

Jimmi and Brian had decided to stay on at Starbase Eighteen. Excelsior had dropped them off early because of some crisis that Admiral Sulu couldn't or wouldn't explain. Mike had seen them come in a week earlier than expected and wrangled some extra vacation time. He caught a ride to Earth with Cathy and her boys to see his parents and the family that he had been ignoring for so long.

After having spent a full school year on Earth, Jimmi was enjoying tending bar again. Especially with the lazy pace of the Fly By Night Bar and Grill when no large Federation ships were in orbit. Oh, there were a few Federation transports and several independent freighters but the bar was close to empty anyway. Brian had just recently turned sixteen. Jimmi made a deal with him. He would work in the bar bussing tables and she would leave him alone more or less.

Right now he was playing pool. Mike had taught Brian and the Chekov boys how to play three years ago. Brian planned to practice as much as possible while he was there so that he could beat the pants off Peter next time they played. Peter was a year older than Brian and almost a foot taller. He could beat Brian in just about any game. It was just one more thing that had gone wrong in his life.

Another problem Brian had was his looks. His hair was a light brown with just a hint of red. His mother was always saying how much she loved the color. He hated it and kept it cut as short as he possibly could. And just to make things worse he had a face full of freckles and he was skinny. Everyone underestimated his age by at least a year, often two. This problem was especially annoying when it came to girls. He knew plenty of girls but they all wanted to be just friends.

Matthew Brady walked into the bar. He was approaching fifty but not a hint of grey had found its way into his black hair or beard. He was surprised to find Jimmi Sulu behind the bar. She was a couple of years older than him according to Mike and she had a touch of grey in her hair. But Matthew liked the way it twisted and twirled through her curls. She was laughing with the two guys that always sat in front of the tap when Matthew walked in. It seemed to him she was always laughing in the bar.

"Matthew Brady! It's been a long time." She smiled at him. He wondered if her eyes sparkled like that at everyone.

"Good evening, Ms. Sulu." Matthew said as he sat down at the bar. "Where's Mike?"

"Now Matthew, if you are going to call me Ms. Sulu, you are going to have to leave!" Jimmi laughed. "In here it's Jimmi or Boss. You got that?"

"Yes Ma'am."

"Enough of that." She laughed. "Now what will you have tonight?"

"A draft and a bowl of Paco's chili if he has any back there." Brady ordered.

"Paco always has chili." Jimmi said pouring the beer.

"So how is your husband, the Admiral?" Brady asked nonchalantly.

"So, you've heard about his promotion." Jimmi leaned her elbows on the bar and her chin in her hand. She always wore her tops off the shoulder. Today she was wearing a cream colored top that had a golden thread running through it. The deep collar seemed to wrap her arms to her body like a thick ribbon around a package. He had never even

kissed this woman and yet all he wanted right this minute was to unwrap that package. It helped to talk about her husband.

"Sure." He smiled. "And last time I was here I even met that living legend, Captain Kirk."

"Ah, James T." Jimmi laughed. She wondered what James T. had thought of Matthew. As far as Jimmi could see, except for the uniform, they were a lot alike.

"James T?"

"Didn't he introduce himself like that?" Jimmi said. She lowered her voice, mocking Kirk. "Captain James T. Kirk."

"Kirk is a powerful man." Brady reminded her. "You could get in trouble with talk like that."

"Nah, I've known James T. a long time." Jimmi said. "If I didn't tease him, he'd get upset."

"I forgot, you were a starfleet brat." Matthew said. Jimmi shrugged and went into the kitchen to get his chili. It was Paco's specialty and it was getting quite a reputation with the regulars.

The teenage boy who had been playing pool, put down his stick and came up to the bar. Jimmi came out of the kitchen and served the bowl of chili to Matthew. She looked over at Brian. She wished he let his hair grow out a bit. It curled so beautifully. He was wearing black pants and a black long sleeved t-shirt with a black sleeveless jacket over top. The only purpose that Jimmi could see for the jacket was a multitude of small pockets. She had no idea what he carried in those pockets. She also didn't understand the fascination with black. Her father said it was a phase that would pass. She hoped he was right.

"Brian, were you planning on eating any dinner tonight?" Jimmi asked.

"Razz." Brian sighed and rolled his eyes. What did she think? That he would starve if she didn't tell him to eat. "Eventually, Mom."

