

The next time Brian saw Matthew Brady, he was being brought into the Artful Dodger's transporter room. His wrists were still cuffed in front of him and the same two security guards escorted him. Victor Rivera had escorted Brian.

"You ok?" Brian asked Brady quietly.

"Sure Kid." Brady smiled.

Captain Uhura walked into the transporter room and directly onto the pad. "Mr. Rivera, you will accompany us to the Excelsior. Come on Brian, Mr. Brady. The Admiral is waiting."

When they materialized on the Excelsior's transporter pad, Admiral Sulu stood next to the control panel. Chief Shumar was operating the controls. Sulu took a couple steps towards them, smiling at his youngest son. Brian looked at his father with uncertainty.

"Come here, son." Sulu said gently. Brian complied with the order, stopping in front of his father. The Admiral put one hand on his son's shoulder. He hesitated only slightly before pulling the boy close and embracing him fully. "It's good to see you."

"Dad, I..." Brian didn't know what to say. He had expected his father to be angry and harsh, not controlled and gentle.

"We'll talk later." the Admiral said. "Right now I have business with Captain Uhura and Mr. Brady."

"But Dad..."

"Wait for me in my cabin." Sulu ordered and turned to Brady and the Dodger officers.

"But Dad, Brady didn't do anything." Brian said.

"Brian, do as I say." Sulu said over his shoulder.

"He did not kidnap me!"

"Brian!" The Admiral turned to his son. He put a hand on each of the boy's shoulders. "That was not a request. If you can not follow a simple order, I will have you escorted there and a guard placed on the door."

"I'm going!" Brian pulled free of his father's grip. "Razz!" Sulu watched the retreating teen for a moment. He mentally counted to five, not having enough time to get to ten. But by the time he turned back to business he had his composure back.

"Razz, Sulu." Brady laughed. "No wonder the kid ran away."

"My ready room." Sulu said. He turned and left the transporter room. The others followed. Both Uhura and Rivera acted as if they had not noticed the scene between father and son.

They did not resume talking business until they had reached the Admiral's office. Sulu took his chair behind the desk. He directed Mr. Rivera to remove Brady's restraining cuffs. Brady and Uhura took the chairs in front of the desk while Rivera stood near the door.

"I understand Rumml and his information got through." Brady grinned while he massaged his wrist. "Even after you searched him."

"The search was not in vain." The Admiral replied.

"Of course we were not interested in the information, but in the method of transport." Captain Uhura said. "I take it you found something Admiral?"

"The Bashzook was carrying cases of wine." Sulu said. "The cases themselves were made of a material the tricorders could not accurately read."

"If they got no readings, why didn't your search party tear the cases apart?" Brady asked.

"After all, isn't that standard starfleet procedure?"

"We got readings. They just weren't accurate." Sulu smiled. He ignored Brady's last comment. "Luckily Commander Chekov has a long memory. He had seen similar readings before." "Where?" Uhura asked.

"During Enterprise's first contact mission with the Della Mir." Sulu smiled at Uhura. "Maybe you remember the planet Tellus?"

"That was close to thirty years ago!" Uhura said, eyes wide with amazement. "You're going to have to give Chekov a raise."

"Shh. He'll hear you." Sulu laughed. The admiral looked up at the ensign by the door. "Mr. Rivera, I have a special assignment for you."

"Yes sir."

"For at least the next six months, you are to tell anyone that asks and anyone that will listen about this meeting." Admiral Sulu said. "In a casual manner you are to relay how angry I was that I could not hold Mr. Brady on kidnaping charges. I told him I would be watching him and would pick him up on any charges I could make stick. I also personally threatened him if he ever came near any of my family again."

"Yes sir."

"Ensign this assignment is to include civilians and Starfleet personnel." Sulu said. "As well as any contact you have with cadets. Any questions?"

"No sir." Ensign Rivera replied.

"Good." Admiral Sulu said. "You can wait outside for Captain Uhura."

"Yes sir." Rivera said and left the office.

"He's well trained." Brady smiled at Uhura.

"I'm glad you approve." Uhura said. "Anything else Admiral?"

"Tau Regana." Sulu said. "We have to do something about him. Any suggestions?"

"As long as he refuses to leave New Freedom, we can't touch him." Uhura said. "Perhaps we can give him some incentive to take a trip."

"He doesn't want anything more than my head." Brady shook his head. "And all he's done is sent independent contractors after me."

"Independent contractors?" Sulu asked.

"What would you call them?" Brady smiled.

"Thugs." Sulu replied. "The mysterious Mr. Lucre has been distancing himself from the Tau family since Starfleet got involved a few months ago. If we make things very hard for Tau, maybe Lucre will ask him to leave. After all Mr. Lucre would have the authorities believe that his businesses are totally legitimate."

"Sounds like we are bordering on harassment, Admiral." Uhura said.

"We have a lot of information on the Tau family." Sulu shrugged. "If we search through it carefully, I'm sure we can find valid questions we need to ask his employees and associates."

"I suppose I'll have to keep a low profile for awhile longer." Brady sighed.

"Will you be safe once Tau is in custody?" Uhura asked Brady.

