

Sulu returned to Excelsior to see if Gonzoles had turned anything up on Lucre. He checked in on the bridge first. Chekov was in command. Ensign Colbert was at the navigation station, so Gonzoles was still working on it. Sulu took the center seat.

"Did Gonzoles bring you up to speed?" Sulu ask.

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "She thought that Brady was sincerely unaware of what was going on. Do you agree?"

"It did seem that way." Sulu said thoughtfully. "But I am not willing to say anything for certain today."

"Captain," Commander Rand reported. "The Aphrodite has just requested permission to dock. Priority one."

"That was quick." Chekov commented, still standing next to the Captain. "They must have come from headquarters at warp nine all the way."

"They are hailing us, Sir." Rand said.

"On screen." Sulu ordered.

A picture of the Aphrodite's bridge appeared on the Excelsior's main screen. Captain Drake sat in the center seat. She had been promoted to Captain less than six months ago. Sulu and Chekov had both known her on the Enterprise. Her ship the Aphrodite was similar to the Artful Dodger in size and mission. Next to her stood Captain Habib. He had greyed considerably since the last time Sulu had seen him. Sulu wondered if he looked that much older to Habib.

"Captain Drake." Sulu smiled. "Nice to see you again. Congratulations on your promotion."

"Thank you Captain Sulu." Captain Drake smiled.

"Captain Sulu." Habib interrupted. "We have much to discuss. Would you meet me at the judge advocate general's office on the base?"

"Certainly Captain Habib." Sulu said. "I'm on my way. Excelsior out."

"He doesn't waste any time." Mr. Kim commented.

"Why wait?" Sulu asked. "Chekov, watch for a small freighter called the Sly Fox. Brady is having a friend bring it in from New Freedom. It shouldn't be here until tomorrow, but I don't want Brady slipping out in the middle of the night."

"Aye Captain."

Sulu beamed down to the base. He rarely had to go to the office sections of the base. He managed to conduct whatever business he had via subspace. He stepped into the turbo lift and requested the JAG office. When the turbo lift stopped, he found himself in a reception area. A young ensign sat behind a desk working on a computer console. He looked up when Sulu walked in.

"Captain Sulu?" He asked. Sulu nodded. "Captain Habib will be with you in a moment, Sir. He request you wait for him here."

"Thank you, Ensign." Sulu said. He wondered if making him wait was Habib's idea of a power play. Then admonished himself to stop getting defensive and wait to see what happened. After a minute or two, Captain Habib emerged from a side door and came towards Sulu extending his hand.

"Sorry Hikaru." Habib said as they shook hands. "I should have checked in with the

office before calling you."

"No problem Jacob." Sulu said. "Can we get down to business?"

"Yes. This way." Habib led him to a small sterile office. It had nothing in it but a desk with computer console and three chairs. He sat behind the desk. "I'll have to do something about this. Not even a plant. Computer."

"Working."

"Record this meeting. An initial discussion re: the events leading to the official complaint against the Excelsior and her captain by Space Station New Freedom. Present in the room are Captain Jacob Habib and Captain Hikaru Sulu." Habib said. "Captain Sulu, it would seem you've been busy since you were informed of the investigation."

"And I've kept the JAG office informed of all my findings." Sulu said. "Did you expect me to just sit and wait?"

"Of course not." Habib said, trying to keep it pleasant. "Is there any information that you have that you have not yet shared with the JAG office?"

"Lt. Commander Gonzales is doing some research for me right now. She is looking into someone known to me only as Lucre." Sulu reported. "But I have not received her report yet. Everything else has been reported by me or Captain Uhura."

"Ok, then let's go back to the beginning." Habib said. "How did you come to be looking for the Trah-dah?"

"We received a call from the Artful Dodger." Sulu said. "Captain Uhura requested our presence and my opinion on the source of some information she had regarding the build up of arms by the Cardasians."

They spent the next two hours going over every detail of what had happened; everything from the call from Uhura to the Excelsior leaving New Freedom controlled space. Captain Habib asked all the correct questions. He did not accuse Sulu of anything. Captain Sulu answered every question in detail. He did not attempt to make anything look better than it was.

"I guess that's all for now, Captain." Habib said turning the recording computer off. Both captains took a deep breath. Habib smiled awkwardly "It's been a long time, Hikaru. I probably should have contacted you before this."

"Why is that, Jacob?" Sulu asked a bit surprised.

