

Captain Sulu hoisted his duffle bag on his shoulder and made his way to the small shuttle-pod that would take him to the U.S.S. Excelsior. As he entered the modest ship, the pilot turned and stood at attention. Sulu stopped and smiled at the Latin woman with the efficiently braided long black hair. It had been quite awhile since they stood in the same room together.

"Lt. Gonzoles. It's good to see you."

"Thank you Captain." She returned his smile. "It's good to see you too. All systems show green. We are ready to depart on your order Sir."

"Then let's go." Sulu dropped his bag on one of the passenger's seats and made himself at home at the copilot's station. Gonzoles nodded and sat back down at the pilot's station. She signaled the flight decks control room and took off. As soon they were airborne, she put the small shuttle into a gentle climb towards orbit.

"I heard you and Jimmi were married the other day." Gonzoles said as she adjusted her controls. She glanced at the Captain and smiled, "Congratulations."

"Thanks." Sulu nodded and shrugged. "It seems the news has traveled faster than I expected."

"There has been a lot of gossip." Gonzoles said. "A lot of speculation."

"I guess that's to be expected." Sulu said. Gossip was a constant in the service. It could not be stopped. "After the sudden wedding and the baby."

"Baby?" Gonzoles turned to him suddenly, her eyes wide with surprise.

"I assumed you knew." Sulu said. "My wedding seems to be all over the rumor mill. Isn't Jimmi's pregnancy?"

"No one said anything to me, Sir." Gonzoles said. "Congratulations again. When is she due?"

"Two and a half to three months." Sulu said. "She didn't give me an exact date."

"This is wonderful." Gonzoles couldn't stop smiling. "Boy or girl?"

"I don't know." He smiled. "Jimmi wants to be surprised, so the doctors kept the scans that we saw away from vital areas."

"So basically you don't know anything." Gonzoles grinned.

"Basically." Sulu nodded. "So what is all this gossip about? Anything I should be concerned about?"

"I don't think so, Sir. It seems like natural curiosity to me." Gonzoles said as the tiny ship climbed out of the atmosphere into the blackness of space. "New captain on the ship. Wondering when we will get our orders. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"Good."

"Everyone does want to know, Captain. Are we finally going out on patrol or will there be more trials?"

"Let me get to know the ship and the crew before we go anywhere." Sulu laughed. "I have a lot of catching up to do."

"Yes Sir."

"It won't be long." Sulu added a little more seriously. "Why? Are you bored?"

"Not at all." Gonzoles said quickly. "I've learned so much since I've been on Excelsior. I just want to start putting some of it into practice."

"Good." Sulu said.

"There she is." Gonzoles nodded to the view port.

Sulu turned to see the U.S.S. Excelsior. The huge starship filled the forward view port. She was bigger than any Federation vessel to date. She maintained an extended docking orbit around Earth. The captain's voice was full of awe when he said quietly. "She is beautiful."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles agreed. She took the shuttlepod on a leisurely trip around the ship before landing in the main shuttle bay. As soon as Gonzoles touched down, she got up and grabbed the captain's duffle.

"Lieutenant." Sulu said following her to the back of the small ship. "I've always carried my own bag."

"Not today, Captain." She smiled and opened the hatch. Sulu stepped out to see well over two hundred crewmembers snap to attention. Captain Styles and Commander Kyle waited for the new captain at a podium on a small platform. While the two captains shook hands an ensign that Sulu did not know piped him onboard.

"Permission to come aboard, Captain." Sulu said to Captain Styles.

"Granted, Captain." Styles replied.

There was a short ceremony that was required for the transfer of command. Once done, the new captain of the Excelsior faced a large part of his crew for the first time. There were a few familiar faces among the crowd. Lt. Commander Rand, Chief DiFalco and a few other officers he had known from assignments on Enterprise.

"Good morning." Sulu started. He briefly wondered how Captain Kirk managed to always have a speech at the tip of his tongue. "The first thing you will learn about me is that I am not the speechmaker that some captains are.

"I know that you have been working hard for the past eighteen months to get the Excelsior ready to launch. And we will do that soon. I plan to build on that hard work to make this the best ship in the fleet. Thank you. Dismissed."

"Captain Sulu." Commander Kyle said as the crew broke ranks. "We've planned a reception with all senior officers in the main rec hall."

"Thank you, Johnny." Sulu nodded to his first officer. He turned to Captain Styles. "Will you join us, Howard?"

"No thanks, Hikaru." Captain Styles smiled as he shook his head. "I have orders to supervise the building of the new Excelsior class ship at the San Francisco Yards. I am anxious to get to work."

"What are they going to call her?" Sulu asked.

"The Intrepid." Styles replied. "Take good care of the Excelsior. I'm going to miss her."

"You can count on it." Sulu nodded. They shook hands again before Styles headed for the shuttle pod that brought Sulu to his new command. As he turned back to John Kyle, Sulu saw Lt. Gonzoles talking to another woman officer. His duffle was gone. Sulu knew he would find it in his quarters; if he ever found his quarters. "Ok, Johnny. Show me around."

"So Johnny." Sulu said as they made their way to the reception in the main rec hall. "It's been a while. How are you? How are Jane and the kids?"

