

On the Sly Fox Brian tumbled out of the only bunk. Matthew Brady sat in the pilot's seat. The stars on the small view screen did not make much sense to Brian. He rubbed his eyes and looked at the readouts on the controls, trying to orient himself.

"Where are we going?" Brian asked Brady

"Into the lion's den." Brady said.

"Ok, don't tell me." Brian sulked. He turned and went off to the bathroom. Then he stopped at the food replicator and got himself a hot cup of Andonian tea with chocolate. He brought his cup back to the copilot's seat. There wasn't much room to move around on this small ship.

Brady smiled. "I thought you had these readouts down cold. Can't you figure out where we are?"

Brian studied the readouts and sipped his chocolate tea. "I can see that we left the Orion System behind and that we are heading in the general direction of the Neutral Zone. But if we are going to the zone why didn't we swing past Rigel? Seems to me that would be the logical way to go."

"True." Brady smiled and nodded. "But I have to make a stop first. Have you ever heard of the New Freedom Station?"

"Yeah." Brian said with a grin. "Aldo Rabbu says you can get anything you want on New Freedom. And he meant anything!"

"Who is Aldo Rabbu?"

"His parents are the jewelers on Starbase 18." Brian explained. "He's about my sister's age. Used to hang around and try to impress her."

"Did he?" Brady asked. "Impress her?"

"They went out a couple of times." Brian shrugged. "But a guy's got a lot better chance with my sister if he's wearing a uniform."

"Oh." Brady smiled and nodded. "Just like your father's?"

"I guess." Brian said. "She's so damn impressed by Starfleet. I don't get it."

"I take it you are not so impressed?"

"It's ok for some people." Brian shrugged again. "But don't you think there's more to life? And all those rules! I have enough people telling what to do now. I can't imagine signing up for more of that voluntarily."

"I read you." Brady agreed. "I've always had a problem with rules myself."

"But why are we going to New Freedom?" Brian asked. "Isn't that where the Tau guy is?"

"You have been paying attention, Kid. Haven't you?" Brady said. Brian wasn't sure if Brady was impressed or teasing him. "Yeah, that's where Tau Regana is."

"His name is backwards." Brian observed. He would show this pirate he was not someone to be dismissed lightly. "Doesn't that mean he's from the Apnex Sect?"

"Have you made a study of Romulus, Kid?" Brady asked.

"Ambassador Spock was at my grandfather's house one night. He was talking about a religious sect near the Apnex Sea on Romulus. They put their family names first." Brian explained. "He said they descended from the original inhabitants of the planet before the Vulcan terrorist settled there. Spock finds Romulus very interesting."

"So you know Ambassador Spock?"

"He's a friend of my grandfather." Brian shrugged. "When he's on Earth, Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk come over and they talk all night. I think they forget I'm there. But I hear a lot of things that way."

"Smart kid." Brady commented. "And Ambassador Spock is of the opinion that the original Romulans were Vulcan terrorists?"

"No. That was my grandfather's opinion. Mr. Spock took exception to the term terrorist." Brian smiled remembering the evening. He had listened as the three friends sat in front of the fire for hours discussing politics and philosophy. Brian sipped his tea and changed the subject. "So if Tau is there and he wants you dead, why are we going there?"

"Hopefully Tau will be distracted by other things." Brady said. "And I will be able to meet with friends. I need information before I continue."

"What kind of information?" Brian asked.

"Well for one thing, I'd like to find out if Rumml completed his mission." Brady said carefully.

"Why didn't you just make the delivery yourself?"

"It was along Rumml's regular route." Brady said casually "He would not arouse any suspicion."

"I don't get it." Brian shook his head. "What was it he delivered for you? And where did he deliver it?"

"That's not your business, Kid." Brady said calmly.

"Must be pretty important." Brian said. He waited in vain for Brady to respond. "Ok, so when do we get there?"

"Not for several hours." Brady said.

"We're only going warp one point six."

"I don't want to get there too soon. I need to get some sleep first." Brady got up and headed towards his bunk. "Don't touch anything."

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Dr. McCoy walked into the Fly By Night Bar and Grill. He was surprised to find it open for business and his daughter behind the bar. It was early in the evening by Star Fleet time. A couple of the regulars sat at the bar and several small groups were finishing up dinner at the tables.

Jimmi came out from behind the bar to greet him. They hugged briefly. "Any news?" McCoy asked. Jimmi shook her head. He hugged again. "How are you holding up?"

"I'm awful, Dad." Jimmi said.

"Why didn't you close the bar?"

"And endure all that silence?" She asked. Jimmi returned to her post as bartender. "It would drive me mad!"

McCoy sat on a bar stool and studied his daughter. In her fifties, she was still a beautiful woman although her eyes were red from crying. She was wearing maroon cotton slacks and a matching long sleeve t-shirt with a tapestry vest over top. Not her normal bar attire. McCoy also

noticed the wisps of grey had disappeared from her hair since he had last seen her.

"Do you have any idea what Brian was up to?" McCoy asked.

"None at all." Jimmi shook her head. She picked up the coffee pot and looked at her father. He nodded so she poured them each a cup. "Do you have any idea what Hikaru is up to?"

"What do you mean?"

"He tells me he's on an important mission and he can't be bothered with Brian right now." Jimmi said angrily.