"To apologize for my behavior the last time we saw each other." Habib said. "It was unacceptable and I wouldn't take it from anyone I was investigating now."

"It is not important. It was a long time ago." Sulu said, unsure just what Jacob wanted of him.

Habib nodded. He wanted to say more, but perhaps this wasn't the time. Captain Habib's assistant came into the room. "Lt. Turner, I want to talk to Captain Uhura next. I'll keep you advised, Captain Sulu."

Sulu nodded and left. Turner looked to his Captain. "How did it go, Sir?"

"About as I expected." Habib said. "Have you received a report from Excelsior regarding Mr. Lucre?"

"Yes." Turner said. "But I haven't had a chance to check it yet."

"I'm sure you will find it complete." Habib said. "Sulu's people are thorough. And the Captain himself is too honest to hold anything back from us. He really thinks if he just tells the

truth that everything will work out."

"That is the way it's suppose to work." Turner said. He was an earnest young man who had worked for Habib since he had gotten out of the Academy. He was dedicated to his boss and the law.

"Yes, it is." Habib agreed. "But something is going on here. Some very powerful people are more than interested in the outcome of this investigation. Let me know about that report and send Captain Uhura in as soon as she arrives."

"Aye Sir."

Captain Sulu returned to Excelsior. He really would have liked a beer and a meal, but he knew the entire crew was on edge about these proceedings. He called the senior officers to the conference room to discuss the situation. Dr. Patrick, Commander Chekov, Lt. Kim, Commander Rand, Lt. Commander Gonzoles and Lt. Commander Johnson were all waiting when the Captain arrived.

"How did it go?" Chekov asked when they were all seated.

"By the book." Sulu said. "Captain Habib and I went over every detail of the incident. There were no surprises. Gonzoles, what did you come up with?"

"Richard Lucre is of human ancestry. His family left Earth close to a century ago. His wealth is substantial. He has multiple dwellings including one on Space Station New Freedom and one very large estate on Kirshna Varu."

"Where is that?" Sulu asked. It certainly wasn't a Federation planet.

"It is a non aligned planet in sector thirty two. It is a small class M planet of no distinction. You'd fly by it a hundred times and not notice it." Gonzoles said. "Mr. Lucre's wealth apparently comes from shipping and mining operations across the galaxy. It would seem that he runs his business from New Freedom. He is one of the owners of the corporation that operates the station itself. Mr. Lucre recently transferred ten thousand shills to Tau Reganer."

"Shill? Is that a Romulan currency?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"Technically it is Bolian, but the Romulans accept it." Chekov said.

"When I was talking to Tau Reganer he said that Lucre considered the debt paid." Gonzoles said. "I was under the impression that the debt was owed to Lucre. Why he was paying Tau Reganer, I don't understand."

"Perhaps the debt wasn't monetary." Kim suggested.

"A debt of honor?" Johnson asked. "Like repaying a favor?"

"It all seems political to me." Rand said. "Like a power broker playing one group against another to get what he wants."

"I wonder what he wants." Patrick said.

"Do you have anything else on Lucre, Gonzoles?" Sulu asked. "Any connection between him and Matthew Brady?"

"Nothing that I could find, Sir." Gonzoles said.

"Look into his business transaction." Sulu ordered. "See who he deals with and if there is any pattern that could explain things."

"Aye, Sir."

"I want to talk to Brady again. Anything else?" Sulu said. When no one said anything, he said, "Dismissed."

All the officers except Dr. Patrick and Captain Sulu left the briefing room. The doctor sat quietly looking at the Captain. Sulu sighed. "Ok, Pat. What is it?"

"Nothing." The doctor said. "I was just wondering how you were doing."

"How should I be doing?" Sulu asked. "I did nothing wrong. Yet I have no idea what is going on or what will be the outcome of this investigation. Everywhere I turn there are new questions and new possibilities. Nothing is clear-cut here. I am frustrated to say the least."

"Then let me buy you a drink." Pat smiled.

"What? No lecture?" Sulu asked. Dr. Patrick just shrugged. They went down to the bar and ordered dinner and a couple of beers. The bar was fairly crowded. Captain Habib and Matthew Brady were both there. Captain Sulu did his best to ignore them and have a pleasant meal. He considered questioning Brady, but Dr. Patrick convinced him to let it go for the night.

