

Commander Hikaru Sulu walked through the halls of Enterprise on his way to the weekly poker game. But he was preoccupied with the letter he had just received from Ensign Gonzoles. He detoured to the gym. It was not crowded at this time of day which made it a convenient time for Admiral Kirk to work out. Sulu found the Admiral alone in the weight room.

"Sulu." Kirk looked up at from his work out. His normally easy going helm officer wore a serious expression. "Problem?"

"I'm not sure, Admiral." Sulu leaned in the doorway and watched the Admiral do alternate curls with heavy hand weights. "I just got a letter from Gonzoles. She sounds very discouraged lately."

"Discouraged?" Kirk asked. He finished his repetitions and put the weights in their proper places. Sulu picked up Kirk's towel and handed it to him.

"Over the last couple of months her letters have become less frequent and more negative." Sulu explained. His relationship with Gonzoles was his first attempt at taking on the mentoring role and he did not want to let the promising young officer down.

"Any idea why?" Kirk asked.

"For one thing, she's bored." Sulu said. He understood how she felt. The longer they knew each other the more Sulu realized they were very much alike. And he would be very bored and frustrated in her position. Stuck at a minor Starbase, flying stellar mapping missions. "She's been flying the same mission for the last four years. And she's beginning to despair of ever making lieutenant."

"Four years is not an abnormally long time." Kirk said although both he and Sulu had made the grade considerably quicker. "What about a transfer?"

"She is putting in for one." Sulu was feeling a little frustrated himself. Ensign Gonzoles was the first young officer to look to him for advise as he looked to Kirk. But it was hard to offer advise and support via subspace. "Although this time of year...."

"Her timing isn't great." Kirk nodded. "But her record is good. And she's gotten some good experience under her belt."

"All Gonzoles needs is the opportunity." Sulu said. She had proven that to him on more than one occasion. "I just hate to see her attitude taking a bad turn, Admiral. Unfortunately I don't see what I can do about it."

"Well." Kirk smiled. Sulu would never ask, but Kirk agreed with Sulu's assessment of the ensign. She deserved a break. "Perhaps a word or two in the right places...."

"I know she would appreciate it, Admiral." Sulu smiled.

"Isn't this your poker night, Sulu?" Kirk asked.

"Yes Sir." Sulu nodded and checked his chronometer. "And I'm late."

Ensign Rosita Gonzoles sat in the pilot seat of the U.S.S. Congo. The runabout was traveling at warp four. They had left Starbase Sixty Eight a little over six hours earlier. She had been flying these mapping missions for almost four years now. They

were always routine. The astro-cartographers, Dr. Alan Young and Dr. Ruth Levy, were in the aft compartment. It would be another hour before they reached the next mapping coordinates. The detailed mapping of this sector would take several more years but Rosita Gonzoles had no desire to hang around for it.

Sensors reported contact with a Della Mir scout ship. Gonzoles considered hailing them just for someone new to talk to, but all they would do is try to sell her something. It seemed to be the only thing that all the species of the Della Mir Community considered important. She let the ship pass. Adjusting course, Gonzoles swung around the Kalan system and continue on her route. The ship yards at Kali Guari, the fourth planet in the system, managed to generate a lot of traffic. Gonzoles avoided their space whenever possible.

Less than half an hour after the Congo had cleared the Kalan system, sensors made contact with a large ship. The computer identified it as a Miranda class starship. It was the Saratoga and they were hailing her.

"This is the U.S.S. Congo out of Starbase 68." Gonzoles replied to their hail. "Ensign Gonzoles piloting."

A slender human man with light receding hair appeared on her screen. Gonzoles judged him to be in his fifties. "This is Captain William Warren of the Saratoga. You're a little far from home, aren't you Ensign?"

"Our mission is detailed stellar cartography, Captain." Gonzoles answered. "We are surveying systems R-832 and R-834 on this flight, Sir."

"At that rate you could spend your whole career out here." Captain Warren said good-naturedly. The look on the pretty Latino ensign's face made him want to laugh, but the Captain stuck to business. "Ensign Gonzoles, have you had any unusual sensor contact within the last hour or so?"

