

The base officer's club was full. Starbase and Enterprise personnel were celebrating the engagement of Lt. Regina Piesto and Lt. Sam Iwuoha. As Regina's best friend, Rosita Gonzoles was acting as hostess. There were toasts to the happy couple, a few gifts, and a cake. Commanders Sulu and Uhura sat at the bar watching the festivities.

"Well, they look happy." Uhura commented.

"They are the center of attention." Sulu observed. "They better look happy if they know what's good for them."

"It is possible that they are happy." Uhura laughed.

"It's possible." Sulu acknowledged with a smile. He looked past Uhura to survey the crowd again. His smile disappeared when he saw Chekov and Cathy Vasco walk into the club together. Uhura turned to follow his line of sight. Sulu shook his head. "I hope Chekov knows what he's getting into."

"Leave it alone, Hikaru. It's not your business." Uhura warned. Sulu merely drank his beer. They both watched as Pavel and Cathy talked to the happy couple. "What did she ever do to you anyway?"

"Nothing."

"Don't hold out on me now, Boy." Uhura nudged him. "You don't usually make these kinds of judgments lightly."

"I don't care what she does with her life." Sulu said. He knew about Cathy's drinking habits and about the games she like to play in bars. "She can be as irresponsible as she likes, but I don't like her pulling Jimmi into her games."

"Jimmi's a big girl." Uhura observed while she stirred her own drink. "I'm sure she doesn't do anything she doesn't want to."

"Right." Sulu drank his beer. "It's the same with Cathy and with her brother. They are a bad influence. Jimmi listens to them too much."

"Would you rather Jimmi not have any friends outside of Starfleet?" Uhura asked.

"That would be extremely selfish of me. Wouldn't it?"

"Extremely." Uhura nodded. "It couldn't be that you worry that their influence is stronger than yours. Could it?"

"Certainly not."

"Of course not." Uhura sipped her drink. Having known Sulu for so many years, she could feel his tension as he watched Chekov and his date headed their way. "Would you please relax."

"I'm relaxed."

"Right." She laughed. "Here they come. Be nice."

Sulu smiled. "I am always nice."

"Right." She laughed again.

"What's so funny?" Chekov asked.

"Never mind." Sulu said. Intent on being nice, he turned to the young blond woman.

"Good evening, Cathy. Have you met Commander Uhura?"

Chekov ordered a couple of drinks while Cathy and Uhura chatted pleasantly. A few minutes later, Gonzoles came over to the bar. Sulu was surprised that Gonzoles seemed to know Cathy fairly well. Both in their mid twenties, they found endless things to talk about. Sulu and

Chekov edged away from the women.

"What's Cathy doing here?" Sulu asked

"She has business." Chekov explained. "I just ran into her."

"Be careful, Pavel." Sulu said seriously. "Cathy is not exactly trustworthy."

"She speaks highly of you too." Chekov sipped his beer. When Sulu did not laugh as Chekov had expected, he continued. "You worry too much. I just took the girl to dinner. I am not marrying her."

Commander Uhura walked over to them. The party was slowly starting to break up. "It's getting late. I'm going to call it a night."

"Dropping subtle hints, Girl?" Sulu smiled at her.

"Who me?" Uhura asked. She placed her empty glass on the bar.

"I'll be along in a minute." Sulu said. "I just want to say good night to Gonzoles."

After Uhura left, Chekov and Sulu rejoined Gonzoles and Cathy. They were in the middle of a conversation. Cathy laughed. "Well, that's what he said."

"Are you telling me I shouldn't trust your brother as far as I can throw him?" Gonzoles asked.

"I didn't say that, exactly." Cathy smiled. Chekov put his arm around her. "But L.J. seems quite taken with you."

"You and Lenny?" Sulu asked with surprise.

"He doesn't like to be called Lenny." Gonzoles avoided confirming or denying the accusation. "He prefers L.J."

"I know." Sulu said and drank his beer. Pavel and Cathy exchanged a few quiet words in Russian then said a quick good night and left the bar together. "I better be going too."

"Will Enterprise be leaving orbit soon?" Gonzoles asked.

"Admiral Kirk hasn't shared any new orders with the crew." Sulu said.

"Then the rumors aren't true?"

"I don't know. Right now they are still rumors." Sulu said finishing his beer. "I guess we'll just have to wait and see. Good night, Ensign Gonzoles."

"Goodnight, Commander Sulu."