Lt. Commander Gonzoles was doing her research at the science station on the bridge. Commander Chekov was in command. Lt Foot was at communications and Lt. Kim was at the helm. The navigation station was empty. Mr. Kim would let Gonzoles know if she was needed there.

Gonzoles looked at line after line of business transactions. Her eyes were starting to blur. She was just about to call it a night when something caught her eye. She stopped the computer and stared at the transaction record. But it wasn't a mistake. It wasn't what the Captain had been looking for and it probably would make no difference in the investigation, but she had to tell Commander Chekov.

"Mr. Chekov." Gonzoles said slowly. He looked over her way. It wasn't her normal efficient manner. "Could you take a look at this, Sir?"

"Of course." He came over to her station and leaned down to look over her shoulder. "These are the business records of Lucre?"

Gonzoles nodded. "The last transaction, Sir. The payment comes from Vasco Enterprises. Is that?"

"My wife's ID code." Chekov finished for her. Although Cathy talked to him about her family's shipping business, he had never heard her mention New Freedom or Mr. Lucre. "Yes, it is. Mr. Foot, contact my wife on Earth. It is official business. Priority one."

"Aye Sir." Lt. Jeremy Foot answered.

"Should we inform the Captain?" Gonzoles asked.

"When we know something, of course." Chekov said. "Right now there is no reason to disturb his dinner."

"Mr. Chekov." Mr. Foot said. "According to Earthlink, Mrs. Chekov is not on the planet."

"I talked to her last night!" Chekov said going over to the communications station. "Check with Vasco Enterprises. See if they have a flight plan or itinerary on her. Talk to her assistant, Sam Yuspa. If that doesn't work, call Jimmi Sulu."

"Aye Sir." Mr. Foot said. Chekov forced himself to walk over to the center seat and sit

down. It wouldn't help to stand over Mr. Foot's shoulder. He wouldn't find Cathy any faster. There were a thousand reasons why she could have left Earth. She traveled for business all the time and she rarely told him where she was going. Finally, Mr. Foot had good news. "Sir, I have Ms. Chekov. She's on route here."

"Put it through to the Captain's ready room." Chekov said, he was already half way there. He sat down and turned on the computer console. Cathy appeared smiling. "What the hell is going on, Catrina? Why are you on your way here?"

"I wanted to surprise you!" Cathy said. She didn't understand why he seemed angry. She had surprised him before. He had always liked not knowing when she was going to show up. Jimmi had thought something was wrong. She must have been right. "Is that a problem, Pavel?"

"No, that is not the problem." Chekov said. He took a deep breath to slow himself down. "But I do need to ask you some official questions."

"Official? I've never done anything official in my life." She teased.

"Cathy, please. There is an investigation going on and your company's name has come up." Chekov said. "So answer me as honestly and completely as possible. I will probably have to give a copy of this conversation to the investigator. There is nothing to joke about."

"Who are you investigating?" Cathy asked.

"We were researching the business transactions of Richard Lucre." Chekov said. "There was a payment from Vasco Enterprises to Lucre a couple of months ago."

"Right."

"What can you tell me about him?" Chekov asked.

"I've never met the man." Cathy shrugged.

"Cathy the transfer had your authorization code on it." Chekov said

"Of course it did. I am still chief financial officer of the company." Cathy explained. "Every payment of that size and kind has my code on it."

"What kind?" Chekov asked.

"Ok Pav. This goes back to before I was in the business. When my parents took the business over from my grandparents, it was strictly world traffic. Poppie thought going to the moon was a big trip. But Mom and Dad wanted to expand. They realized that all those science and agricultural settlements that Starfleet was depositing in nearby systems would want regular supplies from home. It was sound business but the company did not have the capital. Richard Lucre did. Dad borrowed a huge chunk of money from him to buy two ships. Mom flew one. Dad flew the other. That's the reason Lenny and I were in boarding school. If we had stayed on Earth we would have seen the folks once a year. At school we saw them a couple times a month."

"You are still paying back the loan?" Chekov asked skeptically. "That must have been twenty five years ago."

"Doing business with Richard Lucre is the same as doing business with the devil." Cathy said. "I would never agree to the terms my father agreed to back then. The loan, although a large one, was paid off years ago. But part of the agreement was that a percentage of profits would be paid to Lucre as long as my father controlled the company. And you know Big Joe, he's not about to give up control."

"So he bought a part of the company?" Chekov asked.

"No, he wanted the profits without any of the liability." Cathy said. "He had nothing to lose."