"He said that?"

"Not exactly." Jimmi conceded. "But why isn't he here? Doesn't he understand I need him?"

"I know you don't want to hear this Dear." McCoy said. "But he has his duty."

"I don't care about his duty!" She snapped. "I care about my baby. What if Brian never comes home? What if I never know what has happened to him?"

"Jimmi! Stop torturing yourself." McCoy said. "He hasn't been gone that long. And if I know your youngest, he would tell you that he could handle himself."

"He's just a baby, Dad."

"I know Dear." McCoy said gently. "But he's trying very hard to grow up. He reminds me so much of you at that age."

"I never just disappeared on you."

"No. But you often acted without thinking of the consequences." McCoy said. "It is possible that's what is going on here."

"Maybe..."

"How do you think I got all these grey hairs?" He tried to cheer her up.

"I hate to tell you this Dad, but you've gone beyond grey." She managed to smile at him. His full head of hair was now a snowy white. Except for the color of his hair and the inevitable wrinkling of his skin that comes with age, McCoy had not changed dramatically from the first time Jimmi had seen him.

"You on the other hand, seem to have less grey hair than before."

"Oh that." Jimmi fingered her hair self consciously. "I did that when I couldn't sleep last night. I also scrubbed the kitchen from top to bottom and reprogrammed the holographic generator of my entertainment system."

"Sounds like more than one sleepless night's work."

"Well, I guess that's one thing I can thank Brian for." Jimmi said. "I never knew how much more I could get done just by cutting sleep out of my schedule."

"I bet you're not eating right either." McCoy frowned. Jimmi just shrugged. "Come have dinner with me."

"I'm so glad you're here Dad." She leaned across the bar putting her hand over his. "I just don't know what else to do."

"Why don't you try sitting down and relaxing for awhile." He suggested.

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"Space Station New Freedom. This is the Sly Fox, registry number alpha 779 beta,

requesting permission to dock at the outer most ring." Matthew Brady hailed the station.

"Sly Fox, this is New Freedom dock master. Permission granted to dock at air lock 28." the answer came back. "Enjoy your stay."

"Why are you docking at an airlock?" Brian asked. "The landing bay here must be large enough for this ship."

"It is." Brady said as he maneuvered the small ship to the outer ring of the station. "But the landing bay is not conducive to a quick take off. By docking at an airlock all we have to do is disengage and go. No force fields to lower or security to by pass."

"That makes sense."

"I'm glad you approve, Kid." Brady smiled. "Listen, while we're here, I want you to stay on board the ship."

"What?"

"To guard the ship." Brady said. "Make sure no trespassers get on board."

"No." Brian said.

"You'll do as I say, Kid."

"I want to see the station." Brian whined. "You can't bring me to one of the most notorious places in the Federation and not let me see it."

"I might have to move fast." Brady explained as they settled against the airlock. "It will be easier if you are here."

"I can take care of myself." Brian said.

"I said no!" Brady went to the back of the Fox and opened the air lock hatch. He turned back to Brian "Stay put."

"Like hell." Brian said after Brady had left. But Brian was in no hurry. He took the time to link up to the station computer and access the station directory. When he was sure where he wanted to go and how to get there he left the ship.

Brian found the bazaar. There were several decks of shops and businesses. The bazaar was full of the seamier side of New Freedom. It was exactly the side Brian wanted to see. There were bars with gambling and scantily dressed employees. Merchants offered exotic wares from all corners of the galaxy. There were so many different species that Brian had trouble cataloging them in his mind.

On the edge of all the activity, Brian came across a humanoid man sitting in front of an easel. His skin was an odd color, almost a terra-cotta. He was thin and mostly bald except for a ring of yellow hair just above his large ears. He held a palette in one hand but Brian could not see any colors on it. Brian watched as he touched the palette with his long thin fingers then used that finger to paint vivid streaks of color on the canvas.

"How'd you do that?" Brian asked.

The man looked over his shoulder at Brian. "You have never seen biolumi?"

"No. How does it work?" Brian asked staring intently at the painting. It was a swirling mass of color. He crouched down and moved closer to the canvas. The man was painting on what appeared to be a piece of plastic. When the man did not answer, Brian self consciously glanced at him. "I am sorry. I didn't mean to intrude."

Brian started to straighten up, but the man touched his arm lightly. Brian turned to look at him. Brian's deep blue eyes met the stranger's light green ones. The man smiled and said

gently. "No intrusion, Brother."

"Brother?" Brian asked.

"All artists are brothers."

"Artist? I don't know." Brian blushed.

"I am Dolyn." The man said.

"I'm Brian." He did not mention his last name, but Dolyn didn't seem to notice.

"Touch the palette." Dolyn said leaning forward to put the palette in Brian's reach. "The color will vary with the pressure you apply."

Brian tentatively touched the palette. It looked solid and white but gave under his finger like a multicolored sponge. He put his finger to the canvas and was rewarded by a brilliant blue.

Thrilled, Brian drew his finger along the canvas following the swirls Dolyn had left. The blue deepened to purple. The purple lightened to pink.

"Wow!" Brian said to himself, his eyes wide with wonder. He turned to look at Dolyn. They smiled at each other. "Can I?"

"Yes Brother."

