't want us to figure this out."

Mike came over with the young woman he had been talking to at the bar. She was attractive, in her mid twenties with strikingly red hair. "This is Angel, my new waitress." Mike said. "I told her you would be nice to her. Don't make a liar out of me."

"You must be a hard boss, Mike." Sulu laughed. "Cassie's late once and you hire a new waitress."

"Cassie is late more often than not. However, Angel is an additional waitress." Mike said. Cassie came in laughing with Dr. Patrick. "About time."

"Sorry, Mike." Cassie said. "I over slept."

The lunch rush was just starting. The three friends had their lunch and went their separate ways. Uhura went back to her ship. Chekov also returned to work. Sulu went to the bar to talk to Mike.

"Any idea where I might find Matthew Brady?" Sulu asked leaning across the bar.

"He'll be in here later." Mike said. "He can't get enough of Paco's chili. I don't know where he stays. I do know he has friends on the base."

"Civilians?"

"Generally." Mike was wiping a bar that did not need wiping. "Matthew is a private man. He doesn't offer and I don't ask."

Sulu just nodded. His questions seemed to be making his nephew nervous. He left the bar. The investigation couldn't start at least until the next morning. Captain Sulu had only today to find out what was happening. He wasn't sure what to do next. Uhura's information was confusing. If the Tray-dah had been kidnapping Klingon leaders, where had they taken them? There was no way the administration at New Freedom would talk to him now. They had probably denied any access to Starfleet, period.

"Sulu to Excelsior."

"Excelsior here." Commander Rand answered.

"Commander, have Gonzoles report to me here."

Sulu pocketed his communicator and headed for the transporter room. He arrived as she was beaming down. "Reporting as ordered, Captain."

"Commander, have you ever been to New Freedom?" Sulu asked as they left the transporter room together.

"Physically on the station? No Sir."

"They are notorious for sharing what information they have." Sulu explained. "However I don't think they will answer any official inquiry from me. I want you to ask them some questions."

"Why will they talk to me?" Gonzoles asked. "They are bound to question anything coming from Starfleet right now."

"Because they are not going to know you are Starfleet." Sulu smiled and led her into the Fly By Night. "Mike, I'm going to use Jimmi's apartment."

"Ok." Mike said slowly. He wasn't sure what to think of his uncle taking a woman into Jimmi's apartment. He wondered what the Boss would say.

Sulu led the way up the stairs to his wife's apartment. He turned on the computer console on the desk. "Take off your uniform jacket, Rosita. I don't want them to have any indication that you are with Starfleet. From here they will trace the communication back to the bar, not anything official."

Lt. Commander Gonzoles took off her uniform jacket and took out the barrette that held her hair back. Sulu smiled approvingly. But the uniform T-shirt was a dead give away. "What did you want me to ask, Captain?" Gonzoles asked.

"You have to get rid of the t-shirt." Sulu said.

"Excuse me, Captain?" Gonzoles asked.

"Look in my wife's closet for something more casual, more alluring." Sulu said. "I want you to look like you belong here at the bar."

"Sir, I'd feel strange going through Mrs. Sulu's closet." Gonzoles said.

"Why?"

"Because she is your wife, Captain." Gonzoles said. But he obviously didn't see the problem. "It is not appropriate. And I am sure she would not appreciate it."

"Women!" Sulu shook his head. He took Gonzoles' hand and pulled her into the bedroom. He opened Jimmi's closet. "I know she always leaves a few things here, just in case."

"In case of what?" Gonzoles asked.

"I don't know." Sulu laughed. "Help me out here, Gonzoles. This is not my area of expertise."

Gonzoles rejected the dresses. No matter what the Captain thought, she and his wife were not the same size. She looked in the drawers. After a few minutes she came upon a peasant blouse in pale pink similar to what they still wore in her native Guatemala on festival days.

"How about this?"

"Good." Sulu nodded. "I'm going to ask Mike a question. I'll be back in a minute."

Sulu left the apartment. He suddenly felt a bit odd about being there while Gonzoles was changing. Maybe he had been married too long. He went out to the bar and got Mike's attention. Matthew Brady was sitting at the bar with a bowl of chili in front of him.

"Mike, do you know anyone at Space Station New Freedom?" Sulu asked.

"A few suppliers. I know the owner of The Wayward, a bar there. Why?" Mike asked.

"Hmm. I don't know if that will help." Sulu said. "What about you, Brady?"

"I know many people there." Brady said. "What are you looking for?"