Jimmi tried to ignore the eye rolling. "Fine, just let Paco know what you want and I'll stop bothering you."

"Can I have something to drink?"

"Of course." Jimmi poured him a soft drink. Brian took the drink and returned to the pool table. Jimmi just watched him and said to herself, "Your welcome."

"That's your youngest, isn't it?" Matthew asked as Jimmi refilled his beer. "Last time I saw him he was about two or three years old. Right?"

"Yeah, that's Brian." Jimmi looked over at the boy playing pool. She sighed and smiled at Brady, "Do you have any children, Matthew?"

"Nope. Never found time for that." Brady said returning her smile. "I've been busy."

"I'm sure." Jimmi said.

"Hey Boss. How about a refill?" Phil called. Jimmi went down the bar to refill Phil and Jay's beers.

While Brady finished his dinner, Jimmi refilled drinks up and down the bar. The crowd began to grow. Jimmi called Angel in to work. It only took her a few minutes to

report for duty. She stopped by the pool table on her way in.

"You're getting better, Brian." She smiled. Angel was twenty four years old. Brian was thrilled she would even talk to him.

"Thanks." Brian smiled shyly. She winked at him and continued on her way to the kitchen to get her apron. He wondered if she hated her red hair. Her's was at least strikingly red, not wishy washy brownish red like his.

Matthew Brady finished his meal and sat at the bar nursing his beer. He was watching the crowd with careful nonchalance. Finally an oddly matched pair came in and claimed a table. A very dark skinned human man of slight build with a Gordian, which could be best described as a tall burly hairless being. He had large yellow eyes and azure-blue skin that somehow reminded Brady of the lizards of Bre'el IV. Brady took his beer and joined the pair.

"Martin, Shey." Brady said quietly. "It's about time."

The Gordian spoke in halting standard. "Brady. The Overlord is on his way. Tomorrow. Oh nine hundred hours. The main landing bay."

"I'll be there." Brady said. "He's agreed to all conditions?"

"Don't worry about that." Martin, the human, said. "Just be there. And come alone. Rumml does not like an audience."

"Martin, you'd be funny if you weren't so predictable." Brady took his beer and left their table. He knew they would be watching him. He walked over to the pool table and watched Brian play. The boy made five shots in a row.

"Not bad, kid."

"Go away." Brian said leaning over the table concentrating on his game.

"Tough guy, huh?" Brady chuckled. Brian couldn't stand being laughed at. Especially by this guy. Brian had seen the way this man looked at his mother. Why did she have to flirt with everyone in the bar? It was embarrassing.

"If you want to get in my mother's pants, that's your problem." Brian sneered. "It won't help to try to make friends with me."

"Boy!" Brady grabbed Brian by the collar and turned him around. Brian dropped the pool stick. Brady took hold of the boy's jacket with both hands and almost lifted him off the floor. "If I ever hear you talk about your mother like that again, I'll crack your head open."

"Too late!" Brian mustered all the defiance he could to look this tall man in the eye when he said. "It's been done. Let me go."

Matthew let go of Brian and shook away the sudden anger. Why did it bother him if Jimmi's kid was an insufferable little bastard? He was much calmer when he said "You've got a bad attitude, kid." Matthew Brady retrieved his glass from the table he had set it on to grab Brian. He drained his beer, handed Brian the glass, and left the bar. Martin and Shey followed him at a discreet distance.

Brian took the glass and stopped at a table to pick up a couple of more. He took the dirty glasses behind the bar. His mother was talking to a woman who sat at the end. Maybe she hadn't seen the incident with her bearded friend. He went into the kitchen to see what Paco had for dinner. Angel was also in there helping put together an order.

"What's good to eat?" Brian asked.

"You can help yourself to chili." Paco said. "Or you could wait until I'm done and I'll fix you something else."

"Why the long face, Bri?" Angel asked when Brian sat on a chair next to Paco's work table. Brian just shrugged. "It wouldn't have anything to do with Matthew Brady, would it?"

"Who?" Brian asked.

"The tall guy with the beard who was giving you a hard time before." Angel said.

"Who is he any way?" Brian asked. It annoyed Brian that a stranger felt he had a right to talk to him that way.

"He's a trader and a pilot." Paco said. "Comes in here a lot. Tends to disappear when Starfleet ships come in."