"This is legal?" Pavel asked.

"This is business." Cathy answered.

"Do you know if Lucre had this kind of deal with others?" Chekov asked.

"I don't know, but I don't doubt it." Cathy said. "What is this all about, Pavel? Why are you investigating Richard Lucre?"

"I can't talk to you about it." Pavel said. "When will you arrive at Starbase?"

"Probably about one a.m. Starfleet time."

"Perfect." Chekov smiled at his wife. "I get off duty at midnight. Meet me at the Fly By Night."

"I'll be there." Cathy smiled. "And Pavel, whatever it is, will it be all right?"

"There is no need to worry." Chekov said. "I'll see you tonight. Excelsior out."

When Chekov returned to the bridge Lt. Commander Gonzoles had left and Captain Sulu was in the center seat. He was not on duty but it was not unusual for Sulu to put in long hours. The Captain looked expectantly at Chekov, so he walked over to the center seat.

"Did you talk to Cathy?" Sulu asked. Gonzoles had brought him up to speed before he told her to get some sleep and a fresh start in the morning. She had a tendency to keep going until someone told her to stop.

"Yes." Chekov said. "The payments from Vasco Enterprises to Richard Lucre are the result of a business deal Joe Vasco made with Lucre over twenty five years ago. Cathy's opinion is that the deal was necessary at the time, but she would not do business with the man now."

"You recorded the conversation?" Sulu asked.

"Of course." Chekov said. "I will send it to the JAG office along with the results of Gonzoles's research. And, Cathy is on her way here."

"Why?" Sulu asked.

"She heard we were going to be here awhile." Chekov shrugged. "She is still angry because I canceled my shore leave at Christmas. You know how she is about that."

"She is angry so she's coming for a visit?" Sulu asked confused.

"This is the 'our marriage is more important than our work' argument." Chekov explained. "She will show me that she can put her business aside to come see me, therefore I should be able to do the same."

"I know that argument." Sulu laughed. "You can't win. When will she be here?"

"In a couple of hours." Chekov said. "I'll meet her at the bar when I get off duty. What about the investigation? Did Captain Habib say how he would proceed?"

"No." Sulu said. "Just that he would keep me informed."

"Shouldn't we be coordinating our investigation with the JAG office?" Chekov asked.

"As long as we share all our findings we are ok." Sulu said. "Until I receive orders to the contrary we will follow up on every possibility."

Chekov did not want to think about what happened if those orders came in. He had no desire to make a choice between regulations and his Captain again. One court martial in his career was enough, even if the charges had been dropped.

Finally Lt. Kim came on duty and Commander Chekov went off. He stopped at his

quarters for a shower and shave before going to the Fly By Night. He hadn't seen Cathy since last July and he missed her. But she wasn't at the bar yet. Chekov found a seat at the bar next to Matthew Brady and ordered a beer. It was fairly crowded. The Excelsior and Artful Dodger crews were well represented. The Aphrodite had left orbit earlier in the evening.

Angel came up to the bar with her tray to place an order. She smiled at Chekov. They were sharing a joke when Cathy walked into the bar. Perfect. Cathy walked up behind him and said sharply, but not loudly. "Pavel Chekov!"

He jumped and turned towards her, smiling. "Don't do that!"

"What are you up to, Mister?" Cathy tried not to smile back.

"I was just talking to Angel." Pavel smiled appreciatively at his wife. She was wearing a black slip of a dress that showed off her perfect shape without clinging. But she had cut her beautiful blond hair. The last time he had held her it fell well below her shoulders. Now it barely touched them.

"Angel? Really?"

"Excuse me." Angel took her full tray and went to deliver her drinks.

"It is her name. Really." Chekov smiled. They had played this game before. He reached for her hand. "Come here and say hello to me properly."

She put slid her arm around his neck and kissed him. "Hello Baby. How about buying a lady a drink?"

There were no empty bar stools. Chekov gave his to his wife. Mike poured her a vodka without waiting for an order. "You've cut your hair."

"Do you approve, Commander?" Cathy asked sipping her drink.

It used to be enough that he noticed, Pavel thought. Now he must approve. "You look beautiful." He said gently twisting a stray blond strand. He switched to a safer subject and asked, "Where are the boys?"

"On Earth. I left them with J.M." Cathy answered. "Poor Dr. McCoy has a house full of teenage boys. I hope they behave themselves."