"I don't want to go into this in the bar." Sulu said. Brady was being awfully helpful. It made the Captain nervous. He couldn't understand what his motivation was. "Do you mind joining me in the apartment?"

Brady shrugged and got up to follow the Captain. As they climbed the steps, Brady said "I thought you had a woman up here."

"Really?" Sulu laughed. "How did you get that idea?"

"Bar room gossip, I guess."

Gonzoles waited in the common room. She had the pink peasant blouse on. It was pushed down her shoulders as far as possible and still be decent. She had brushed out her black wavy hair so that it rested lightly on her bare shoulders.

"Well?" Gonzoles asked.

"Yes. That is exactly what I meant." Sulu said. "Brady have you met Lt. Commander Gonzoles?"

"Commander. Nice to meet you." Brady smiled. He turned to Sulu. "You don't consider her a woman?"

"I consider her one of my senior officers." Sulu said. Brady wondered briefly if Sulu was blind. "I wanted to contact New Freedom to follow up on some information that came from the Klingons. But they won't talk to Starfleet, so I asked Commander Gonzoles to talk to them out of uniform "

"Information from the Klingons?" Brady asked.

"It would seem your friend Tau had kidnaped several Klingon officials from the border settlements that were having the problems with the Cardassians." Sulu said. "Did you know anything about that?"

"That bastard!" Brady said. "He really did want to start a war didn't he?"

"Yes, but what I am wondering is what happened to the missing Klingons?" Sulu asked. "They must be dead or held somewhere. If they had escaped they would have returned to their posts and reported what happened."

"Are you sure, Sir?" Gonzoles asked.

"Any Klingons I ever met would rather die than desert their posts." Brady agreed. He thought about whether he should say any more. "You realize that at New Freedom you can get just about anything you want. Even things that are not legal in the Federation."

"What are you talking about, Brady?" Sulu asked.

"I don't know what happened to these Klingons. I don't know if this is what Tau was up to." Brady said. "There are several possibilities."

"Come on, Brady." Sulu was getting annoyed with his stalling. "Does this have something to do the cryptic comment regarding the people behind Joreed?"

"This didn't come from me. You got that, Sulu?" Brady asked. Sulu nodded. "Besides information and drugs and contraband of every description, you can buy and sell people on New Freedom."

"Slaves?" Gonzoles said. "But where do they come from? And who buys them?"

"Where do slaves ever come from?" Brady asked. "The helpless. There are pirates who specialize in preying on disabled ships. They offer help, rescue the crew and passengers, then destroy the ship and report all hands lost. No one looks for the missing because they have been declared dead."

"Who buys them?" Gonzoles asked again. "And why?"

"I personally know of several wealthy people outside of Federation space who are always on the look out for a beautiful woman or man as a toy." Brady said. "Some are bought for their technical genius, their strength, or their knowledge. There are many different reason."

"I don't generally think of Klingons as helpless." Gonzoles challenged.

"True." Brady said. He smiled at her. It was almost the same as having the conversation

with Sulu, but she was a lot prettier. "If Tau was engaging in the slave trade, he would attempt to kidnap whoever the buyer is interested in. Find the buyer and you'll find the reasons."

"The missing Klingons were from small border settlements." Sulu said. "They would have had no information that the Romulans or the Cardasians could use. Whatever they know could be had from more conventional methods. It doesn't make sense."

"Even if we got through to New Freedom Dockmaster," Gonzoles asked. "What are they going to tell us? If they are involved in slave trade they are not going to admit it, Starfleet or no."

"Commander Gonzoles." Brady suddenly looked at her smiling. "I have a different idea, if you are willing."

Gonzoles eyed him suspiciously. The way he looked at her made her feel naked. She wished she had her uniform back on. The Commander replied. "I'd have to hear the idea first, Mr. Brady."

"Call me Matthew, please." He grinned. "Don't call the dockmaster. Call Tau Reganer. He is there at the station and no doubt wondering what is happening to his nephew."

"And what do you propose I tell him?" Gonzoles asked.

"That his nephew and I are in custody and in need of his help." Brady explained. "That you are a friend of mine, he'll believe that. And that you are desperate to help me. Tell him I gave you his name."

"Why can't you call him, Mr. Brady?" Commander Gonzoles asked.

"Romulans, like Starfleet officers, are suspicious by nature." Brady said. "If I am not in trouble, I have no reason to contact him."

"Captain?" Gonzoles looked to Sulu. He was being unusually quiet. The Captain had been looking at the family portrait on the wall. Jimmi had insisted they have it taken. Sulu wasn't sure of the ages. But he thought Harry had been about thirteen. That would make Dee eight and Brian just three. But he didn't have time to think about that now.