"Except the Excelsior." Angel corrected. "Last time he was here, he was helping your father with some problem."

"Although I've heard Captain Sulu..." Paco started.

"That's Admiral." Brian corrected.

"Right. Anyway I've heard your Dad call Brady a pirate." Paco finished. "He sounded serious to me and Brady never denied it."

"A pirate?" Brian said with interest. "Really? Razz!"

"It was probably just an expression." Angel laughed. "You know, a joke."

"A joke?" Brian asked. "I doubt it." She wasn't honestly talking about his father, was she? He tried to remember his father telling a joke, but all of their talks in the last couple of years had been serious. Brian helped himself to a large bowl of chili and Angel delivered the order to table four.

The next day, Brian was up and out of the apartment before his mother came out of her room. It seemed to Brian that he had never been on Starbase Eighteen without the Chekov brothers. Today he was left to entertain himself. He decided to try to find out if Matthew Brady really was a pirate. He used the computer in Mike's office to determine which ship was Brady's and where it was docked. Luckily, he had a small ship called the Sly Fox which was in the main landing bay. If it had been larger it would have been docked at one of the air locks or in orbit. In the main landing bay he could at least get a look at it.

There were several small ships in the main landing bay. Brian stopped for a while to watch a maintenance crew repair the engines of a the largest ship in the bay. The engineers didn't mind Brian presence or his questions. Brian had learned a lot about the workings of ships this way. He thought he certainly wouldn't mind the solitary life of a freighter pilot. When life got too crowded, he could just fly away.

Brian wandered through the bay idly looking over all the ships. He found the Sly Fox. It was a small. Brian wondered how Brady could make a living. A ship of this size couldn't carry much cargo. He was about to return to the maintenance crew when he saw Brady talking to...someone. The other person's back was to Brian, so he couldn't see who it was. By size and shape, Brian thought it might be a Barolian but he couldn't be sure. Brian hid behind the Sly Fox and inched his way closer.

He couldn't hear what they were saying. He tried to get closer. Peeking around the edge of the ship, Brian saw Brady hand over a computer pad and receive a small bag of some kind. He was trying to see what kind of bag when someone grabbed him from behind. He turned around to face a very large hairless blue being glaring at him. Brian tried to run but Shey grabbed him and drug him over to Brady and the Barolian.

"Let go!" Brian yelled.

"Shut up, kid." Brady cautioned him, hoping the boy was smart enough to keep his mouth shut. These were not the kind of people you play with. "We don't need any more interference."

"He was spying." Shey said haltingly. "In the bar, last night too."

"You know this boy?" The Barolian accused Brady angrily. "What's his name?"

"Trouble." Brady responded. "Leave him to me, Rumml. I'll take care of it."

"And how are you going to do that?" Rumml asked. He nodded to Shey who let go of the boy. Brian looked around for a place to run, but Brady grabbed him by the collar of his sleeveless jacket and pulled him close to his side. Brian didn't know what to say or what to think. So he just waited.

"I know his mother." Brady smiled and winked. "It won't be a problem."

"I should have known, Brady." Rumml said. Brady's reputation with the ladies was well known. Rumml had no trouble accepting his taking responsibility for the youth. For all he knew, he might be the boy's father. And Rumml did not need any problems on a Star Fleet base. He turned to Shey. "Find Martin. We are leaving this base now."

Shey bowed quickly and left. Brady looked Rumml in the eye. He felt the need to clarify one last issue. "Just make sure that gets where it's going with no stop overs."

"A contract is a contract." Rumml replied.

"Come on, kid." Brady said. He took Brian by the arm and left the area quickly. Brian was forced to run or be dragged.

When Brady finally slowed down, he asked. "What were you doing?"

"Looking at the ships." Brian replied. "Just what were you doing?"

"Just business." Brady said. "Nothing for you to worry about."

"Right." Brian said as they left the landing bay and turned towards the bar. "He was Barolian. They trade with the Romulans. What did you just buy? Or did you sell something?"

"You've got more of your old man in you than I thought." Brady said as much to himself as to Brian. "Never mind my business. Rumml was ready to kill you or worse."

"What's worse?"

"You don't want to know." Brady said. He stopped and stopped Brian too. "Look kid, there are times when the only way to accomplished something good is to beat the bad guys at their own game."