Gonzoles waited until the engaged couple said goodnight before she went home. The signal on her desk was lit, which meant someone had left a message for her. She sat down at her desk and directed the computer to play the message. It was from Commander Von Matlz.

"By order of Admiral James T. Kirk, Ensign Rosa Gonzoles is to report to the U.S.S. Enterprise at 08:00 hours on stardate 8016.6 for a special assignment." The Commander said with all his military authority. Having read the order, he softened a bit and added. "We will miss you, Rosita. And we wish you good luck where ever this assignment takes you."

Pavel and Cathy had left the bar for a walk in the Starbase 68's park. It was considerably smaller than it's counterpart on Starbase 12. But in the four years the base had been operational the trees had started to get some height and the bushes had filled in nicely. A group of civilians had formed a garden club of sorts and planted a variety of flowers so that something was always blooming.

"These are beautiful." Cathy had stopped in front of a full bed of yellow and orange day

lilies.

"Yes, they are. And so are you." Pavel said. Cathy laughed to herself. She hadn't dressed up for the party at all. She was still wearing her high waisted red linen pants with her short black and white checkered cardigan. He took her in his arms and kissed her. "I am glad we ran into each other again so soon. I had thought I would not see you for quite awhile."

"How long will you be here?" Cathy asked. She stepped back from him and continued walking slowly.

"I do not know." Pavel took her hand as they walked. "But not long."

"I know most of these plants." Cathy said. She stopped again in front of a blueish green moss growing around the base of some tropical ferns. "But I'm not familiar with this moss."

"It is from the Vega system." Pavel said. "Sulu would know the name of it. It is often used in station gardens because it helps regulate the water in the soil."

"So the wizard Sulu is a botanist too?" Cathy asked.

"It is a hobby of his." Pavel laughed at her characterization. "What do you have against him?"

"It's not important." Cathy shrugged, walking again.

Pavel gently moved a strand of her long ashen blond hair off her face as they strolled along the path together. "How you feel is important to me."

"There's no big mystery." Cathy said. "My best friend thinks he's the most wonderful man in the universe and I disagree."

"Perhaps one day when we know each other better, you will explain more fully." Pavel suggested as they came to the edge of the park.

"Perhaps." Cathy smiled. Still holding his hand, she turned in the opposite direction that he had expected her to take.

"Where are we going?" Pavel asked.

"Hanger deck." Cathy tried to sound nonchalant. "I want to check on my ship before calling it a night."

"Check on your ship?"

"When do you have to be back?" Cathy asked. "Do you turn into a pumpkin at midnight again? Like your last night on Twelve?"

"A pumpkin?" Chekov laughed. "No. The Enterprise is officially still on patrol. We are not on leave."

"So what does that mean?"

"I am only required to be on the ship when I am on duty." Chekov explained. "That will be at oh eight hundred. However, if an emergency recall is ordered, I have five minutes to report back to the ship."

"Five minutes?" Cathy asked. "What if you are not dressed?"

Pavel stopped and faced her. "You were planning on undressing me?"

"The thought had crossed my mind." Cathy blushed. Pavel smiled, put his arm around her shoulder, and started them on their way towards the hanger deck. When they were in her ship, Cathy poured them each a generous portion of vodka. Pavel took the glass she handed him, but did not drink right away. Cathy took a quick drink.

"Nervous?" Pavel asked quietly. He set his glass on the table.

"No." Cathy protested.

"So you don't need this." He took the glass out of her hand and set it next to his own. Then he took her in his arms and kissed her. She responded eagerly. But when he slipped his hand under her sweater touching her bare back just above her waist, he felt her tense. When he felt her pull away from him, Pavel asked. "Is something wrong?"

"No.. " Cathy turned away. "I mean, yes.... I mean... I don't know."

"Cathy." Pavel sighed with frustration. He ran his hand through his hair. "Make up your mind."

Cathy picked up her glass and finished the vodka in it. "I'm sorry. This feels so utterly strange."

"You mean relatively sober?"

"No." Cathy looked at the empty glass in her hand and reached for the vodka bottle again. "Well maybe. But that's not it."

"Tell me." Pavel said taking the bottle out of her hand. He returned it to the compartment where it belonged. Unsure, Cathy just stared at him. "Tell me."

"I feel like a virgin." Cathy tried to laugh it off. "Like I don't know what to do."

"Cathy." Pavel took her face in his hand and looked her in the eye. "What are you trying to say?"