"You came to see me all by yourself? I am honored." He smiled.

"When the mountain won't come to Mohammad." Cathy shrugged. They caught up on family business. Cathy told him about Joey and Jamie's trying to carve out separate identities in high school. So far the twins hadn't been very successful. And about Peter's latest girl friend who he was very serious about. Cathy was a little worried that things were going too far too fast. Finally Pavel excused himself to go to the men's room and Cathy called Mike over. "What is going on here?"

"Don't look at me, C.J." Mike said leaning across the bar. Cathy smiled. Mike never changed. Even though he was approaching forty, with his baby face and devil may care attitude he could probably pass for under thirty. "They don't tell me anything."

"But you hear the skuttlebutt." Cathy said. "Jimmi wants some answers."

"Someone on New Freedom made a complaint against Excelsior." Mike said. "They are investigating and everyone is on edge about it. I don't trust the rumors. There are too many of them. Is the Boss coming?"

"No." Cathy said "Both her father and Captain Kirk told her to stay out of it. And you know how she is about following their orders."

"Yeah, I know how she is." Mike smiled. He knew that Jimmi would follow their orders to the letter and still find a way to do what she wanted. "So she sent you?"

"It fit in with my plans anyway." Cathy returned the smile. "So what is this complaint?"

"Don't know." Mike confided earnestly. He was concerned for his uncle. "But it is not only against the ship. It is against the Captain, personally."

"That doesn't make sense." Cathy frowned. "What could 'do the right thing' Sulu have done so wrong?"

Matthew Brady couldn't keep quiet any longer. He laughed out loud. He had been listening to the two old friends with interest. This was obviously the wife he had heard Chekov mention many times before. "How long have you known the Captain?"

"Since he was a lieutenant." Cathy said to the handsome stranger. He had a deep calm voice that Cathy found very attractive. And his eyes were a dark clear sparkling blue that seemed to look right through her.

Mike provided the introductions. "C. J. Chekov, this is Matthew Brady."

"So you are Matthew Brady. I've heard about you." Cathy was surprised. Jimmi hadn't exaggerated. He was gorgeous. Before she could say any more, Pavel returned. It irritated him to see his wife smiling at Brady.

"Catrina." He said softly in Russian. "Are you ready to go?"

She turned to look at him. He was not the possessive type, but he seemed upset. Of course it wouldn't be obvious to anyone that didn't know him well. But his face had hardened and his back had stiffened. He could be damn stoic at times. He kept all their arguments behind closed doors. She replied in Russian. "Of course, whenever you are."

"Now."

"Goodnight Mike." Cathy said. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Brady."

"Good night, Mrs. Chekov." Brady smiled as they left.

As they walked to the transporter room, Pavel said. "I want you to stay away from Brady."

"Why?"

"He is dangerous and I don't trust him." Chekov said. They walked into the transporter room, so the conversation stopped. "Excelsior, please Chief."

Once on the ship they went directly to Chekov's cabin. Jealousy was so unlike Pavel. She thought they had gotten past the trust issue long ago. Cathy waited until they were behind closed doors. She spoke quietly and slowly. "You don't trust him or you don't trust me?"

"Him." Chekov said with absolute certainty. "This whole incident started with him. We still do not know the extent of his involvement."

"Maybe I can help you find out."

"No."

"What do you mean? No?" She asked indignantly. She did not take orders well. She was too used to giving them.

"I mean that this is an official Starfleet investigation." Chekov said. "You have no business being here. And you are not getting involved. I don't care what you promised your friend."

"Fine." She pouted for a minute or two. He came up behind her and slowly started to

undo the zipper on the back of her dress. "Are you trying to distract me, Pavel?"

"Yes."

"Good."

At oh-eight hundred hours, Captain Sulu reported to the bridge to take the watch from Commander Kim. Commander Rand came on duty at the same time. Ensign Colbert and Ensign Amin also came on duty. There was not much to do while orbiting a space station, so only a skeleton crew was necessary on the bridge.

"Report, Mr. Kim."

"The Sly Fox docked at air lock six at oh-five thirty hours. And at oh-four hundred hours the Starship Pegasus came into orbit. She contacted the station on a secured channel, activated transporter, and left." Lt. Kim reported.

"That's interesting." Sulu said. "We haven't heard any more from the JAG office?"

"No Sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Kim." Sulu said taking the center seat "You are relieved."