"What do you expect Tau Reganer to tell us?" Sulu asked.

"He'll probably tell you to go to hell. But if Commander Gonzoles...don't you have a first name?...if she can play dumb, he may say more than he ought to."

Sulu looked at Gonzoles. He thought it had to be her decision. "The more information we have, the better off we are. It's your call Commander."

"It's worth a shot." Gonzoles said. Sulu had to know she would never let him go down without a fight. She turned to Brady. "How do I get in touch with him?"

Brady touched a few controls on the desk control panel. As the connection was made, he quickly jumped out of the range of the view screen. Gonzoles sat at the desk and took a few deep breaths. When she spoke she raised the pitch of her voice. Less commanding, more submissive.

"Hello. I am looking for Tau Reganer. Have I reached the correct person?" Gonzoles asked tentatively.

"Who are you?" Tau Reganer asked "And how did you make this connection?"

"Matthew Brady gave me the number." Gonzoles confided. "He thought you could help him. I am his....friend. My name is Rosey."

Tau Reganer sneered a bit. "Yes, you look like most of Brady's friends. What makes him think I can or will help him?"

"There is someone with him." Gonzoles was putting on a good act. She sounded

confused. "The name was also Tau...Tau Mauru, I think. Matty said you would want to help him if you could."

"What else did he say?" Tau Reganer asked.

"Of course he said something about profits, but he always does." Gonzoles said. "Can you help him? These Starfleet people are very serious this time. I'm very worried about him."

"Tell Brady, he'll have to get out of this himself." Tau Reganer said. "As for my nephew, he knew he was expendable from the start. I'll do nothing to help him. I have bigger worries."

"Please..." Gonzoles pleaded. "I don't think they will let him out."

"It looks like you will have to find another friend." Tau Reganer said. "And if you do see Brady again, tell him that the warning has been heeded and that Lucre considers the debt paid."

"I don't understand." Gonzoles said. "Will this help him?"

"Not in the least." Tau Reganer laughed. "He doesn't even know that he set this plan in motion. But I have no more time for this. Tau out."

Gonzoles turned off the desk console and looked up at Matthew Brady. Using her normal voice, she said. "Who is Lucre?"

"And what is this debt?" Sulu asked. But Brady was just staring at them, stunned. He didn't know what to think.

"Ummm....I don't know what to tell you." Brady said.

"Try the truth." Gonzoles suggested. Sulu watched Brady. Matthew was recovering from the shock of what Tau Reganer said. Sulu could almost see the swagger come back.

"Have you been taking captain lessons, Rosey?" Brady laughed. "Lucre is a very rich and powerful man. I've never met him myself. And I have no idea what Tau meant about a debt."

"Commander, run a check on Lucre." Sulu said. "I want to know everything there is to know before the investigation convenes."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles said. "But I'd like to get back in my uniform first."

"Of course." Sulu smiled at her and said. "Although it was good to see Rosey again. It's been a long time."

Gonzoles didn't bother to answer. She retreated to the bedroom and transformed herself back into a Starfleet commander. Even as she was pulling her hair back into a regulation braid she found herself thinking of Matthew Brady's piercing blue eyes and mocking smile. She couldn't decide if she was truly attracted to him or if she was just lonely because she hadn't had a lover for awhile. Not that it mattered. He was obviously trouble. And Rosita Gonzoles did not need any trouble. Still...

When she returned to the common room, Matthew Brady was sitting at the desk talking to someone. Captain Sulu was slowly pacing around the room. He was deep in thought.

"Thanks Tomom." Brady was saying. "I'll see you tomorrow then."

"Captain, I'll return to Excelsior to conduct my research." Gonzoles said.

"You've made a recording of the conversation with Tau Reganer?" Sulu asked. She nodded; it was standard procedure. "Be sure a copy of it gets to the JAG office."

"Aye Sir." She left the apartment. Brady and Sulu followed her back to the bar. It was mid afternoon and the bar was almost empty.

"Brady, I'll have to insist that you don't leave the Base." Sulu said.

"Last night you couldn't compel me to stay." Brady said. "Now you insist I don't leave."

"This conversation changes things." Sulu said. "I can't guarantee that you won't be held until this is cleared up. I don't know where this is going now."

"Damn it." Brady said. "No good deed ever goes unpunished. Why did you have to give this to the enemy?"

"The JAG office is not the enemy." Sulu said.

"Are you sure?" Brady asked. He turned and left the bar.