"Who tells you these fairy tales?" Brian asked skeptically.

"Oh, I forgot you were such a tough guy." Brady said "Then just forget it. Don't think about what's right or wrong. Don't think about anything. It's not my problem."

Brian stared at him with his mouth open as Brady walked away. What was he suppose to do now? Brian followed after Brady. He went slowly, not sure if he wanted

to catch up or not. But he did want to know what was in the bag. But would Brady tell him? He had to know. Where was Brady going? There were no shops this way. The only place he could possibly be going was the barracks. That didn't make any sense.

Matthew wondered when the kid was going to give up. Why was Brian suddenly so interested? Matthew glanced over his shoulder and said, "Stop following me, kid."

"I want to know." Brian said determinedly.

Matthew stopped and looked at the skinny kid. He wasn't finished his growing yet. His hands, shoulders, and ears all looked too big for him. He didn't look at all like his father, but he had that resolute look in his eye that was all Sulu. "What do you want to know so badly?"

"What's in the bag?"

"Money." Brady said simply. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the small cloth bag no larger than his palm. "Since you're a starfleet brat, maybe you've never seen the real thing."

Brady touched the bag with his thumb and the top flipped open. He poured a dozen or so coins in to his hand to show Brian. The teen studied the glittering coin. He was intrigued.

"What kind is it?" Brian asked

"Barolian's trade in several currencies." Matthew said. "This is demishill. This much would exchange for about three hundred and fifty standard credits."

"Wow!" Brian said. For just one transaction? No wonder he didn't have to carry a large volume of cargo. "You must be rich."

"Some days." Brady laughed as he replaced the coins in the pouch and pocketed it. He had been right. The kid never had seen any real money. "Now go home. Your mother must be worried about you."

"Razz... no!" Brian said. Why did he have to bring her into it? When was someone, anyone, going to see him as a person instead of someone's kid? "She won't look for me until there's work to be done."

"Is that how you really feel about your mother?" Brady asked. Brian just shrugged. Adults never trusted anything he said, so why should he bother to explain. "Maybe after you've seen a little more of the galaxy, you'll appreciate your parents more."

Brian turned and left without another word. He would never get to see the galaxy the way his mother had been sitting on him this last year. He headed in the direction of the bar. As he walked along he tried to figure out Matthew Brady. Was he really a pirate? What had he sold to Rumml? Why was he worried that the Barolian not make any stops?

Too bad Mike had gone to Earth. Mike knew everything that went on not only on Starbase Eighteen but on Starbase Twelve and several starships as well. Brian did not want to ask his mother about it. If Excelsior had been there he could have asked Uncle Pavel or Dr. Pat.

"Hey Mom." Brian called as he walked into the bar. She was behind the bar taking a lunch order from a couple of women sitting at the bar. "What ship did Commander Gonzoles transfer to?"

Jimmi looked up at her youngest. What was this? Normal conversation? More than three words in a row? "The Pegasus. She's the first officer. Why?"

"I wanted to send her a letter." Brian said innocently. "She said I could."

"Good idea." Jimmi poured him a glass of iced tea. "I used to send letters to James T. and Spock when I was your age."

"Not Dad?" Brian asked.

"No, I hadn't met your Dad when I was sixteen." Jimmi smiled, leaning on the bar. "I met him when I was seventeen. I fell in love with the handsome young lieutenant instantly but I didn't have the nerve to send him a letter until I was flunking astro physics."

"You were flunking?" Brian asked amazed.

"You mean I never told you that story?" Jimmi knew she had told at least one of the children. Maybe it had been Demora. "If it wasn't for your father, I never would have made it out of high school."

"How did Dad help?" Brian asked truly interested. He had no trouble picturing his father lecturing on Astro physics.

"I sent him the class requirements and he broke it down for me in several long letters. I played them over and over until I finally passed the class." Jimmi said. "Of course what really made the difference was that I loved listening to his sexy voice."

"Mom!" Brian was exasperated. It was bad enough when his parents were together. They were embarrassing. But did she have to talk about him like that?

"Sorry." Jimmi laughed. She ought to know better, but Brian was so predictably upset by his parent's expressions of love. She couldn't help it. Brian just shook his head and went off to the office to send his letter.