"I think so." Brady said. "His power comes from fear of reprisal as much as from his money."

"Good." Admiral Sulu stood up, signaling the end of the meeting. "I believe that's all we

have to deal with right now."

"What about Brian?" Brady asked as Sulu came out from behind his desk.

"Let me worry about Brian." Sulu said. Brady nodded and joined Mr. Rivera who was still waiting outside the office.

"But he's waiting for you." Uhura reminded him.

"Let him wait." The Admiral grumbled.

"I know I'm not a parent, Hikaru, but..."

"That's right you're not." Sulu said abruptly

"Sorry Admiral."

"No, Girl, I'm sorry." Sulu rubbed his eyes. "I know you are just trying to help. But there are no easy answers here. Brian and I are going to have to work this through ourselves."

"Do you have a plan?" Uhura asked.

"I don't know if it will work." Sulu smiled with uncertainty. "But I thought I'd lock the two of us in a room together. We'll either come to an understanding or we'll kill each other. What do you think?"

"Risky." Uhura said. "But probably one of only a few options."

Brian paced around his father's cabin. It was not the standard issue officer's cabin. There were two sleeping alcoves at opposite ends of the common room. One was little more than a walk in closet with three stacking bunks. The other alcove was basically his parents room when the family was on the ship. Brian could vaguely remember laying in that double bunk with his mother during red alerts waiting for his father to come and tell him it was all right. He had probably been about six. Brian still hated waiting.

Brian sat down at his father's desk in their common room. He punched up a computer game. But he wasn't doing as well as usual. The cabin seemed empty to him. He had never been on the ship without his mother. He played game after game, trying not to think about when his father would come. Finally as his last turn at the game ended in dismal failure, Brian balled both hands into fists and pounded on the computer control pad.

"What did that station ever do to you?" Admiral Sulu asked from the doorway.

"Nothing." Brian mumbled shaking the pain out of his hands. Sulu came the rest of the way into the cabin so that the door shut behind him.

"Well Brian, I think you owe me an explanation." Sulu said calmly. He pulled up the extra chair and sat down across the desk from his son.

"I guess." Brian avoided his father's scrutiny.

"You guess?!" It took all of the admiral's self control not to smack the kid. "What in the entire galaxy were you thinking about when you stowed away on the ship of a total stranger?"

"I didn't mean to stow away." Brian explained. He was trying to take his grandfather's advise. "I just wanted to know what was going on. No one ever tells me anything. I thought I could find some answers on his ship. Then he was coming and I hid and he took off."

"You can't be that stupid, Brian."

"How would you know?" Brian stood up abruptly and paced around the room. "You never listen to me."

"Really Brian..."

"You didn't listen to me today." Brian yelled at him. "I was trying to tell you about Brady and you just told me to go away."

"Slow down." Sulu ordered standing to face his son. "If you are going to start yelling, we'll never get anywhere."

"Then I guess we're not going to get anywhere!" Brian turned and started towards the door.

"Where are you going?" Sulu asked, not as calmly as he wished.

"The brig." Brian said. "I belong there as much as Brady does."

"Brady's not there." Sulu said. Brian stopped and turned to look at his father. "He's gone."

"Gone?"

"The charges were dropped and he's been released." Sulu said. "He couldn't get off the ship fast enough."

"You bastard!" Brian yelled. Without thinking much about it, his hand clenched into a fist and he swung at his father's face. The Admiral was surprised, but easily blocked the blow with his arm.

"How dare you!" Sulu was stunned by his son's actions. But Brian just swung with his other arm. Sulu deflected that blow also. Brian swung again. This time the Admiral grabbed his wrist and twisted the boy around so that he was behind Brian effectively immobilizing him. He had one hand still on Brian's wrist and the other around his shoulders. "Stop! Stop right now!"

"Get off me!" Brian yelled. He twisted and turned trying to break his father's grip.

"You stop acting like a kid and I'll stop treating you like one." Sulu yelled back. But the encounter was not going according to the Admiral's plan. Sulu took a couple of deep breaths and managed to calm himself before he continued. "I need you to stop fighting me, Brian. Can you do that? Can you talk to me?"

"I don't know." Brian whispered. He hung his head and stopped pushing against his father. "I want to. Pop said I should."

"Brian." Sulu loosened his grip. He turned the kid around to face him. But Brian didn't look up at him. Sulu rubbed the back of Brian's neck and spoke to him softly. "Come on, Son. Tell me about it."

Brian still didn't look up. He had his head down and his eyes closed. "I guess I was scared. And I just kind of got used to Brady being there. Then he got in trouble because of me. And no one would listen to me. Brady at least listened."

"Brian. Come sit down." Sulu put his arm around Brian's shoulder and took him over to the couch. They both sat down. But Brian still wouldn't look at his father. "I'm glad you were scared. That shows a little good sense. Your mother was absolutely frantic with fear. And I was... well, I was scared too."

Finally Brian looked up at his father. "You never get scared."

"Not true." Sulu said. "I push it aside so that I can get my job done. But not knowing where you were or if you were all right had me scared to death."