While Brian was spending his time with Dolyn, Matthew Brady had met his golden skinned friend Tommon Basu. They walked along towards the Sly Fox at a quick pace. Tommon was close to a foot shorter than Matthew and had to almost run to keep up with his long time friend.

"Be sure you give the message to Mrs. Sulu personally, Tommon." Matthew said as they reached airlock 28. Tommon nodded. "The kid can be a real pain but he's ok."

"Have you told him I am to take him back to Starbase 18?" Tommon asked.

"Are you kidding? If I had he'd have disappeared by now." Brady laughed. He opened the air lock and stepped into the ship. "Brian, this is... he's not here! That brat!"

Tommon followed Matthew onto the Sly Fox. "There is hardly time for this, Matthew. I will find the Sulu boy. You get off the station before there is any trouble."

"There's trouble all right and his name is Brian Sulu!" Brady paced around the ship trying to think. He saw the station directory still on the copilot's view screen. "Damn it! He's gone to the bazaar."

"If you go there, Tau's people will see you."

"I know." Brady rubbed his beard thoughtfully. "OK, we'll split up and search the bazaar. If I have to make a quick exit, I will. But then you'll have to convince Brian to go with you to Starbase 18."

"If you go as you suggest, how will I know if you have the boy or not?" Tommon asked.

"Hmmm...." Matthew opened a panel behind his bunk. He took out two small personal transmitters. "Take this. The range is limited, but it's sufficient for the station. Come on."

Matthew started his search on deck forty two. He looked through every shop and booth to no avail. Tommon went directly to deck forty four. He had a picture of Brian supplied by Brady, but had no luck finding the teen among the merchants. They reached deck forty three from opposite sides at about the same time.

Matthew glanced in the bars and gambling houses, but he knew they would throw out a teen with no money without a second thought. Brady quietly made his way along the edge of the bazaar. Several times he had to change direction to avoid Tau's personal militia. Finally he saw

Brian sitting at the feet of a Drax'l man with an easel. Brady walked up behind Brian.

"Get up Kid." He growled in a low and threatening voice. Brian jumped involuntarily. He looked up at Brady. "We've got to get out of here now."

"So go." Brian said without getting up. "You don't need me."

"You're right! I don't need you." Brady grabbed him by the collar and pulled him into a standing position. "But I am going to return you to your mother whether you like it or not."

"Get off me." Brian tried unsuccessfully to loosen Brady's grip. "I don't need a babysitter! And I don't have to go with you."

"Quiet!" Brady warned him. "Come on."

"Brady." Brian and Matthew both turned to see a human woman with a phaser aimed at them. She was nearly as tall as Brady with short honey colored hair. She wore a steel grey jumpsuit with a black battle jacket and black boots.

"Lucus." Brady said. "Long time."

"Is this the kid, Brady?" She asked. "The one all of Starfleet is looking for?"

"Someone's looking for me?" Brian asked.

"If you are the Sulu kid, the whole sector is looking for you." Lucus said. "And if Starfleet gets their hands on you this time Matthew, they won't let go so easily."

"Why? What would they do?" Brian asked. He looked up at Brady, then around for a place to run.

"So what's with the phaser Maryann?" Matthew ignored Brian's confused interruption. He smiled at Lucus but kept a firm hold of Brian's collar. "I heard your boss was looking for me and here I am."

"Well, I'm not taking any chances, Matthew." she returned his smile. "I remember the last time we found ourselves on opposite sides of a fight."

"You've got a long memory." Brady covertly looked around for a way out. But a few other of Tau's employees had seen them and were coming through the crowd towards them. "That was a good ten years ago."

"Is there a problem, Brother?" Dolyn asked Brian.

"There sure is." Brian nodded to his new friend. Maryann Lucus focused on the Drax'l man for the first time.

Matthew took advantage of her wandering attention to slam Brian into Lucus, knocking her off balance. The phaser was knocked loose from her hand and went sailing across the bazaar. Matthew pulled Brian close to him and yelled "Get back to the ship now." As soon as Brady let go of him, Brian started running.

As he ran the bazaar seemed to come alive with people trying to catch him. They appeared out of no where in every shape and size. A tall broad Nausicaan tried to catch him. But Brian's slight build let him slip between two booths where the alien could not follow. As he ran around the back of that booth, Brian looked over his shoulder. The Nausicaan was after Brady. Matthew swerved. The Nausicaan lost his footing and fell into a pottery booth with a loud crash. Matthew stopped for a second to catch his breath and get his bearings. He did not see Maryann Lucas coming up behind him.

"Brady!" Brian yelled. He bent over and ran head first into the woman's stomach. Lucus tried in vain to hold Brian as she went down. Matthew turned, almost losing his balance as Brian

went by him. He recovered enough to grab Brian's arm and steer him towards the nearest turbo lift. They ran smack into the door before it even had a chance to sense them and open. When it did open they fell into the turbo lift together.

"Outer ring." Brady ordered. "Air lock 28."

They sat on the floor catching their breath as the turbo lift traveled first vertically then horizontally through the station. Brian finally asked. "Are you ok? She had a hypospray."

"Are you sure?"

"Razz!" Brian swore. He knew a hypo when he saw one. "My brother's a doctor. My grandfather's a doctor."