At oh-eight hundred Captain Habib walked into the JAG office. Ensign Chawla was at the desk as he had been when Captain Habib had arrived the day before. Then he had struck Jacob Habib as unflappable, but today Ensign Chawla jumped up as soon as the Captain stepped off the turbo lift.

"Captain Habib." The young man said quickly. "Captain Kirk has been waiting in your office for the last ten minutes."

"And no one bothered to call me?" Habib asked. He did not wait for an answer. Fleet Captain Kirk did not like to be kept waiting. Captain Habib strode purposefully into his office. "Captain, I'm sorry to keep you waiting. I was not aware you were on the base."

"I arrived early this morning." Kirk said. He sat behind Habib's desk studying his computer screen. "Interesting reading. What do you think of this incident so far?"

Captain Habib remained standing just inside his office door. "I don't have all the information yet, Sir."

"Gut feeling, Captain."

"Gut feeling: the captains and crews of the two ships involved acted correctly and the people at New Freedom are hiding something, Sir." Habib said. "However, my gut feeling is not always correct. I can not make an official report without a lot more information."

"And if this information is not forthcoming, Captain?" Kirk asked.

"That would depend on why it is not forthcoming, Sir." Habib said. Kirk got up from Habib's chair and walked around the desk. Habib did not move. "If the information is unknown, I would continue investigating until I was satisfied that I knew all I could. If the information is classified, I would refer the investigation to a higher security level in the JAG office."

"Sit down Captain." Kirk said pleasantly. Habib took his seat behind the desk. "Your office needs something. Artwork. A plant, perhaps."

"I haven't had time for that, Captain Kirk." Habib said. He had known the powerful fleet captain for a long time and was used to his distraction tactics. "I just got here yesterday."

"You've always been a hard worker, Jacob." Kirk said sitting down opposite the captain.

He didn't particularly want to bring up the history between Habib and Sulu, but it was there and had to be dealt with. "But this can't be easy for you."

"Captain, there may be those who are waiting for me to bungle this investigation," Habib said a bit defensively. "But I will do my job."

"I know, Captain." Kirk said. "I would not ask you to do any differently."

"If you don't mind my asking, Sir." Habib said. "Why is command so interested in an apparently fraudulent complaint?"

"I don't know about any one else," Kirk said. "But both Captain Sulu and Captain Uhura are friends of mine. They would not be in this situation if not for me."

Habib wondered what that meant. However he knew Captain Kirk would only tell him what he wanted to tell him. "I also would not be here if it wasn't for you, Captain."

"You give me too much credit, Captain." Kirk said.

"I don't think so, Sir." Habib said. He had been ready to quit Starfleet that day and no one would have been upset to see him go. But Kirk, recently demoted to captain then, had talked him out of it. He had said he was his own worse enemy. And he had been right. Nothing would have happened if he hadn't blown up at Sulu. He never would have been in the position to lose his temper with Admiral Reese. He had been lucky to have Kirk on his side. Habib had spent the last twenty some years learning to control his temper.

"Well, how will you proceed, Captain?" Kirk asked.

"Today I have interviews scheduled with Commander T'Penn, Ensign Riveria, and Matthew Brady." Habib said. "The Excelsior is also investigating, so I believe I will also want to talk to Commander Chekov and Lt. Commander Gonzoles. But I will wait for their reports before I decide."

"Wrap this up as quickly as possible, Captain." Kirk said standing to go. Habib stood also. "The Cardassian situation is volatile at best. I may need those two ships."

"Aye Sir." Habib said. "Captain Kirk, if war is imminent and if Space Station New Freedom is somehow involved..."

"Then I need to know." Kirk finished. He left Habib standing there thinking. Captain Kirk proceeded directly to the transporter room. Dr. McCoy was waiting for him. "Well, Bones have you been enjoying your inspection tour so far?"

"No." McCoy grumbled. "The infirmary on this base is a wreck. Who put Dr. Colby in charge of this place anyway?"

"You did."

"Must be going senile." McCoy mumbled to himself. In his early eighties, McCoy was anything but senile. The only signs of his advancing age were his brilliantly white hair, wrinkled skin, and crabby disposition. Actually he had always been crabby.

A young woman stood at attention by the transporter controls while they talked. Kirk turned to her with a smile, "Ensign, hail the Excelsior and request permission for us to beam aboard."

"Aye Sir."