"I'm sorry." Brian said. He fidgeted nervously on the couch.

"Is that suppose to make it all right?" Sulu asked. "Because I'm telling you right now,

that doesn't cut it."

"What will cut it?" Brian was having trouble sitting still.

"First, I need to know that you understand that you are not alone in this life." Sulu said. "You have a responsibility to your family, Mister. All this brooding about no one understanding you is self indulgent nonsense. It's time to grow up Brian."

"And do what?" Brian asked. Finally he couldn't sit any longer. He got up and paced around the room. "Go into Starfleet? Be a doctor? Serve the greater good? No thank you."

"Do you have any plans? Or are you expecting something to just fall into your lap?" Sulu asked trying not to get defensive.

Brian turned to look at his father. He reached into one of his many vest pockets and pulled out a folded piece of paper. He tossed it on the coffee table. He reached into another pocket and tossed another piece of paper on the table. By the time he stopped six carefully folded pages were in front of the Admiral. Sulu reached for the closest piece and slowly unfolded it. It was a drawing of an adolescent Orion girl.

"Who's this?" Sulu asked.

"Her name is Rengi." Brian explained "I met her in the Betelgeuse Astroid Belt."

Sulu unfolded the rest of the pages one by one. One was Jimmi and Mike behind the bar at the Fly By Night. Another was of Angel, the waitress. There was one of Dr. McCoy laughing. One was Brady asleep in his bunk. The last one was of Sulu. It was just his head and shoulders and he looked very stern.

"Brian." Sulu studied the drawings carefully. "These are good. How long have you been drawing seriously?"

"As long as I can remember." Brian shrugged. "My art teacher says I should draw everyone and everything. She wants me to practice capturing different expressions."

"Have you shown these to your mother?" Sulu asked even though he knew Brian hadn't. Jimmi would have told him. She would have been thrilled.

"No." Brian blushed. "She'd just..."

"She'd be proud of you." Sulu said.

"I doubt it. She doesn't have much use for art, Dad." Brian said. "Mom's really just interested in business."

"Don't sell your mother short." Sulu said. "You don't know her the way I do."

"I see her more than you do." Brian didn't understand.

"I know it's a hard concept for teenagers to grasp." Admiral Sulu smiled. "But parents are people too. And there are a lot of sides to them that their kids never see."

"If you say so." Brian shrugged.

"Well. This art is important to you? This is what you want to do with your life?" Sulu asked. Brian nodded and shrugged almost simultaneously. He was sure his father would never understand. "Good. I'm glad you have found some direction."

"You mean it?" Brian asked.

"Yes. But that does not excuse your recent behavior." Sulu added. "I can not just let it go. You have to learn some responsibility. You've had your fun, now it's time to pay the price."

"So, what's the price?"

"I don't know." Sulu said. "I'll have to discuss this with your mother. For now, you'll

stay in this cabin until we reach Starbase 18."

"Razz!" Brian complained. "When will that be?"

"When we get there." Sulu said. "Now I have to get back to the bridge."

Admiral Sulu left without another word. When he was gone Brian breathed a sigh of relief and laid down on the couch to think. He wasn't laying there long when someone buzzed the door. Brian got up and answered the door. It was a very pretty young woman he had never met before. Yeoman Lohmeyer explained that Admiral Sulu had ordered her to deliver a package to Brian. It was a sketch pad and a full set of artist's pencils.

Commander Chekov turned in the center seat to see the Admiral coming onto the bridge. It wasn't totally unexpected. Officially Sulu was off duty, but he tended to concentrate on business when his personal life became overwhelming. Chekov relinquished command.

"How'd it go with Brian?" Chekov asked.

The Admiral did not answer immediately. Finally he shrugged and said. "In balance, it went better than I expected."

"He didn't actually have an excuse, did he?" Chekov tried not to grin.

"It was an accident." Sulu laughed. "He claims he did not intend to stow away. By the way, what's in the Betelgeuse Asteroid Belt?"

"Nothing." Chekov shook his head. "Just asteroids as far as I know. Why?"

"Brian said met an Orion girl named Rengi there." Sulu said. "I obviously haven't gotten all the details yet."

"Sounds like an interesting story." Chekov grinned. "I would be interested to hear the rest."

"So would I." Sulu nodded. "Maybe he'll tell me about it. Has the Artful Dodger gone on her way?"

"Yes." Chekov said. "Captain Uhura has set course for Space Station New Freedom. She said she has questions for a Ms. Maryann Lucus and Mr. Kar Parthee."

"Who would they be?" Sulu asked.

"Apparently employees of Tau Regana." Chekov said. "Parthee is a Nausicaan with outstanding warrants for piracy, assault, and theft. Lucus is a human with outstanding warrants for smuggling and flight from prosecution."

"Interesting people Tau hires." Sulu smiled. "Uhura believes these two are on New Freedom?"

"According to her 'interrogation' of Brady, yes." Chekov nodded. "There is one detail regarding this matter with Brady that needs to be addressed, Admiral."

"What's on your mind, Chekov?"

"Commander Gonzoles." Chekov said. "I'd like to send her a coded message. First officer to first officer. She deserves to know the truth."