"Ok." Brady smiled as he stood up. He offered Brian his hand. Brian was just on his feet when the turbo lift doors opened. The corridor was empty. They hurried to the safety of the Sly Fox. Once they were on board Brady remembered the transmitter. It took it out of his pocket and opened the channel. "Tommon."

"Matthew. Are you all right?" Tommon responded. "I saw you and the Sulu boy leave the bazaar."

"We're fine." Brady said. "Are you on your way here?"

"Yes. I'll be there in a few minutes." Tommon terminated the connection.

"Who was that?" Brian asked.

"A friend." Brady said. He sat down in the pilot's seat to prepare for departure.

"Tommon Basu. He's going to take you back to Starbase 18."

"I'm not ready to go back." Brian strode over to Brady. "I want to talk to Dolyn some more."

"Who?"

"The artist I was talking to at the bazaar." Brian explained.

"You can't trust him." Brady dismissed the idea.

"Matthew! Matthew!" Tommon's voice came through the transmitter. "Answer!"

"Go ahead Tommon."

"Tau's security is out side your air lock. I can not reach you." Tommon reported. "You must disembark now."

"I read you, Tommon." Brady said. "Deliver that message I gave you. And tell her I'm sorry. "

"I will, Matthew." Tommon said. "A safe journey."

"Brian, disengage from airlock." Brady ordered. Brian reluctantly sat at the copilot's seat and followed orders. The small ship drifted free. Matthew steered the most direct course away from New Freedom at the fastest safe speed. He engaged the cloaking device and changed course.

"Where are we going now?" Brian asked.\_

"Right this minute? No where." Brady said. They were circling back towards the large space station they had just left. "We are going to sit here and watch."

"Watch what?"

"I want to see if anyone follows and I want to make sure Tommon gets off the station safely." Brady explained.

"Does he live there? Or was he just there to meet you?" Brian asked.

"He is often at New Freedom on business." Brady explained. "He and his family operate the Basu Emergency Ship Repair Co. That's his ship at Airlock Seven."

The ship Brady indicated on the view screen was much larger than Sly Fox. It had the company name printed in large letters on its port side. As they watched the Basu ship floated free of the station and casually went on its way.

"Ok, he's gone." Brian said. "Now what?"

"Wait." Brady said. As they watched two small one man ships took off from the landing bay. They followed after the Basu ship. Still Brady waited. Finally he was satisfied with traffic patterns around the station so he set course for the Neutral Zone. He kept the cloaking device on until they were many light years from New Freedom. "You did ok back there, Kid."

"I still don't get it." Brian complained. "You wanted to make sure Basu got off ok. Those two ships followed him and all you did was go the other way."

"They want to know where Tommon is going." Brady explained. "Once they realize his destination they won't be able to touch him."

"Why?"

"Because he's headed to Starbase 18." Brady smiled. "And Tau doesn't want any more Starfleet entanglements. Tommon knows your Mom. He'll tell her you are ok."

"How long have they been looking for me?"

"Since you disappeared, you idiot!" Brady said. "Didn't you consider that your parents would be worried about you?"

"They never have been before." Brian sulked.

"You poor boy." Brady said sarcastically. "You mean you are not the center of the galaxy?"

"Me? I've always been an after thought to my parents." Brian said. "After the ship. After the bar. After Harry and Demora."

"Well, they are thinking about you now." Brady said. "Of course from what I know of your father, I'm glad I'm not in your shoes."

"I guess." Brian shook his head with resignation. "I don't think he'll ever understand."

They flew along in silence for awhile. Brian was sulking. And Brady was glad for the peace and quiet. Brian took out some paper and started sketching. He drew Rengi from memory. He wanted to get her features down on paper before he forgot them. He had a preliminary sketch of most the people he knew on file in his room.

"What did you mean about Dolyn?" Brian asked suddenly several hours later.

"Dolyn?" Brady asked.

"The artist I met in the bazaar." Brian explained. "You said I couldn't trust him."

"He's a Drax'l." Brady explained.

"So..."

"Don't you realize they are empaths?" Brady asked.

"You're saying he could read my mind."

"Worse than that. He could read your feelings." Brady said. "He knew what you wanted and needed on a gut level. That's something that can be used against you, Kid."

"So I shouldn't trust him because of that?"

"Right." Brady nodded.

"That's crazy." Brian insisted. "We had something in common... We connected... I could trust what he said."

"If you say so." Brady shrugged. "But with a Drax'l, you'll never know for sure. Now go get some sleep."

"What if I'm not tired?"

"Suit you self." Brady said. "But I'm going to want that bunk in a couple of hours. Feel free to sleep in the copilots chair."

"Razz!" Brian mumbled as he threw himself into the bunk. He rolled to face the wall and fell asleep faster than he would have thought possible.

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On Starbase Eighteen, Jimmi put on another pot of coffee. It was late afternoon. The bar was open but empty. It wouldn't be long before Paco came in to start getting ready for the dinner rush. Not that there had been much of a rush lately. The regulars still came in but they were more subdued than usual. They had stopped asking her if there was any news. Her father came out of the Fly By Night's office to join her.

"Coffee's fresh." Jimmi said. She didn't want to ask if he had found anything out. She didn't want to know who he had talked to in Starfleet.

"Jimmi, you need to get some sleep." McCoy said sitting across the bar from her.