He sat down at the desk and made a recording. "Commander Rosita Gonzoles, first officer Federation Starship Pegasus NCC 1902, personal. " Brian took a deep breath.

"Hi Rosita. How do you like your new job? Is Higgins as bad as they say? Listen, I ran into someone I think you know and I need some answers. Maybe you can clear some things up without divulging any classified information. Can you tell me anything about Matthew Brady? He's into something with some Barolian named Rumml. Paco said he was a pirate but Angel thinks that was just a joke. Do you know anything? I'm at the Fly By Night. Please answer as soon as you can. Thanks."

Brian sent his recording to the central starfleet mail distributor. Since he was already on a starbase there was no wait. His message was on its way to the Pegasus, where ever she was, with in seconds of Brian's request. The rest was up to Gonzoles. How soon she looked at her mail and how quickly she would answer. He could be talking to her in minutes via subspace or getting a return letter weeks from now. So he went back to the pool table.

After an hour or so, Matthew Brady strolled into the bar as if nothing had happened that morning. He sat at the bar and ordered lunch. Brian pretended not to notice Brady flirting with his mother. But he had to know if Brady was relating anything to his mother about this morning. Brian put his pool stick down and gathered a couple of dirty dishes. He took them to the kitchen. He was about to ask Paco for some lunch

when his mother called him.

"Bri!" she called. He came out of the kitchen. "You got a call on subspace from the Pegasus."

"Thanks, Mom." Brian ran to the office. He could feel Matthew Brady watching him go.

"Who does he know on the Pegasus?" Matthew asked grinning.

Jimmi wondered why Matthew seemed so amused that Brian would be talking to someone on the Pegasus. "Commander Gonzoles. Perhaps you know her. She used to be on the Excelsior, which is how Brian knows her. My kids have always had friends among the Excelsior crew."

"Oh, I know Rosey." His smile changed. It must be a fond memory, Jimmi thought.

"Really?" Jimmi laughed. "I think this is a story I want to hear."

"But I doubt it's one I want to tell."

In the office, Brian opened the channel. Rosita was waiting patiently for him. She must have been off duty. She was wearing a maroon starfleet sweat shirt and had her hair in a ponytail. "Hi, Rosita."

"Hello Brian. It's been awhile." She smiled. Brian as always was dressed in black. She wondered if he owned any other color clothing. She knew the Sulus had been having some trouble with his growing pains. She would help him with whatever she could. "What's this about Matthew Brady?"

"Is he a pirate?"

"Matthew is...in business for himself." She said carefully. "I wouldn't call him a pirate although he has been known to bend the letter of the law from time to time. But I think his heart is in the right place."

"But he was doing some kind of business with a Barolian named Rumml." Brian protested. "Is that ok?"

"I checked out this trader, Rumml, as soon as I got your letter." Gonzoles said. "He has no outstanding warrants. And it is not illegal in and of itself to trade across the neutral zone, Bri. So unless you know of an illegal act, there's nothing I can do about him."

"Well, I'm not likely to find anything else out because Rumml and his friends left the base." Brian said. "But what about Brady? Do you know him well?"

"Well enough." Rosita shrugged. She wasn't about to explain her relationship with Matthew to Brian. "I'm probably not the best person to ask about Matthew. I'm not very objective."

"Really?" Brian asked. She had always been the most objective person he knew. She was the one person who had never treated him like a child.

"Maybe you should talk to your father about him." Rosita suggested. Brian just made a face. Rosita laughed and added. "He has also been suspicious of Matthew."

"Well, maybe." Brian said. "Thanks for your help."

"Ok, Brian." Rosita smiled. "Send me another letter soon. Bye."

Brian terminated the connection. According to Commander Gonzoles he had to know of an illegal act before she could act. But he wasn't even sure he wanted something done. He just wanted to know. Brian wasn't sure just how he would proceed, but he would have to find out for himself.

When Brian returned to the bar, Matthew was finishing up his lunch. Brian still wasn't sure what to do but he couldn't just let it go. He went into the kitchen and asked Paco for a sandwich. Paco made his lunch while Brian kept his eye on Brady. He grabbed the sandwich and walked back into the bar.

"Brian." Jimmi said quietly so that only he would hear her. "In the kitchen or at a table. You are too young to be behind the bar."