"Normally I'd say let Brady straighten it out with her." Sulu nodded. "But I doubt he'll be looking up the Pegasus any time soon. Go ahead and send the message."

"Yes sir." Chekov started towards the science station.

"Coded and secure."

"Coded and secure." Chekov repeated. "Aye."

At midnight the third shift came on duty. Admiral Sulu transferred command to Lt.

Commander Kim. He had become second officer when Commander Gonzoles transferred to the Starship Pegasus. Sulu stopped at the communications station after the shift change.

"Ensign Deni." Sulu said quietly. "When the call comes from my wife, send it through to my quarters regardless of time."

"Aye Sir." She nodded. Sulu and Chekov left the bridge together. Chekov suggested a game of racquet ball and something to eat but Sulu declined. He returned to his cabin. To his surprise Brian was still awake.

"I thought you'd be sleeping." Sulu said. Brian was sitting on the couch with the sketch pad propped on his knees.

Brian just shrugged. "Thanks for the sketch pad."

"Your welcome." The Admiral took an apple from the bowl of fruit he always kept on the coffee table. "Can I see what you are working on?"

"I can't seem to get his eyes right." Brian complained showing his father the drawing of Dolyn.

"How did you happen upon a Drax'l?" Sulu asked between bites.

"He was in the bazaar at New Freedom." Brian said turning the drawing back to look at it again. "Brady said I shouldn't trust him."

"Well, I can understand how Brady feels." Sulu said. After all Brady's life sometimes depended on his ability to deceive. "But what about you? What did you think of him?"

Brian looked up from his drawing at his father. His father had never asked his opinion of anything. "He looked inside me, Dad. And I felt something.... a connection."

"You realize that Drax'ls are empathic, right?"

"I know." Brian said. "But it was more than that. He was working on a biolumi painting. And he let me try it. And I... well... "

"What?" Sulu asked. Brian's freckles seemed to merge together when he blushed. And much to Brian's dismay he blushed whenever he talked about how he felt about his art.

"I trusted him." Brian shrugged

"Interesting." Sulu got up and started getting ready for bed. "I talked to your grandfather. He said your Mom would sleep through the night. I expect she'll call as soon as Doc tells her you are here."

"How long before we get there?" Brian asked.

"Tomorrow." Sulu said on his way to his bunk. "About fourteen hundred hours. Don't stay up too late."

"I won't Dad." Brian promised. "Goodnight."

"Admiral Sulu. Bridge to Admiral Sulu."

Sulu rolled over and reached out for the comline on his night stand. Barely above a whisper, he answered. "Sulu here."

"Admiral." Ensign Deni said. "I have Mrs. Sulu waiting on the captain's channel."

"Stand by, Ensign." Sulu said. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. After getting a drink of water and splashing some on his face, he went into the other room and shook Brian. "Brian! Get up! Mom's calling."

"Razz. What time is it?" Brian asked sleepily. But Sulu wasn't standing there. He was already sitting at his desk telling Ensign Deni to put the call through. According to Brian's chronometer, it was 05:07 hours. Brian had only gotten three hours of sleep. He stumbled to the bathroom.

"Hi Baby." Sulu smiled at his wife. "Have you had enough sleep?"

"I can't believe Dad didn't wake me up when you called." Jimmi complained. "Is Brian ok? You actually have him there on Excelsior? You are not just going to get him?"

"Yeah Baby. He is here. He is safe." Sulu smiled. "And you'll have him home by this afternoon."

"Thank God!" Jimmi didn't know whether to laugh, cry, or scream. "Well, can I talk to him?"

"Jeanie. It's five o'clock in the morning." Sulu laughed a bit. "I shook him out of bed. He'll be here in a minute."

"I'm sorry it's so early." Jimmi smiled. "I don't know what Dad had in that hypo, but I was out for over twelve hours."

"Doc wouldn't have given it to you if you didn't need it." Sulu said then turned the screen to face Brian who had taken the chair across the desk from his father. "Here's Brian now.""

"Hi Mom." Brian said sheepishly.

"Brian, Honey, are you ok?" Jimmi asked anxiously.

"Yeah, Mom. I'm fine." Brian said. Jimmi breathed a sigh of relief.

"Are you sure?"

"I'm not a baby anymore, Mom." Brian was getting really irritated with that question. "I can take care of myself."

"Then what were you thinking about?" Jimmi demanded, her tone changing dramatically.

"I was worried sick! You have a lot of explaining to do, Mister."

"Ummm." Brian rubbed his eyes. It was too early to actually think. "I don't know Mom. I messed up. I'm sorry."

"Sorry?" Jimmi fumed. "First I thought you were just careless. Then I thought you were hurt. Then I was sure you were dead. Damn it Brian! I thought I would never see you again. You damn well better be sorry!"

Brian looked over at his father helplessly. He had no idea what to say to his mother. "I didn't mean it, Mom. I didn't want to hurt you."

"Oh Brian! What am I going to do with you?" Jimmi closed her eyes and a tear ran down her cheek.

"Jeanie." Sulu turned the screen back to him. "That's something we need to talk about. Go on back to bed, Brian."