"I have work to do." She shrugged. She slowly refilled her coffee mug and poured one for her father.

"Isn't Mike due back today?" He asked. Jimmi nodded. "Good. When he gets here I want you to lay down and try to sleep. If you want, I can give you something to help."

Jimmi sighed heavily. "I'll try, Dad."

"Hey Boss." Paco called as he came through the front door. "Look who I found."

"Michael." Jimmi smiled as he came in. "I'm glad to see you."

Mike Woo dropped his bag on the floor and went directly behind the bar to hug his aunt and boss. As always he was dressed casually, wearing natural linen slacks with the sleeves of his bronze cotton shirt rolled up to just below his elbows. "Boss. I'm sorry it took me so long to get back. How are you?"

"Rotten." Jimmi managed a smile. "And tired."

"Give me a minute to put my bag upstairs and check my messages." Mike smiled. "Then I'll relieve you."

"Fine." Jimmi nodded.

"Good to see you, Doctor." Mike said on his way back to his bag.

"And you, Mike." McCoy replied. He sipped his coffee and watched his daughter. "Aren't you going to ask?"

"No." Jimmi said wiping the bar. "If it was good news or bad news you would have told me by now. If it's nothing new, I don't need to hear it."

"All right Dear."

Jimmi looked up to see a Barchin man hesitantly come in the door. He looked around the empty barroom uncertainly. It took Jimmi a few minutes to recognize Tommon Basu. With their slight variations in skin and hair color and their tendency not to look you in the eye, individual

Barchins could be difficult to distinguish. He kept his eyes down until he was directly in front of the bar.

"Mrs. Sulu." Tommon glanced first at Jimmi then at Dr. McCoy. "May I speak to you privately?"

"Mr. Basu." Jimmi said eagerly. "This is my father, Dr. McCoy. Anything you need to say to me, you can say in front of him. Has Matthew sent you?"

"He has." Tommon said. He nodded to McCoy, who returned the acknowledgment. "I have seen your son."

"Is he ok?" Jimmi reached across the bar to grab his hand. "Where is he? Is he coming home?"

"He is well." Tommon wanted to pull his hand back, but she held him tightly. "Matthew had wanted me to bring him home to you, but we were separated and Matthew had to leave the station suddenly."

"Which station?" Dr. McCoy asked.

"New Freedom." Tommon Basu said. "He wanted me to tell you that he will keep your son safe and bring him home as soon as he possibly can."

As soon as Mr. Basu had finished relaying the message, Jimmi called Excelsior. She was put through to Admiral Sulu in record time. He did not look happy. Jimmi could imagine the knot between his shoulders.

"Hello Jeanie." He tried unsuccessfully to smile.

"Harry, I've had some good news." Jimmi smiled broadly.

"He's home?" Sulu asked cautiously.

"No." Jimmi said. "But Matthew Brady's friend, Tommon Basu, saw them yesterday on Space Station New Freedom. He was suppose to bring Brian home but they got separated."

"He said Brian is ok?"

"Yes."

"Are they still at New Freedom?" Sulu asked.

"No, Tommon Basu said they had to leave suddenly."

"Why did Brian leave with Brady? What was their heading? When is he coming back?" the Admiral asked.

"I don't know." Jimmi said. "But Mr. Basu is still here. I can ask him. But at least I know Brian is alive!"

"Yeah Baby. It's great." Sulu really smiled for the first time. "Thanks for the good news. I needed it."

"Me Too." Jimmi said. "Me too."

"Jeanie. Is your father with you?" Sulu asked.

"He's in the bar. Do you need to talk to him?" she asked. He nodded. Jimmi touched the Fly By Night's com. "Mike, please ask Dad to join me."

"And Jeanie. I need to speak to him alone." Sulu added.

"Business I suppose." Jimmi said. Her husband just shrugged. Jimmi looked up as her father walked into the room. "He wants to talk to you. Admiral to admiral. No civilians allowed."

Jimmi stood up to let her father have the desk chair. He stopped in front of her to look her in the eye. "Where are you going?"

"To bed, Dad, as ordered." Jimmi smiled. "Goodnight Harry. Goodnight Dad."

"Goodnight Dear." McCoy said. He settled in the desk chair as she headed for the door. He called after her. "I'm going to check on you in an hour. If you aren't sleeping..."

"I read you, Dad."

"All right Hikaru. We're alone." McCoy said. "I talked to this Basu character. According to him, Brian stowed away on Brady's ship because he saw him make the deal with Rumml. Brady would have returned him right away but he is having a problem with Tau Regana and his operatives."

"That's what has had me worried, Doc." Sulu said. "Brady has quite a price on his head. I don't want Brian with him when his luck runs out. Tau is getting bold. He's sure Starfleet can't reach him."

"And as long as he won't leave New Freedom." McCoy said. "He's right."

"If I get the evidence of how the information is crossing the Neutral Zone, I'll go there and get him myself." Admiral Sulu said.

"But you found nothing when you searched Rumml's ship?" McCoy asked ignoring the Admiral's bluster.

"We did not find the information that was planted. However our other sources say the information got through." Sulu said. "Chekov is still working on those strange readings we got on that ship."

"Do you think Brady knows how Rumml is getting the information through?"

