

"Diplomats." McCoy shrugged as he and Kirk stepped off the turbo lift onto the bridge of the Enterprise. They immediately turned towards Spock at the science station. Spock looked up at the two expectantly. McCoy summed up their conversation on the way to the bridge in one short sentence before Kirk could say a thing. "He can't tell us."

"Not totally unexpected." Spock said.

"Admiral." Uhura said slowly as she adjusted the controls of her communications board. Kirk walked around the upper circle of the Enterprise bridge to the communications station. "I am picking up a compressed communication signal directed to the System G-582."

"Can you intercept?" Kirk asked.

"Not sitting here." Uhura looked up at Kirk. "It was sent to specific coordinates on a compressed beam. We'd have to be in a direct line to intercept and decompress."

"A receiver in that system?" Kirk asked.

"Mr. Brady?" Spock asked.

"Or another mine." Kirk suggested. "Or the builders of that mine."

"Admiral." Sulu demanded Kirk's attention. "The Romulan Battle Cruiser is leaving orbit. They aren't wasting any time about it."

"Hail the battle cruiser." Kirk ordered as he walked down to the command chair. Spock returned to the science station and started scanning.

"Aye." Uhura switched her controls to hail the Romulans. "They are ignoring the hail, Sir."

"She is activating the cloak." Spock said. The Romulan Battle Cruiser faded into the blackness of space.

"Her heading, Spock?"

"Unknown." Spock straightened and looked at Kirk.

"Uhura, get me Admiral Coster."

"Aye Sir."

Nick Coster appeared on the Enterprise screen almost immediately. "Jim. They cloaked before we could get a fix on their heading. Did you get anything?"

"No." Kirk said. "I was going to ask you the same thing."

"They left without the Ambassador or his staff." Coster said. "So they will be back."

"What about the prisoners?" Kirk asked.

"They were returned to the Romulans this morning." Coster said. "All of them immediately transported to the battle cruiser."

"Moments ago we detected a compressed communications signal to the system that was mined by the pirates." Kirk said. "I'm going to go see who is there to receive it."

"Jim." Coster said. "You understand the restrictions?"

"I understand, Nick." Kirk said. "I'll keep you advised. Kirk out."

"Restrictions?" McCoy asked.

"Mr. Chekov, set course back to G-582." Kirk sat down in the command chair. "Warp nine at the earliest safe distance, Mr. Sulu."

"Course laid in." Chekov said.

"Leaving orbit." Sulu reported.

"Restrictions?" McCoy asked more quietly this time.

Kirk looked McCoy in the eye. "Later."

The trip back to System G-582 would take another thirty hours at warp nine. At the end of the shift Kirk, Spock, and McCoy retired to the Admiral's cabin. McCoy instantly made himself at home in the chair facing Kirk's across the desk.

"The Romulans are not to hear anything about the Tegra from us." Kirk said as he sat down.

"That's the restriction?" McCoy asked.

"That's it." Kirk said.

"And you can't tell us any more." Spock observed.

"If the Ambassador had his way, I wouldn't be telling you this much." Kirk said. "It is strictly on a need to know basis. Top secret. Now, do you have anything more on the transmission?"

"Commander Uhura has narrowed the area that could possibly hold the receiver." Spock said. "The northern hemisphere of the third planet."

"That desolate little planet sees a lot of action." McCoy said.

"We, of course, did not detect it before." Kirk noted.

"It is logical to assume that if a receiver is still in use by the pirates or the Tegra an invisibility screen would be active to protect it." Spock said.

"Yes." Kirk agreed. "How are we going to find it before the Romulans do?"

"We did a detailed scan of the surface prior to reading Mr. Bartell's shelter." Spock said. "If we compare the readings of that area while the invisibility screen was active with the readings when it was not, we may find a way of detecting the screen."

"That's a start." Kirk nodded.

Dr. McCoy returned to his cabin after eating and decided to get some sleep before the Enterprise reached System G-582. He laid down on his bunk in his Starfleet issue pajamas. "Computer. Any correspondence in my file? McCoy, Commander, Leonard."

"Two letters are in the file."

"Play them in the order they came in." McCoy said.

"Hi Pop." McCoy's nine year old granddaughter smiled at him. "Guess what? Mom and Dad are letting me take horseback riding lessons. Because I got good grades. Ms. Lui said I have the best handwriting in my whole class."

Five year old Amanda pushed her face into the picture. "Know what?"

"Hey this is my letter!" Ashley yelled at her little sister.

"Mommy!" Amanda yelled at the top of her lungs.

"Stop it." Joanna said to her children. "Sorry Dad. You girls take turns. And let me know when you are done so I can talk to Dad."

McCoy laughed as the two little girls told him more than he ever wanted to know about their life in Atlanta. When they were done and McCoy's older daughter, Joanna, had finished, the computer brought up his other letter.

"Hi Dad." Jimmi smiled. "I tried calling you today but Starfleet in its infinite wisdom wouldn't let me through. Are you in some politically sensitive area again? Something you are not allowed to tell me about, no doubt."

"I spent my afternoon packing. You know when I first came to Earth for college, I really did not feel at home here. I was so mad at you for insisting. But now it feels so strange to be leaving my homeworld.

"You know I hate it when you are right. And you have a habit of being right too damn often. James T. says I never tell you when I think you are right, only when I think you're wrong. He may have a point but don't tell him I said that.

"So just to prove him wrong, Dad. Thanks for talking me into going for the Phd and for taking the teaching job at U.S.F. I have really enjoyed all the research I've done into the twentieth century and I've enjoyed teaching. I may go back to it someday.

"I can't wait to see you in July. I love you."

Commander Sulu spent his evening with the mundane duties of a department head. At the computer console in his cabin he read and made reports, assigned duty schedules, and handled miscellaneous problems. When he was finished, Sulu sat back, rubbed his eyes, and said.

"Computer, please tell me I have a letter from home."

"State correspondence file name." The computer said.

"I've been talking to you for the last two hours, computer. I would think you'd know me by now." Sulu sighed. "Correspondence file Sulu, Commander, Hikaru."

"There is one letter in the file."

"Play it." Sulu ordered. He smiled when her face appeared.

"Hi Harry. What's going on with Enterprise?" Jimmi asked. "James T. called me in real time this morning but when I tried to call Dad earlier and you just now, I can't get through. James T. called to yell at me because you told him about the Café before I had a chance to tell him. Thanks a lot, Hikaru Sulu! He had a whole lecture on how I don't think of my father's feelings, etc, etc, etc. You haven't said anything to Spock yet? Have you? Should I expect his call any time now? A little warning would be appreciated."

"I'll be going to the base in mid June to see to all the details of opening the Café. I'll let you know the exact date as soon as I'm sure." Jimmi stopped talking and smiled at him. "I miss you, Harry. The bed feels so empty since you left. I can't wait until you are with me again. Call me in real time. I miss talking to you. I love you. Be careful."

After her smile faded from his screen, Sulu set his computer to record a letter to Jimmi. "Hi Jeanie. I just got your letter. Sorry about the Admiral. If you didn't want him to ask, you should not have dropped hints in your letter to him. But he asked, so I told him. And no, I haven't mentioned it to Mr. Spock. But I can't guarantee that no one else has. I miss you too, Baby. But I've had a really long day. I'll call you tomorrow when I get off duty. I love you. And I am always careful."

Sulu sent the letter to Earth and went to bed.