When they materialized on the Excelsior, Captain Sulu was waiting in the transporter room. He greeted them warmly as if nothing in the least was wrong. "Captain. Doctor. It is good to see you. Did you have a pleasant trip? Does Captain Higgins still tell those awful

jokes?"

"Now how did you know we came in on the Pegasus?" McCoy asked.

"Didn't take a genius." Sulu said as he led the way to a conference room where they could talk. "It was the only ship that came from Earth besides the Aphrodite. And Captain Drake would have told me if you were onboard her ship."

"Where is your first officer, Captain?" Kirk asked.

"His wife is visiting." Sulu explained. "But I can ask him to join us, if you wish."

"No." Kirk said. "There's no need. I've just been to the JAG office and spoken to Captain Habib."

"So, how goes the investigation?" Sulu asked.

"That's what I wanted to ask you." Kirk said. "Habib said you were also investigating. Have you shared your information with his office?"

"Of course." Sulu said. "Right now Gonzoles is looking into the business of Richard Lucre, one of the owners of New Freedom."

"Have you found out anything significant?" Kirk asked.

"That his business practices are predatory to say the least." Sulu said. "That he seems to do business with everyone in the quadrant. You've seen the reports regarding the missing Klingons?"

"Yes. You think Lucre has something to do with that?" Kirk asked.

"The freighter Tray-dah was equipped to carry prisoners of one kind or another. And it was in the right place at the right time. Tau Reganer told Gonzoles that Lucre considered the debt paid. And according to my information there is slave trade being carried out on at New Freedom, which Lucre is at least part owner." Sulu said. "Coincidence?"

"Slave trade?" Kirk said. "Where does this information come from?"

"That would be confidential, Sir." Sulu said.

"Confidential?" Kirk raised his eyebrow at Sulu.

"I gave my word." Sulu said. "But I trust this information."

"You trust the source?" Kirk asked. Sulu nodded. He didn't want to admit he trusted Brady, but in this he did. Brady had evaded questions and refused to answer, but he had never out and out lied to Sulu. "Bones, would you give us a few minutes?"

"Well, if we're going to call this an inspection tour I might as well go inspect something." McCoy said on his way out. "I'll be in sick bay if you want me."

"This is not the time to hold back, Hikaru." Kirk said seriously. "We are talking about more than this investigation here."

"I think I know that, Jim." Sulu replied. "We are talking about the balance of power in this quadrant. There is a real possibility of war with the Cardassian. And no one knows what the Klingons will do."

"You know, I've been known to keep a secret or two." Kirk said thoughtfully, a hint a smile on his face. "I will keep this source of yours confidential, but I need to know who it is."

"Matthew Brady." Sulu said simply. With someone else he might have made conditions or demanded assurances. But not with Kirk. "He claims he never met Richard Lucre, but he seems very afraid of him. Brady is not the type to panic, but he is sure that his life is in danger if Lucre knows he said anything."

"Hmmm....I'd like to meet this Mr. Brady." Kirk said. "But while I'm here, we do have other business."

"Oh?"

"The Pegasus is in need of a first officer. I suggested Gonzoles to Captain Higgins." Kirk said. "Which reminds me, you'll be receiving official notification soon of her promotion to full commander."

"About time." Sulu said. "I only requested it over six months ago."

"Bureaucrats." Kirk shrugged. "I know how Gonzoles feels about you as a commanding officer. She's not going to be moved on until you suggest it."

"I'm going to miss her." Sulu said. "I will advise Gonzoles of your recommendation to Captain Higgins. Anything else?"

"Yes." Kirk said. "You."

"Me?"

"You've refused promotion again." Kirk said. "Do you plan to retire a captain?"

"Maybe. You've also refused promotion." Sulu said. "If there is going to be war, you will need all the experienced captains you have."

"We're not talking about me. The reorganization of the border sectors using Fleet Captains has been extremely successful. There has been talk of reactivating the rank of fleet admiral." Kirk said. "It doesn't necessarily mean giving up your command. Just taking on added responsibility."

"I'll think about it, Captain Kirk." Sulu said.

"You do that, Captain Sulu." Kirk said pleasantly. There was nothing more he could do. Sulu had always had his own vision of where he was going and why. Back when he was just a commander, Kirk had suggested Sulu for a position as first officer of a starship. Sulu had refused it. It had turned out to be the right decision, less than a year later the ship was lost with all hands. Two years later, he was captain of the Excelsior. "In the mean time, I'm going to go see Uhura."