"He claimed he didn't know." Sulu said. "But I'd like to talk to him again about it. He might have seen something that would help."

"Well, the kidnaping charge should bring him to you sooner or later." McCoy smiled.

"I hope sooner." Sulu said. "Tau seems to have far reaching influence. And the longer Brian is with Brady..."

"I know." McCoy said. "But he'll be fine, Hikaru. Brian is probably looking on this as one big adventure."

"An adventure that is going to cost him." Sulu's concern for Brian shifted back to anger. "If he thinks he can put his mother through this kind of heartache without paying the penalty, he better think again."

"Basu's message seems to have eased Jimmi's mind considerably." McCoy said.

"I'm glad, Doc. I really am." Sulu said. "But that doesn't excuse Brian's behavior."

"Of course not." McCoy agreed "But if I could offer you a little advise, Hikaru. When you finally see Brian, listen to him."

"What could he possibly have to say that could justify his actions?" Sulu asked.

"Nothing." McCoy said. "And I have no doubt that you will straighten him out regarding his recent actions. But I'm talking about listening to how Brian feels. A boy his age needs that."

"And I haven't been there for him." Sulu sighed with resignation. "You are right about that Doc."

"I'm not judging you, Hikaru." McCoy said. "If anyone knows your side of it, I do."

Having a family in Starfleet is not easy. But you and Jimmi have done it as well as anybody I've ever seen."

"Well." Admiral Sulu shifted uncomfortably. "I don't have time to get into this right now. I appreciate you keeping an eye on things there for me. Excelsior out."

Admiral Sulu terminated the connection without waiting for a response from his father-in-law. He pushed his chair away from his desk and stood up abruptly. He couldn't help but notice the family picture on his desk. It was at least six years old. It was from a time when all Brian wanted from his father was a game of baseball. Sulu straightened his uniform jacket, took a deep breath, and returned to the bridge of the Excelsior.

On the bridge everything was as it should be. Lt. Commander Kim was at the helm. The new ensign was at navigation. Her name was Pelta, the Admiral reminded himself. This was her third shift on the bridge and she was proving capable. Sulu walked over to the science station.

"What have you got, Chekov?"

Chekov turned his chair to the Admiral smiling. "Do you remember the first contact with the Della Mir?"

"Of course." Sulu said. "That contact took up our time on Enterprise for almost a year if I remember correctly."

"Then of course you remember the planet Tellus and the trouble we had reading through their building stones with our tricorders?" Chekov asked. Sulu nodded. Chekov put two sets of readings up on his screen. "The readings on the right are from Enterprise files of that mission. The other readings are from Mr. Johnson's tricorder on the Bashzook."

"They're close, Pav. But not identical." Sulu leaned over Chekov's shoulder to study the readings. "Any idea why?"

"I've reviewed the files from Enterprise." Chekov said. "Our thinking at the time was the unusual combinations of tellurium had captured the magnetic field caused by the pulse beacon giving the unusual readings."

"Keep going Pavel."

"The pulse beacon was being tested for ten years and had been activated for half that time when we were there." Chekov continued. "There difference could possibly come from the fact that it's been over twenty five years since the beacon was to have been turned off. Or the difference could come from some manufacturing process."

"In other words you don't know." Sulu said.

"I would need more information to be certain." Pavel said. "However the difference is neither here nor there. The important thing here is that on the planet Tellus the readings from the tricorder were not accurate."

"And what better place to hide something as small as a data storage unit than in or behind a material the tricorder can not accurately read?" Sulu asked with a smile. "But the magnetic fields could be a problem for the data storage units."

"The storage unit would have to be designed to isolate the data from the magnetic fields." Chekov shrugged. "Tricky but not impossible."

"Good job, Chekov." Sulu rested his hand briefly on Chekov's shoulder. "Was the Bashzook equipped with a cloaking device?"

"No." Chekov said. "She carries standard freighter equipment. A type-4 phaser bank, a

cargo transporter, deflectors and shields. I'd estimate the Bashzook's top speed at warp six or so." "He should be coming back this way by now." Sulu commented on his way back to the center seat.

"Assuming he stays with his flight plan." Chekov said. "I doubt he will want to run into us again."

"We'll go on our way, slowly." Sulu said. "Keep long distance scanners on maximum. I want to see him before he sees us."

"Aye Sir." Chekov said.

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"Are you ever planning on explaining this to me, Brady?" Brian asked. The Sly Fox had dropped out of warp and was cruising along at half impulse power through a quiet ordinary star system. The yellow sun was average in size and power. If any of the planets were inhabited, they weren't interested in small passing ships.

"What did you want to know?" Matthew Brady asked from the pilot's seat.

"You said Rumml completed his mission so you don't need to go to the Neutral Zone. Yet that's where we're going." Brian said.

"Is it?" Brady asked noncommittally.

"Not in a straight line." Brian said. "And not in any hurry. But we get closer to the zone all the time. And what are we doing in this system? As far as I can tell there is nothing here."

"Haven't you ever heard of the scenic route?"

"No."

"Ok, Kid. It seems like every one in this sector is looking for you and me." Brady said. Brian nodded. "I certainly don't want Lucus or Tezuka to catch up with us. And I am very particular about who I talk to in Starfleet. So we are taking a low profile."

"Why don't you just use the cloaking device?" Brian asked. "Then you can fly by any one and they'll never see us."