"I'm trying to tell you that I had a very bad experience with a man." Cathy pulled away from him and started to pace. Trying not to look at him, she said. "I thought I was in love, but... Well. After he left me, I promised myself I'd never again let any man hurt me."

She stopped to look at him. Chekov had taken his glass of vodka and sat on the edge of her bed. "And so?"

"So every relationship I've had since has been on my terms." Cathy said. Chekov sipped his vodka as he listened. "It was not hard. They were all predictable. They didn't care about me and I didn't care about them. Anyway, when I got bored, I'd tell them to get lost."

"Am I suppose to be impressed?" Pavel asked

"No." Cathy sat on the bed next to him. "I'm just trying to be honest. You've been nothing but honest with me. I guess what I'm really trying to say is that I care what you think and I'm not used to that."

"I think you are a beautiful and intelligent woman." Chekov took her empty glass out of her hand and put both glasses on the nightstand. Pavel leaned forward to brush her long blond hair off her shoulder. Gently he kissed her. "And right now I want nothing more than to make love to you."

She smiled. He kissed her again easing her down on the bed. Cathy tried to catch her breath as they kissed and caressed each other. Between kisses she said. "I just wanted you to know that this is different to me. I don't want you to think..."

"Cathy." He cut her off. "It is all right. Stop worrying."

"Are you sure, Pavel?" She sighed, relaxing.

"I am sure." He said. As he started unbuttoning her sweater, Pavel suggested "Let me help you with this."

"Computer," Pavel asked sleepily, "What time is it?"

"It is oh six thirty-eight hours." The computer responded.

Chekov sat up slowly and rubbed his eyes. He had never been a morning person. It took him a minute to remember that he was not in his own cabin on Enterprise. Cathy stirred next to him. Still asleep, she pulled the blankets around herself. He tried not to wake her as he dressed. It wasn't a problem until he tried to find his socks. He asked the computer to raise the lights by ten percent.

Cathy squinted at him. He was little more than a shadow in the dim light, but she could tell he had his uniform pants on. "What time is it?"

"Early." Pavel smiled. With his socks and boots in hand he came back to the bed and leaned down to kiss her shoulder. "Go back to sleep. I have to get back to the ship."

She reached up to touch his chest as he leaned over her. He had his shirt on too. "Will I see you later?"

"Yes, if I can." Pavel sat next to her to put on his socks and boots. "If the Enterprise is still here."

"Pavel?" Cathy sat up and tried to see his face.

"Yes, my sweet girl?"

Cathy reached over and touched his cheek. She would have liked to say she was falling in love with him, but she wasn't sure what she was feeling. However, she did know one thing, "You make me feel so good."

"I'm glad. I feel pretty good myself." He smiled and took her in his arms. Cathy sighed, holding on to him tightly. "It is hard to leave you now. But I must."

"I know." She kissed him. Pavel disengaged himself from her. "Come back to me soon."

"I will." He grabbed his jacket and left her ship. After he returned to Enterprise, showered and changed into a fresh uniform, Chekov joined Sulu for breakfast.

"Running late this morning." Sulu observed.

"Hmmm." Chekov shrugged and drank his coffee.

"What time did you get in last night?" Sulu asked casually.

"Late." Chekov said.

"Good morning, gentlemen." Commander Uhura said "May I join you?"

"Why so formal this morning, Girl?" Sulu asked as she sat down.

"I didn't want to interrupt the guy talk." Uhura said to Sulu with a grin. She was also running late this morning and started in eagerly on her melon while they talked. "Have you gotten any information yet on the big date?"

"I haven't gotten anything more than single syllables so far." Sulu grinned and sipped his coffee. "This may take awhile."

"You might as well tell us, Pav." Uhura laughed. She winked at Sulu. "We can always go to our other source."

"What other source?" Chekov asked good-naturedly.

"Jimmi." Uhura said. She turned her attention to Sulu and asked. "How much would you wager that Cathy has linked with Jimmi already?"

"Sucker bet." Sulu shook his head. "Jimmi isn't awake yet."

"Neither was Cathy when I left her." Chekov grinned at his friends. He checked his chronometer. "But we will not have time to talk about it now."

"Damn." Uhura looked at her half eaten breakfast. She was still hungry. "I guess I'll have to catch up at lunch."

They cleared their table and headed to the turbo lift together. Uhura had taken half of her bagel with her. Between bites she was still bugging Chekov for details. When the turbo lift opened, Chekov and Uhura got on.

"Aren't you coming?" Chekov asked Sulu.

"New personnel reporting." Sulu explained. "I'll be there shortly."