"I'm sorry, Mom." Brian nodded and took his sandwich over to the table next to the pool table. He had left a soft drink there. Jimmi was surprised. She had expected Brian to complain when she reminded him about the rules.

"Another drink Matthew?" Jimmi asked.

"No. I'm afraid I have to be going." Matthew smiled at her and handed over his bankcard to pay his bill. "If I spent all my days sitting in a bar I might be happy, but I'd be very poor."

"I'd suggest you just open a bar if you like them that much." Jimmi winked at him. She slipped the card momentarily in the computer's slot. "But I'd miss you coming in here."

"You sure you want the competition?" Brady asked.

"I didn't mean here on my Base." Jimmi laughed, handing his card back to him.

"I didn't know you owned the base."

"Don't let it get around." Jimmi winked. "Starfleet doesn't know it either."

Matthew turned to go, but he noticed Brian was not at his normal post by the pool table. He looked back at Jimmi and jerked his head towards the table. "Where's the kid?"

"He's been disappearing a lot lately." Jimmi shrugged. "I'm beginning to think he has a girlfriend he doesn't want me to know about."

"Girlfriends and mothers just don't mix." Matthew laughed. Jimmi nodded, laughing with him. "I hope I see you next trip, Boss."

"Bye, Matthew."

Matthew left Starbase Eighteen and set course for the Orion system. It was a dangerous place but he needed some information that could only be obtained there. It would take three days to get there at the Fox's maximum speed. Three's days of peace and quiet. Matthew was looking forward to that part of the job. As long as Rumml held up his end of the contract everything would be fine. He put on some soft relaxing jazz and made himself comfortable.

He stayed at the controls for a couple of hours. This was a high traffic area. A lot of Starfleet traffic as well as independents. Matthew Brady wasn't looking for any interference at this point in time. He had a deadline to meet. When he finally left the dangerous area, Brady set the controls on auto and went to bed.

When he was sure Brady was asleep, Brian crawled out of his hiding place. It had been a snap decision. He had left the bar when he heard Brady talking about leaving the

base. The maintenance crew was getting the ship ready so the security lock wasn't engaged. They were used to seeing Brian around the bay so no one questioned his presence. He slipped into the ship and under a auxiliary panel in the back of the main cabin. Once Brady came onto the ship Brian felt he had no choice, he was committed.

Brian sat down at the pilots seat and looked at the controls. But they weren't headed to the Neutral Zone as Brian had thought. They were headed towards the Orion System. It didn't make any sense to Brian. Sure there were plenty of pirates in the Orion System, but Gonzales had said he wasn't a pirate. Brian didn't know what to believe.

"Find everything you need?" Brady asked from his bunk.

"Razz." Brian jumped and looked around. Brady got out of his bunk. Brian recovered from the shock and said. "Everything except the head."

Brady jerked his thumb in the right direction. "Back there." When Brian came back into the main cabin Brady was sitting in the pilots seat. "Now, you want to explain what's going on here, Kid?"

"Um..." Brian was running out of snappy answers. "I just wanted to know what was going on."

"So you stowed away?" Brady said. "That's brilliant."

"I ...I wanted to know if " Brian hesitated. "If it was true."

"What?"

"Are you a pirate?" Brian asked.

"Are you going to turn me in if I am? Better men then you have tried." Brady laughed. The boy stood in front of him in the middle of the cabin not knowing what to do. "Sit down, Brian."

Brian sat in the copilots's chair. "Are you going to tell me?" he asked.

"I don't know." Matthew admitted. He reached for the communications controls. "But I better call your mother. She'll be frantic."

"So?"

"You know, Kid, you've got a bad attitude." Matthew shook his head. His finger paused over the control board. "What is the problem you have with your mother? She's a very nice person."

"Yeah, well I know you like her." Brian said. "That's obvious. But she's been sitting on me like a mother hen for the last year! She never did that to my brother or sister."

"Maybe they didn't need sitting on." Matthew observed as he switched his controls to connect with the base they had left just a few hours ago.

"Right. Everyone thinks Harry and Demora are saints." Brian complained. Taking his finger off the communication controls, Brady turned towards him. The kid sounded a lot like Matthew did at that age. He also had a hard time living up to his big brother's perfect reputation. "Well I'm not going to be a doctor and I'm not going to be in Starfleet."

"What are you going to be?"

"I don't know. Maybe a pirate." Brian said.