"First, it uses too much energy. Second, I'm not suppose to have it so let's just keep that to ourselves." Brady said. "Third, it's not full proof."

"What do you mean?" Brian asked. "It makes you invisible, right?"

"Virtually invisible." Brady corrected. "And I don't like to split hairs where my life is concerned. I look on a cloak like a smoke screen. It works best when you use it as a surprise and a diversion."

"So we're in this system to...?" Brian asked again.

"Just a detour." Brady laughed. "I've never been here before."

"Nothing very special about it." Brian commented looking at the four planet system.

"Awfully jaded for a youngster." Brady said. "I would think the artist in you would appreciate the colors at least."

"Hmmm..." Brian shrugged. "Even with these detours, we are going somewhere. Are you going to tell me?"

"You right. We are going somewhere." Brady said. "And if we get there I will tell you. But until then it's not important."

"It's not like I'm going to tell anyone." Brian grumbled.

Brady brought the Sly Fox around the star roughly along the orbit of the second planet. It provided a spectacular view, with the star filling the forward view ports for several minutes. It wasn't until they had cleared the star and changed course to leave the system that they saw the Starfleet recon vessel. She was much smaller than a starship, but still a formidable ship.

"Captain Brady." The recon vessel hailed them. "This is Captain Uhura of the Federation Vessel Artful Dodger. I have a warrant for your arrest, sir. Prepare to surrender yourself."

"Damn!" Brady his finger through his hair.

"Do something!" Brian said urgently. Brady looked over at him and shrugged. "Use the cloaking device. Like with the Shadow."

"Kid. She's bigger, faster, and more heavily armed than we are." Brady explained "This is not the time to try anything."

"Are you in big trouble?" Brian asked.

"We'll find out." Brady opened the channel and switched the transmission to visual.

"Captain Uhura, it's good to see you again."

"I'll bet." Captain Uhura smiled. "Disengage your engines, Mr. Brady. And we will bring you on board."

"I don't seem to have a choice." Brady said. "The engines are disengaged, Captain."

"Thank you, Mr. Brady." Uhura smiled. "Mr. Rivera, put a tractor beam on that ship and bring it into the main landing bay."

"Aye Captain."

Matthew Brady unceremoniously closed the channel and pushed his chair back from the pilot's station. After all there was nothing to do but enjoy the ride. He turned his chair to face Brian. But Brian had crossed his arms over his chest and was staring at the deck.

"Don't worry about it Kid." Brady said. "It will work out ok."

"Are they going to put you in jail?" Brian asked without looking up.

"I've been in jail before." Brady shrugged. "It's not so bad. Besides, I don't think it will end up like that."

The ship jolted as it was settled onto the deck of the Artful Dodger's landing bay. Brian looked up at Brady. The ship's owner touched the control panel that opened the main hatch. Two security guards came in with phasers in hand.

"What's that for?" Brian asked with irritation. Before they had a chance to answer, Brian got up and walked out onto the main landing bay. Just outside the Sly Fox Captain Uhura waited. Ensign Rivera stood next to her.

"Brian." She smiled. "Do you know how worried we've been about you?"

"I'm fine." Brian shrugged. "I can take care of myself."

"Of course you can." Uhura said. "But that won't stop your parents from worrying. We are already in route to meet your father."

"Great." Brian said heavily. Matthew Brady and the two security guards came out of the Sly Fox. He joined Brian and Uhura. His hands were cuffed in front of him.

"Captain Uhura. Ensign Rivera." Brady smiled..

"Take Mr. Brady to the brig." Uhura ordered.

"Aye sir." The two guards replied in unison. They took Brady away.

"He shouldn't be in the brig, Captain." Brian said. "He didn't do anything."

"Those are the Admiral's orders." Uhura said. "Mr. Rivera take Brian to sick bay. Dr. Devereaux is waiting for him. We will rendezvous with the Excelsior in less than three hours."

"Aye Captain." Ensign Victor Rivera answered. "Come on Bri."

"Why don't you put me in the brig too?" Brian sulked as he followed Victor down the hall. He didn't bother to look around the ship. It looked enough like the Excelsior that Brian didn't even notice his surroundings.

"Because those aren't the orders." Victor said. "You'd think you'd understand how it works by now. "

"Yeah, I understand." Brian sneered. "My old man says jump and you say how high."

"Unless you haven't noticed, your old man is the old man in this sector." Victor said as they got in the turbo lift. Mr. Rivera abruptly changed the subject. "Sickbay. By the way, how's your sister doing?"

"I'm sure you know better than I do." Brian said. "After all wasn't that you two I saw sneaking down to the old fort in July?"

"We weren't sneaking." Victor shrugged. "Privacy is just hard to come by on Starbase Twelve."

"What do you think the old man would say about that?" Brian snickered.

"Your sister is an adult." Victor said. The turbo lift door opened just down the hall from sickbay. Victor continued as they walked down the hall together. "And your father is not going to let his assessment of my work be compromised by my relationship with Demora."

"Right." Brian said as they walked into sickbay. "If you believe that I've got the rights to a wormhole I want to sell."

"Dr. Devereaux, this is Brian Sulu." Victor said to the ship's chief medical officer. The Doctor was no taller than Brian with dark brown skin and barely any hair.