"Just a typical Della Mir scout ship." Gonzoles answered. "That was on the other side of the Kalan system, Captain."

"About half an hour ago, we had brief contact with a Klingon Bird-of-Prey. B'rel class." Warren informed her. "She cloaked as soon as we made sensor contact."

"Talk about far from home." Gonzoles said with surprise. "Captain, wouldn't it be a violation of the treaty if the Klingons are dealing secretly with the Della Mir?"

"We don't know that yet, Ensign." Warren said. "Just keep a sharp eye out and report any unusual sensor contact. We will be in the area."

"Aye Captain." Gonzoles answered. "Congo out."

The conversation with the captain of the Saratoga had caught the attention of the two scientist in the back of the ship. They had come forward when they heard Gonzoles talking. They both outranked Gonzoles but she was the command officer on board.

"Now what?" Dr. Levy asked.

"We continue our mission." Gonzoles answered as she switched long range sensor to maximum and short range sensors to alert status. "The Klingon ship is cloaked and will probably remain so."

"We are no match for a Bird-of-Prey." Dr. Young observed. He took the copilots seat to help monitor the sensor and deflector systems. "Not even the B'rel class."

"That's true." Gonzoles conceded. The runabout carried one bank of phasers as defense weapons and their shields were state of the art. But they were not up to a stand up fight with the Klingon scout ship. "They carry both disrupters and torpedoes. But the Saratoga is in the area. Chances are the Klingons will ignore us."

"Chances are, Rosita?" Dr. Levy asked.

"That's the best I can give you Ruth." Gonzoles shrugged. "And if I'm wrong, turning back won't save us."

"You are so comforting." Ruth Levy sighed. She manned the first science station behind the pilot. Three sets of eyes were more efficient than one. The last hour of their trip passed without incident. But they were all tense from the flight. They surveyed the systems in record time. Mapping and classifying each planet and noting any anomalies. Only one planet had any notable civilization and it was in the preindustrial age.

Admiral Kirk hadn't been in his quarters for ten minutes when Uhura called him from the bridge. He had relieved himself of his boots and uniform jacket to lay on his bunk. He winced as he reached for the control on the night stand. The hand ball game with Lt. Rizzo had pulled a muscle or two.

"Kirk here."

"Admiral." Uhura answered. "I have Captain Warren on the Captain's channel. He wants to speak to you privately, Sir."

"Thank you, Commander. Put it through." Kirk said. He dragged himself out of bed and over to his desk. Momentarily Captain Warren appeared on his screen. Kirk hadn't seen him in a while but the Captain of the U.S.S. Saratoga never changed with the exception of the ever receding hair line. "Bill, how are you?"

"Not bad, Jim." He smiled. Kirk shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Looks like I'm doing better than you. Getting old, Admiral?"

"I just got through on the handball court with an overly enthusiastic lieutenant." Kirk shrugged. Then he added with a smile, "But I managed to show him a move or two."

"And you didn't want to put up with one of McCoy's lectures on acting your age, right?" Captain Warren laughed.

Kirk just grinned. There was no point in answering that accusation. "So, what's up?"

"I just made a stop at Starbase 68. Routine patrol." Warren was now all business. "We swung by the ship yards at Kali Guari just to have a look. A Klingon Bird-of-Prey was just leaving the yards."

"Did you get an ID on her?" Kirk asked. The noninterference treaty with the Della Mir specified that they were required to keep the Federation informed of any technology sales to the Klingons or Romulans. The Della Mir government thought this was a great idea. They assumed that whatever the other two bought the Federation would also want.

"No. She cloaked as soon as she saw us." Warren answered. "Her heading when she cloaked was straight for home, but who knows."

"So that points her right at us." Kirk nodded. "What did they have to say at the ship yards?"

"The Kalans claimed the Klingons stopped for emergency repairs to their attitude stabilizers." Captain Warren said. "Also claimed it was the first time they ever had a Klingon ship in their yards."

"Right." Kirk said sarcastically. "Thanks Bill. I'll keep my eyes open."