"So that's what you are looking for, a career opportunity." Brady had to laugh. At least he remembered having a better plan at Brian's age.

"Don't laugh at me!" Brian warned darkly. Before Matthew could answer the kid his proximity alert sounded. "What's that?"

"Computer, locate and identify." Matthew ordered. "On screen."

"Location four thousand kilometers off port. Class C scout ship." The computer reported. "No identification beacon."

"The Shadow." Matthew said to himself as much as to Brian. "Damn!"

"The what?" Brian asked.

"An old friend of mine." Brady said. He checked his control panel to be sure that all his systems were on line and available "I'm going to hail him. You keep your mouth shut. Got it?"

"Yeah."

"Tezuka? Is that you?" Matthew asked after he opened a channel to the other ship.

"Brady! I thought you were dead." He was human. An Asian man with long black hair and a neatly trimmed mustache and beard. The screen was small and Tezuka could only see Brady's head and shoulders. Brian watched and listened. "Did you get that Starfleet Captain off your back?"

"I've been dodging that Captain for twenty years." Brady laughed with practiced ease. "But I'm too smart to get caught with dirty hands."

"Tau Mauru wasn't so smart." Tezuka observed.

"Tau Mauru never was very smart." Brady agreed. "If it wasn't for his uncle he'd have been dead long ago."

"So what happened to him?"

"Last time I saw him he was in a Federation jail." Brady said. "Why are you so interested in Tau? Does he have something on you?"

"I couldn't care less about the kid, but I owe his uncle." Tezuka said. "And Regana is not too happy that you got off without so much as a fine."

"Yeah, that Starfleet captain wasn't so happy about that either." Brady shrugged. "So what does Tau Regana want you to do about it?"

"He wants to see you." Tezuka said.

"I'd be happy to stop by after I make my delivery." Matthew said. "I assume he's still at New Freedom?"

"Not good enough." Tezuka said. "He wants you now."

"He's locking phasers." Brian whispered.

"Next time, Tezuka." Brady cut off the communications then rapidly touched a succession of controls. On the screen Tezuka's ship, the Shadow, fell away quickly. A minute later Brady cut all power to minimum.

"What did you do?" Brian asked.

"I engaged the cloaking device, got out of his way fast, and cut engines." Brady explained. Brian looked puzzled. The cloaking device and getting away was obvious, but cutting engines? "We'll wait until he moves on before we do. I happen to know the

Shadow carries heat seeking torpedos. So we're not going to make any heat for it to find us."

"But a torpedo would destroy us." Brian said. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the Shadow launched a torpedo. It came towards them but passed by harmlessly. "I thought he wanted you to go with him."

"Looks like his orders read dead or alive." Brady said. "I'm afraid that call to your mother is going to have to wait awhile. I'm not going to give him anything to home in on."

"Fine by me." Brian said and hoped he sounded much more relaxed than he felt. Suddenly this idea to come with Brady did not seem so bright.

"How'd you learn to read these instruments?" Brady asked. "Your father?"

"Are you kidding?" Brian wondered if Brady actually thought he was allowed to even be on the bridge of the Excelsior. "My sister took me up in her Academy trainer a couple of times. It was against regs. of course, but Demora never gets caught."

"You must be a quick study." Brady said. "If you picked up details of the instruments after just a couple times in a trainer."

"Contrary to popular belief, I'm not stupid." Brian snapped. Damn, he better stop acting stupid and get as much information as he could. Pirate or no, this guy would dump him as soon as he could. "Who was the Starfleet captain you were talking about?"

"That was your father." Brady said. "We've had a long and interesting association."

"He's an Admiral now."

"There was no need to mention that." Brady said. "I never volunteer information. It's too valuable to give away."

"So is that what you sell?" Brian asked.

"If someone is willing to buy, sure." Brady said. "I've made my living a number of ways since I left home. I was a couple of years older than you. But I left the same way..."

"You stowed away on a pirate's ship?" Brian asked.

"No." Brady smiled. "But I did leave on a whim. And I didn't go back for fifteen years."

"And from this I am suppose to suddenly want to go home?" Brian asked. He rolled his eyes and said, "Razz."

"Look Kid, I've had enough of the attitude." Brady said. "Just shut up and watch the monitor. When the Shadow leaves the area so can we."