"Are you sure, Dad?" Brian asked.

"Brian, why do I always have to repeat myself with you? A raw recruit follows orders better than you do." The Admiral nodded towards Brian's bunk. This was definitely a no-win situation for Brian. He went back to bed without another word. "Ok, Jeanie. We're alone. How are you, really?"

"I feel better for having slept." Jimmi said. "But I am at a loss as to what to do, Harry. Has he given you any reasons for his actions?"

"We've talked some." Sulu said. "He says it was unintentional. But I'd rather he explain himself to you in person."

"I am just so frustrated with him." Jimmi shook her head. She was almost as angry with herself for not handling things better as she was with Brian. "I am at the end of my rope."

"I think he's beginning to realize the magnitude of what he's done." Sulu said. "I don't know, but maybe in the long run he'll have learned something from the experience."

"Am I hearing you right, Hikaru Sulu?" Jimmi asked. "Are you condoning his actions? As some kind of macho rite of passage nonsense?"

"Of course not." Sulu quickly answered. "I'm just saying he might come out of this with a better attitude. "

"We'll see what happens to his attitude when he finds out he's grounded until he gets out of high school!" Jimmi said. "If he lives that long."

"Well, he's been confined to quarters while he's here." Sulu said. "But grounding just doesn't seem like enough. And making the duration longer doesn't necessarily make the penalty any more effective."

"You are awfully calm about this, Harry."

"More so now than last night." Sulu agreed. "There are things we need to discuss that we just can't handle on subspace. I'll be there by fourteen hundred hours. We'll make a decision then."

"All right." Jimmi grumbled. "I can't kill him until I get my hands on him anyway."

"I'll see you soon." Sulu laughed. "Excelsior out."

The Admiral hadn't gotten enough sleep, but he was up now. And the couple of hours before a shift change were generally the least crowded times in the gym. Sulu decided on a work out before going on duty.

At 13:45 hours Admiral Sulu and Brian beamed down to Starbase 18. Brian was in no hurry to get to the Fly By Night and face his mother. But His father was not letting him dawdle. As they were passing through the playground that was in the middle of the station's park, someone called out Brian's name. He stopped and turned around.

"Debbie?" He asked. A Human teenage girl with long black hair and big brown eyes was coming towards them. She was wearing flowered leggings with a light green sleeveless tunic. "Is that you?"

"I know it's been a couple of years, Brian." She smiled up at him. Admiral Sulu had stopped a couple yards ahead of Brian. He turned to see his son smiling at a pretty young girl "But have I changed that much?"

Brian grinned. She had to be teasing, because she had changed a lot. "You've grown up."

"Brian!" his father called.

"I can't talk." Brian said. "I'm about to be grounded for the rest of my life."

"I'm going to be here for two weeks, then I go back to school." Debbie said. "If they let you out, let me know."

"Yeah. I will."

"Now Brian!"

"I got to go. See ya." Brian ran up to his father and they continued on his way. "Razz Dad! I haven't seen Debbie in two years. Did you want me to be rude?"

"Your social life is going to have to wait." Sulu said calmly. "Right now straightening things out with your mother is your top priority."

"I know."

In front of the bar, the Admiral stopped. He rested one hand on Brian's shoulder and looked the boy in the eye. "I know it embarrasses you, but today let your mother hug you as much as she wants."

"Is she going to hug me or hit me?" Brian asked.

"Has she ever hit you before?"

"I've never been in this much trouble before."

"True." Sulu smiled. "But whatever happens, remember an adult accepts the consequences of his actions."

"Yes sir." he nodded. Brian and Sulu walked into the Fly By Night together. The bar was open but empty except for one group of engineers having lunch. Brian saw his mother and grandfather sitting at the bar. Mom was dressed conservatively. Long sleeve striped t-shirt and navy blue slacks. That and the pony tail had Brian worried.

"Bri..." Jimmi got up and met them. She hugged him tightly, her eyes closed.

"Mom." Brian said finally. "I can't breath."

"Sorry." She stood back and looked at him. Not sure whether to laugh or cry, she seemed to be doing both. She looked beyond Brian to her husband. He wrapped his arms around her. Once he did that, she let go and cried. Jimmi whispered into his shoulder. "Thank you, Harry. Thank you for bringing him home."

"Let's take this someplace more private." Sulu suggested. Jimmi nodded. They walked arm in arm towards the office. Brian thought maybe they had forgotten him. But his grandfather came over and put his arm affectionately around Brian's shoulder.

"Come on, Bri." McCoy said. "Time to face the music."

They went into the bar's second office. It was the one Jimmi and Lenny each used when they came to the Fly By Night. They spent so little time here that neither had bothered to personalize the office in any way. It simply had a semi circle desk, a couple of extra chairs, a beige couch and a coffee table. There was a small wet bar against the far wall and a powder room in the corner. In the other corner was the stairs that led to Jimmi's apartment.

Jimmi immediately took the seat behind the desk, still wiping her eyes. Admiral Sulu was pouring her a glass of water from the wet bar when Brian and McCoy joined them. McCoy put Brian in the chair across from his mother then settled on the couch.