"Mr. Sulu." The doctor spoke with a thick English accent. "You've become a bit of a celebrity around here."

"Great." Brian complained. "That's just what I needed."

"Well, I need you on the exam table please." Dr. Devereaux indicated the table behind him. The sick bay was much smaller than the Excelsior's, with only two exam tables in this room. But all the standard diagnostic equipment was present. The wall behind the exam table contained several panels and screens displaying readouts on all functions of the patient.

"I'm fine." Brian leaned against the exam table. Doctors never believed him when he said he was ok. "I don't need you to tell me that."

"I have my orders." the Doctor said. "The table please."

"Everybody has their damn orders." Brian complained as he jumped up on the table. The Doctor started scanning him. "What would you say if you didn't have that excuse to hide behind?"

"Perhaps I'd say that you've been all over the sector in unknown circumstances." The Doctor answered calmly. "And I'm going to be sure you are not infected by anything. I have the safety of the ship to worry about.":

"Well?" Brian asked as Devereaux consulted his readouts.

"You're fine." Dr. Devereaux nodded. "Now come into my office. I need to report to my commanding officer."

"Razz." Brian mumbled under his breath. But he jumped down from the table and followed the Doctor into his office. Devereaux sat at his desk. There were shelves behind him full of books and several small bronze statues. There was a picture on his desk of a white haired brown woman sitting on the edge of a pier surrounded by children of all ages. "Any of these your kids?"

"No." the doctor shook his head. "That is my grandmother, god rest her. The children are all my cousins. Except for the tall chap in the back. That's me."

"What happened?" Brian laughed. He sat in the chair across the desk from the Doctor. "Did you shrink?"

"I'll have you know, young man, that in my family I am considered tall." Devereaux replied indignantly. He accessed the open channel the bridge communications officer had ready. Then he turned the view screen towards Brian. Dr. Devereaux left Brian alone in the office. The teenager held his breath.

"Pop!" Brian grinned and relaxed when his grandfather appeared on the screen. Behind his grandfather he could see a painting of a stormy seascape. It was Mike Woo's favorite painting and had hung in his office for years..

"Brian, are you all right?" Dr. McCoy asked.

"I'm fine." His smile dimmed a bit. He hesitated before adding. "You're at the Fly By Night. So... where's Mom?"

"Your mother is sleeping." Brian recognized his grandfather's bedside manner tone.

"Why?" Brian asked carefully. He glanced at his chronometer. "It's not even near closing time yet."

"Because she hadn't slept since you disappeared." Dr. McCoy explained. "I finally gave her something to ensure she would."

"Oh." Brian dropped his head. "I guess she's kind of mad at me."

"She's too worried to be mad right now, Brian." McCoy said. "But by the time you get back here..."

"What should I do, Pop?" Brian asked. In the last couple of years he had come to trust his grandfather's advise regarding his mother.

"You know what to do, Brian." McCoy scolded him. "You're not a baby anymore. Start taking some responsibility for yourself."

"I'm trying." Brian said. "But it just makes everyone angrier."

"Brian, going off half cocked without a thought of anyone else. Not calling your mother for days to even say you were alive. You can't get much more irresponsible than that!"

"I'm sorry."

"That was always your mother's final answer when she was your age." McCoy shook his head. "I hate to tell you this, Bri, but being sorry is not always good enough."

"Yes sir." Brian said quietly. It was the ultimate fall back position for any Starfleet brat. And Brian knew how to get to his grandfather. "Did Mom get into a lot of trouble when she was a teenager?"

"There was a time," McCoy smiled. He knew Brian's diversionary tactics well. "when I thought no one could get into as much trouble as my little girl. Of course, now I know I was wrong."

"Pop?" Brian asked seriously. "Is Dad going to kill me?"

"You'll live through it." McCoy said dryly. "You may not want to, but you'll live through it."

"I didn't really mean to stow away." Brian said. "It just kind of happened. And then things really got out of control. I couldn't call."

"Brian." McCoy stopped him. "You should be telling your father this."

"He's not going to listen to me."

"Brian, I am going to give you some advise regarding your father." Dr. McCoy said. "When you talk to him, tell him everything whether it makes you look good or bad. And tell him what you are thinking and feeling. He won't know unless you tell him."

"Pop.... "

"Trust him, Brian." McCoy said very seriously. "If you wanted his attention, you have it. Make good use of the opportunity. Now, go get Dr. Devereaux for me."

"Yes sir." Brian answered. The Artful Dodger doctor was waiting outside his office with Ensign Rivera. "Dr. Devereaux, Dr. McCoy wants to talk to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Sulu." The Doctor said as he passed Brian on his way back into the office.

"So, what are your orders now, Victor?" Brian asked.

"Babysitting." Victor smiled. Brian frowned. "We'll meet up with the Excelsior in a couple of hours. So how would you like some dinner, a shower , and some clean clothes?"

"Sounds good." Brian nodded. "Then I want to go to the brig and see Brady."

"Sorry." Victor shook his head. "Nobody talks to Brady until the Admiral does."

"That's crazy!" Brian followed Victor back towards the turbo lift. "I was with him for days! What is he going to say to me now that is classified?"

"I've got no idea. But those are the orders. Come on."

"Razz! I hate orders!"