By the time the U.S.S. Congo had returned from the mapping mission to Starbase 68, the crew was exhausted. Rosita Gonzoles grabbed a quick sandwich and returned to her quarters. Her bunk mate Ensign Rachel Garrett was on duty in the operations center. Rosita was grateful for the time alone. Ensign Garrett had just recently been assigned to Starbase 68 and they did not know each other well yet. Rosita took advantage of the time to send Commander Sulu a letter.

"Hello Mr. Sulu. Things are still very routine around here." Rosita tried to smile, but she wasn't happy. She slowly unbraided her hair as she spoke, running her fingers through her long black hair. "Something almost exciting almost happened today. Captain Warren of the Saratoga warned us of a Bird-of-Prey he had seen near the Kali Gauri ship yards. But nothing came of it.

"I received your last letter and I am trying to be patient. I have an appointment with Commander Von Maltz tomorrow. I am going to speak to him about that transfer we talked about. I'm never going to make lieutenant sitting here. I feel like the whole galaxy is going by me while I am stuck in this little outpost that nobody cares about.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Sulu. I shouldn't be dumping this on you. I'm just tired and out of sorts today. My next letter will be more upbeat. I promise."

Rosita Gonzoles turned off the computer screen and went to bed. But she had trouble falling asleep. She really needed a change of pace. The next day Ensign Gonzoles reported to Commander Von Maltz's office at the appointed time.

Commander Heinrich Von Maltz was not the kind of man who socialized with officers in his command. However Gonzoles had been at the base since it opened four years ago. He probably knew her better than any of the junior officers.

"Come in, Ensign. Sit down." Von Maltz said from his desk. She came in and sat at the chair opposite him and waited while he finished with his computer. To Gonzoles the starbase commander had always appeared a little top heavy. She thought his broad shoulder and barrel chest belonged on a much taller man. After a minute, he glanced up at her and asked, "What did you want to see me about?"

"A transfer, Sir." Gonzoles said.

Von Maltz turned off his computer screen and sat back in his chair to look at her intently with pale blue eyes. "Is there a problem I should know about, Gonzoles? Something personal?"

"No Sir." She said. There was no need to tell her commander about the relationships failures of the past four years. That wasn't the point anyway. "I just need a change of pace. I always wanted to get on a starship. I feel I'm ready to move on to a new challenge."

"This is the wrong time of year to get on a Starship." Von Maltz said. "The cadets are graduating from the Academy. Those assignments have already been decided. I doubt there is anything available."

"I hadn't thought of that." Gonzoles said slowly.

"But for a change of pace." Von Maltz said to the obviously disappointed ensign. "Commander Bertolini of Starbase 12 needs pilots to fly the extra transports necessary to take the new Ensigns out to that base. Would you be interested?"

Gonzoles thought about it for a minute. The missions wouldn't be any more exciting, but she might get a chance to see her family on Earth and there would be different shops on Starbase 12. And Commander Sulu had advised her to take every assignment that came along. He believed that all experiences were valid and valuable. "Yes Sir. I am interested."

"Good." Commander Von Maltz turned his computer screen back on. "I'll advise you when I have the details. Dismissed."

With the recent upgrade of Starfleet communication equipment, it was possible for Dr. McCoy to talk to his daughters in real time once a week. As long as Enterprise was not on the other side of the quadrant. He alternated his allotted time between Joanna and Jimmi. So when he sat down at his desk and signaled the bridge to make the connection in early July, he hadn't spoken to Jimmi since she had left Earth.

McCoy had serious reservations about the café she had just opened on Starbase Twelve, but Jimmi McCoy was just as stubborn as her father. They had spent the last four years arguing on and off about her life choices. Slowly, he had accepted her decisions. They saw too little of each other to fight for long.

He couldn't help but smile at the young woman with the shoulder length auburn curls and big brown eyes that reminded him so much of the mother who died long before her time. When the connection was made, Jimmi was swaying to up beat music. Seeing her father, she switched off the music.

"Hi Dad." Jimmi smiled. "How are you?"

"Just fine, Dear." McCoy sighed. "Well, I guess you might as well tell me all about it."