"Well Brian?" Jimmi asked finally.

"Well?" Brian asked.

"I want answers, Mister!" Jimmi said angrily. These long talks with Brian never were very successful. "Long on information and short on attitude. You got that?"

"What do you want me to say, Mom?" Brian shrugged.

"You can start with how did you happen to be on Matthew's ship?" Jimmi said.

"I saw him making a deal with a Barolian called Rumml." Brian said. "Brady sold him

something. Some information, but I don't know what. He wanted Rummel to get it across the Neutral Zone PDQ. I thought I could figure it out if I could access his computer. But he came back. I hid and he took off. Once he found me, the first thing he wanted to do was call you Mom."

"So why didn't he?" Jimmi asked.

"That's when Tezuka showed up." Brian said.

"Yoshio Tezuka?" Admiral Sulu asked turning Brian's chair towards him.

"I don't know." Brian said surprised by his father's sudden interest. "Brady just called him Tezuka and the Shadow. I don't know if that was suppose to be him or his ship. But he shot a torpedo at us."

"Who is this Tezuka?" Jimmi asked Sulu.

"He's a slippery character with quite a few outstanding warrants." Sulu said vaguely. He turned to Brian before Jimmi could ask any more. "Obviously his torpedo missed."

"Yeah. He was working for that Tau guy." Brian said. "He wanted Brady dead."

"What?" Jimmi asked. Jimmi stood up slowly and leaned on her desk. "This Tezuka person was specifically trying to kill Matthew? Did you know about this Admiral?"

"I knew that Tau was interested in why Brady was not jailed as Tau's nephew was in a recent incident involving Starfleet." the Admiral answered carefully.

"You knew my son's life was in danger and you still did not leave your position to look for him?" Jimmi demanded icily. "And you didn't even tell me his life was in danger?"

"We can go into that later." Sulu said pointedly. She stared at him angrily, ready to cut down any possible excuse he tried. "Privately."

"Go on, Brian." Jimmi held her anger in check. She sat back down, ignoring her husband's watchful eye. "What happened next?"

"That's when we went to the Haven." Brian said. "In the Betelgeuse Asteroid Belt."

"What's that?" Jimmi asked. "I've never heard of it."

"I thought Brady was crazy." Brian said. "But we flew into the asteroid belt and I saw this huge derelict barge. I've never seen a ship that big. At first there were only indeterminate life and energy readings. Then they dropped their shields and the board lit up."

"Where did you learn to read that kind of equipment?" Dr. McCoy asked with a grin.

"Around." Brian shrugged. "I talk to the engineers and maintenance techs."

"This barge is where you met the Orion girl?" Sulu asked. Brian nodded.

"The what?" Jimmi asked

"Show your mother." Sulu ordered. Brian took the drawing of Rengi out of his vest pocket, unfolded it, and put it on the desk in front of his mother. He held his breath as Jimmi took the drawing and studied it. She looked first at Sulu then at Brian.

"You drew this?" Jimmi asked. Brian nodded. McCoy came over to the desk to see. She dared to look over at her husband. "This is what you meant this morning, Harry?" Sulu nodded. Jimmi turned back to Brian "Who is she?"

"Her name is Rengi." Brian smiled for the first time since he sat down to this interrogation. "She's a friend."

"Why did you keep your drawing a secret?" Jimmi asked.

"I..." Brian decided against the truth. He hadn't meant to cause a rift between his

parents. If this was the consequence of his actions, he was truly sorry. He avoided his mother's eyes. "I don't know."

"You don't know?" Jimmi repeated, shaking her head. "How many times have I heard that answer from you? You don't know. Go to your room, Brian."

"But Mom..." Brian said with confusion.

"Now!" Jimmi ordered. "I need to think about this."

Brian looked to his father for help. The Admiral nodded towards the steps. Brian got up and ran from the room. His heavy footsteps on the metal steps rang in the silent room. Jimmi closed her eyes, not wanting to look at either her husband or her father.

"Well, you handled that beautifully." Sulu said sarcastically.

"What did you want me to do?" Jimmi demanded. She got up and paced around the room. "Should I have said, it's ok Brian...you were almost killed but I'm not upset about it? Or maybe you want me to say, I hope you learned something from living through it all? Tell me Harry! How am I suppose to handle it?"

"I am not suggesting you should not be upset with what happened." Sulu returned angrily. "But don't punish Brian because you are angry at me!"

"I am angry at you. Damn angry!" Jimmi yelled stopping her pacing in front of him. "And I am angry at him too. I don't like sitting by helplessly. Especially when you keep important information from me! And when I ask for an explanation I get 'I don't know' from him again!"

"You shut that conversation down, not Brian." Sulu said. "He wanted to talk to you. He was trying. It's not something that's easy for him to talk about."

"Suddenly you are the expert? Where have you been his whole life?"

"Time out!" McCoy said. They both stopped and looked at him. They had forgotten he was there. Sulu took a deep breath and stepped back from his wife.

"I'll be on Excelsior." Sulu said to McCoy and left quickly.

"Well..." McCoy said.