"We opened yesterday." Jimmi's eyes sparkled as she talked about her new business venture. "Quite a few of the station personnel came to the grand opening. George's antipasto was a big hit. Of course we served that free for the opening. We had a lot of fun."

"I'm glad, Jimmi."

"Are you Dad?" Jimmi asked. "Really?"

"Of course, I am." McCoy assured her. "You know I want you to be happy, Dear. And Jim keeps telling me I can't make your choices for you."

"I'll have to thank James T. for that." Jimmi smiled. "Lenny was so pleased with the opening, that he is talking about a plan to open a café on every Starbase. He says we'll make a fortune."

"Why do you need a fortune?" McCoy asked.

"Relax Dad." Jimmi laughed. "It's just one of Lenny's big ideas. He'll be here helping me until all the ensigns ship out. Then he'll go back to Earth and some new idea will capture his imagination."

"I don't think I understand this partnership of yours."

"It's easy Dad." Jimmi explained. "Lenny is a whiz with money. I wouldn't be here without him. And he likes the planning and the set up. But he gets bored with the day to day stuff. He's always looking on to the next project."

"I guess you don't get bored with the day to day stuff?"

"I love the day to day stuff, Dad." Jimmi smiled. "That's why Lenny and I are good partners. Anyway, business aside. I talked to Joanna this morning. Have you heard from her?"

"Yes." McCoy smiled. "I spoke to her last week. She's just getting around to telling you the good news now?"

"Well, she left me a couple of messages to call her." Jimmi said. "But I've been so busy. And if I had known she was going to tell me she was pregnant again, I would have called back sooner."

"That will teach you to put your sister off."

"I guess." Jimmi laughed. "She seems very happy. Bob is positively glowing. I asked him if he wanted a boy this time."

"What did he say?"

"He said a boy would be ok, but he'd be thrilled to have another beautiful little girl." Jimmi stopped laughing and looked at her father more seriously. "Did you ever want a son, Dad?"

"Now what would I have done with a son?" McCoy asked. The signal light on his console told him he was quickly running out of subspace time.

"I don't know, Dad." Jimmi shrugged. "But I hear Hikaru talk about his father and how close they were..."

"No Dear." McCoy smiled. "I don't feel I've missed anything by not having a son. We're out of time. I'll see you at the end of the week."

"I love you, Dad." Jimmi said.

"I love you too, Dear."

Commander Sulu walked into his cabin and immediately took off his uniform jacket. While he was taking off his boots, he asked the computer to check his mail. He had one letter waiting. When he directed the computer to play it, Jimmi's smiling face

appeared on his screen. Sulu laid back on his bunk to listen to her.

"Hi. I know I was going to send you a letter right away, as soon as I got here, but I've been so busy." Jimmi spoke quickly as if she couldn't get everything she had to say to him out fast enough. Her letters were always fast and furious. "Between the construction and the Starfleet regulations, it's been crazy. So I'm all settled in to my new apartment. Pirate has sniffed every millimeter of living space and he seems happy. But right now the cat and I have another roommate.

"You are not going to believe what happened. Your nephew, Mikey, is here with me. He accidently stowed away on a transport. Don't ask me! I don't know how you accidently stow away. But he told the security guard that I was his aunt. Does that mean in his eyes you and I are married? Are you telling your family something you aren't telling me? Anyway they left Mikey with me.

"I called your sister and brother-in-law. They are ready to kill him. Mike Sr. is coming to get him. He doesn't trust Mikey to come home alone. But he can't come immediately because of some business deal. So Mikey is staying with me and working as a bus boy.

"I didn't pay much attention to him when we were at Mike and Misaka's house. He was so quiet. But he's a cute kid, Harry. George and Randy have practically adopted him. His parents say he's a handful at home, but he's been nothing but helpful here.

"I can't believe you'll be here in less than a week. I can't wait." Jimmi sighed. She glanced down at her chronometer. "I've got to go. Supplies are coming in and I have to make some decisions regarding inventory. I love you. Be careful. Bye."

"Computer. Freeze picture." Sulu couldn't help but smile at her image. "Play the letter again."