"Leave it alone, Dad." Jimmi said. She wiped a tear off her cheek refusing to give in to her feelings again. "I have to go talk to Brian."

"That will wait." McCoy blocked her way to the steps. "What would you say to him anyway?"

"We need to talk about what happens now. His punishment." Jimmi explained. "He can't think that he can just come home and everything will be all right."

"Everything is not all right." McCoy placed his hands on his daughter's shoulders so that she couldn't turn away. "I'm sure that is as clear to Brian as it is to me."

"I don't know what you want me to say Dad." Jimmi said wearily.

"Tell me what you are feeling." McCoy ordered gently.

"Everything! I could kill him. I want to hold him and never let him go." Jimmi sighed. "I can't even begin to tell you everything I am feeling. Damn it, Dad! All I want to know is why? Why did Brian run away? Why won't Hikaru trust me? Why me?"

"No wonder you don't know what you are saying." McCoy smiled at her. "Come sit down. You can't talk to Brian until you have worked some of this out."

"Oh, Dad." Jimmi sighed. They sat together on the couch. "Why am I such a mess?"

"You've just been through a parent's worse nightmare." McCoy said. "You have a right to be a mess. Right now, take a few minutes to relax."

"Relax? Dad how can I relax when I want to kill him?" Jimmi asked. "Brian ran off without thinking. Thank god it was Matthew's ship he stowed away on. If it had been that Rumml character, he'd been dead now."

"He let what he wanted cloud his better judgement." McCoy said simply. "Seems to me he takes after you in that respect."

"What?"

"I remember being called into your principal's office when I was picking you up for Christmas break. That was your senior year of high school, right?"

"It's hardly the same thing, Dad." Jimmi said.

"You broke your school's curfew twenty two times in twelve weeks." McCoy reminded her. "Because you were working in a bar. Your entire band was under age."

"What's your point, Dad?"

"The point is you saw what you wanted and didn't think about the consequences. He did the same thing. He just did it on a grander scale." McCoy said. "And when I wanted to kill you, Jim Kirk sat back and smugly told me to relax."

"I don't recall you relaxing very much." Jimmi laughed.

"That was a hard lesson for me to learn." McCoy agreed. "Now you are going to have to learn it too."

"I don't want to learn a lesson." Jimmi dismissed his advice. "I want Brian to learn a few lessons! Responsibility! Concern for other people's feelings! Common courtesy!"

"I know. But Hikaru has a point. Brian was trying to talk to you." McCoy said. "Your youngest is hard headed. Much more so than either Harry or Demora."

"You mean he's more like me."

"As you were like me." McCoy nodded. "And we butted heads for years. We got to the point where you stopped telling me anything. Remember."

"I remember Dad. And that was a mistake." Jimmi said. "How do I keep him from making the same mistake?"

"I'm afraid you can't make Brian do anything, Dear." McCoy said. "You are going to have to let him make some of his own mistakes. You need to let go a little bit."

"If you are suggesting I stop holding him to the house rules, you're crazy!" Jimmi said. "He's just proven to me that he still needs them."

"That's not what I am suggesting at all." McCoy said. "Of course he needs to follow rules. The basics... going to school, coming home on time, telling you where he is and what he's doing. But just like you can't choose his friends, you can't choose how he lives his life."

"You're losing me Dad."

"If he feels passionately about his art and you don't support that, you will lose him." McCoy warned.

"I don't remember you giving in... "

"Then you have a very short memory." McCoy laughed. "If I had followed my instincts the first time I saw you at the Jade Palace in San Francisco, you'd still be living in a convent."

Jimmi laughed too. "I better go talk to Brian."

"I thought you and Hikaru were going to make this decision together." McCoy said softly. "Present a united front."

"That was the idea." Jimmi nodded. "I know what you are going to say, Dad. I was a little upset with Harry before. And maybe I owe him an apology."

"Maybe?"

"Ok, Dad. I owe him an apology." Jimmi admitted. "But do you think the Admiral will let me on his precious ship?"

"I'm sure of it." McCoy said. Jimmi nodded and left the office. McCoy walked over to the bottom of the steps and said. "Hasn't anyone ever told you it is impolite to eavesdrop, Brian?"

"Yes sir." Brian said from the top of the steps. "But I was looking on it as a reconnaissance mission. I was missing vital information."

"I see." McCoy said. "Well, you might as well come down. I'd like to see some more of these drawings of yours."

As Brian came down the steps, he asked his grandfather. "Are Mom and Dad going to be ok?"

"Of course they are." McCoy answered with utter certainty.

"I don't know, Pop." Brian said. "They never fight. Not like that."

"Nonsense. Your parents have always fought. But they always work it out." McCoy smiled at his grandson. When Brian did not seem convinced, McCoy added. "When they were first married Chekov used to run a pool every July. To win the pot you had to guess how long it take before one of your parents blew up at the other."

"You're kidding."

"Ask Commander Chekov." McCoy said. "But not when your mother is around."

Jimmi went to the transporter room and asked Chief Greenberg to request permission for her to beam aboard. It was granted. But when Jimmi materialized in the Excelsior's transporter room it was Commander Chekov who was waiting for her. He smiled at her.

"Hello Princess." Chekov hugged her. "It must have been some fight."

"Why?" Jimmi asked suspiciously.

"Because when Hikaru returned to the ship he went directly to the gym." Chekov said. "He did not even check in with the bridge."

"I need to straighten things out with him, Pavel." Jimmi said. "Does he know I am on board?"

"I have not told him." Chekov said as they walked through the halls of Excelsior together. "If he checks with the bridge he will be told of course."

Pavel escorted her to the gym door and left her there. The gym was mostly empty. A couple of people were on the jogging track. The day shift wouldn't go off for another hour or so. Then it would get crowded. He wasn't in the racquet ball courts or the locker room. Jimmi peaked into the weight room. The Admiral was in the back punching on a large cylindrical bag. He was wearing only his gym shorts and shoes and the practice boxing gloves. He had managed to work up quite a sweat. It amazed Jimmi that after thirty some years, the sight of him like this

still made her heart beat faster.

"Admiral?" She said tentatively. "New hobby?"

Sulu stopped punching. He took off the gloves and laid them on a nearby bench. He picked up the towel that was laying there and wiped his face. "Nothing new about it."

"This reminds me of when I used to wait for you outside the gym when you were a lieutenant." Jimmi smiled.

"Does it?" He slung the towel over his shoulder.

"Of course then I was just doing whatever I could to be near you." She said. "Today I just came to say I'm sorry."

"Indeed?" He really looked at her for the first time.

"Yes, I was angry and hurt." Jimmi said softly. "And I wanted to hurt you. I was wrong and I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too." Sulu said. He stepped closer to her and took her hands in his. "I'm sorry I can't always tell you everything that is going on. Please believe me when I tell you I did everything in my power where Brian was concerned."

"I know." Jimmi nodded. "I trust you Harry, I really do. So what do you think we do about Brian?"

"I'm not sure." Sulu said. "Let me get dressed and I'll meet you back at the cabin. We can go over our options."

"Don't get dressed on my account." She smiled at him.

"Mrs. Sulu! I am shocked." He laughed at her. She just shrugged and smiled. "Now this reminds me of when you used to accidentally run into me outside the gym when you were visiting Enterprise."

Two ensigns came into weight room. Seeing the Admiral and Ms. Sulu, they went to the other side of the room and picked up the small weights. Jimmi glanced over her shoulder then back at her husband.

"I'll see you at home in a couple of minutes?" She smiled. He nodded.

Sulu was in full uniform when he walked into his cabin. Jimmi was stretched out on the couch. She had kicked her shoes off. Her eyes were closed.

"Are you sleeping?" Sulu asked softly.

Jimmi opened her eyes and smiled at him. "No. Just day dreaming."

"May I?" He asked. She sat up to make room for him. When he had settled on the couch, Jimmi leaned against him. "Now this is something we haven't done in ages. So, what were you day dreaming about?"

"A house." Jimmi sighed. "Two stories with elegant balconies overlooking the lawn."

"Green rolling hills. Stone fences." Sulu smiled. He had heard this dream before. "But no horses."

"No horses."

"If it was me, I'd have horses." Sulu said.

"If it was you, the house would be on the beach." Jimmi snuggled against him

"Better than that." He laughed. "It would be on the beach on an island in the south Pacific. With horses."

"No matter where we live, Harry, we're still worlds apart." Jimmi said sadly.

"So what do you want to do about it?" Sulu asked. "Get a divorce?"

"Hey!" she sat up and looked at him. "These are suppose to be good day dreams."

"Let's get back to reality."

"Brian."

"Brian." Sulu repeated. "You want to ground him."

"That goes without saying." Jimmi said. "And this is not a one weekend deal. I say he's home until Christmas!"

"You are hard, Baby!" Sulu said. "I think a month is plenty of time. His attention span is not that long."

"This time I'm too hard on him. Last time you thought I was too easy." Jimmi said. "Please make up your mind."

"I want to talk to him again. Man to man." Sulu said.

"Which will accomplish what?"

"I don't know." Sulu said. "But when I was his age, I told my father many things I would never even consider telling my mother."

"Hmmm. I wonder how much your father told your mother."

"I don't know." Sulu said. "But I will keep you informed. Ok?"

"Ok." She agreed. She started undoing his jacket. "Now that's that settled... "

"Don't you think we should go talk to Brian?" Sulu smiled.

"Let him wait." Jimmi grinned. She stopped and asked. "Unless you have to go?"

"No, Excelsior will be here overnight."

"And it's almost change of shift! You've authorized liberty, right?" Sulu nodded. Jimmi sat up and reached for her shoes. "I've got to get back to the bar. Mike's going to need the help."

"Ok." Sulu laughed at her. "Let me check in with the bridge and we'll go down together. And grab Brian's sketch pad."

While the Admiral checked in with the bridge, Jimmi flipped through the couple of pages Brian had used so far in the sketch pad. She had to admit the sketches were good. And she remembered what it was like to be afraid to let others see something so personal. Even after she had gotten over her fear of singing for an audience, for years there were songs she would not do if her father was in the room.