"Jane's been in heaven these last couple of years." John Kyle replied. "I've been with Excelsior almost since the beginning. We've actually been really living together for the first time."

"And you?" Sulu nodded.

"Me? I'm great, Hikaru." Commander Kyle grinned. "This has been the best assignment I've ever had. I can't wait to get out of this trial phase and do some real work."

"That's pretty much what Lt. Gonzales said." Sulu laughed.

"You'll find that sentiment among most of the crew, Captain." Mr. Kyle said. "The brass wanted more trials after the failure of the transwarp drive. But we've done all that. This ship and her crew are ready to go."

"Good." Sulu said. "I'm not thrilled with the idea of sitting around here for too long either."

"Especially when you've left a new wife on Starbase 12." Johnny said.

"Congratulations. I bet Jimmi is very happy."

"Thanks." Sulu stopped his first officer with a hand on his shoulder. They were just outside the rec room door. "And if you say I told you so, I'll fire you."

"I didn't say a thing." Mr. Kyle grinned and put both his hands up in a gesture of innocence. "Come on. Don't you want to meet your senior officers, Captain?"

"Lead the way, Mr. Kyle."

"Our senior helm officer, Lt. Jenna Lee." Mr. Kyle was conducting the introductions at the reception.

"A position I held on Enterprise for a number of years, Lieutenant." Sulu couldn't help but smile at the attractive young woman as he shook her hand. Her skin was the dark brown of Cyprus tea and she wore her long mahogany hair in a french braid. But it was her eyes that captured his attention. They were deep brown with flecks of gold in the iris.

"Then I better keep on my toes, Captain." Lt. Lee returned his smile. Before Sulu could answer, Lt. Lee grabbed the hand of a passing officer. "This is Lt. Commander John Williams."

"Chief of Engineering." Sulu nodded. He had been doing his reading on the trip from Starbase 12. "Nice to meet you Commander."

"Call me Willie, Sir." The chief engineer said with a smile and a nod. He was a relatively short man with a ruddy complexion and prematurely graying hair. "Everyone does."

"Well, Captain Sulu." A woman's voice came from behind him. "They finally pried you off the bridge of the Enterprise."

"Lt. Commander Rand." Sulu smiled when he turned to see the blond woman "How long has it been? Ten years?"

"At least." She said, returning his smile. "Congratulations. On Excelsior and your marriage."

"Thanks, on both counts." Sulu said. The Captain took a glass from a passing waiter with a tray of drinks. "Now comes the part when you say it's about time."

"Careful Janice." Mr. Kyle interjected. "He's already threatened me if I dare comment."

"Well it wasn't exactly unexpected." Rand also took a glass. The other officers drifted off and let the old friends talk. "Uhura said you were hooked before Jimmi even finished college."

"You weren't on Enterprise at the time." Sulu observed.

"She and I have kept in touch." Janice said and sipped her drink. "I thought she was going to take that job at the Academy, but I understand she decided to stay on Enterprise."

"She claims to be ready for the quiet life of teaching." Sulu nodded. "But I have trouble believing that. She's happiest on active duty."

"Aren't we all." Mr. Kyle sipped his drink. The rec hall door opening caught his eye. When he saw Excelsior's chief medical officer try to slip in unnoticed, Kyle waved him over.

Dr. Timothy Patrick shook Captain Sulu's hand and smiled almost sheepishly as he explained why he was late. He was a tall lean man with blond hair and blue eyes. Having read his record, Sulu knew him to be in his late thirties. But his baby face and easy manner made him appear ten years younger.

"They bumped me." The doctor exclaimed. He was truly dumbfounded that he had missed his flight. "Parts of New Zealand are still a backwater. I had to wait twenty minutes for another flight out. All because the computer had messed up the reservations of a vacationing family."

"You could have used Starfleet priority to override the computer." Sulu suggested with a smile.

"I could have." Dr. Patrick admitted. "But then the mother would have had to fly alone with the baby and the older kid. And I would have probably ended up sitting next to them. Just seemed like a good idea to let the father have my seat."

"A wise choice."

Across the room, Lts. Lee and Gonzoles walked along the buffet table together. They talked as they selected various hors d'oeuvre from civilizations all over the Federation.

"So just how well do you know the Captain?" Lt. Lee asked as they surveyed the buffet table together.

"Professionally, I met him on my first assignment out of the Academy." Gonzoles said. "We were on a few missions together. And I was briefly assigned to Enterprise."

"And?" Lee asked as she filled her plate.

"And what, Jenna?" Gonzoles whispered.

"You said professionally like there was more." Lee said with a smile and a wink for her best friend.

"No. All I meant was professionally is one thing." Gonzoles tried to explain.

"And personally is something else."

"Oh, you are going to have to explain that." Lt. Lee said as they commandeered a small table in the corner.

"Well." Gonzoles took a deep breath as she decided exactly how much to say.

There was no point in bringing up the confusing first few times she was in a social situation with Sulu. Or how they came to the conclusion that their relationship should be strictly business. So she said, "Almost three years ago, I met the girl he just married."

"What's she like?"

"She's a lot of fun." Gonzoles said "She runs that bar on Starbase Twelve. I know you've heard of it."

"And?"

"And nothing." Gonzoles rolled her eyes. "I just saw a different side to him. You know what I mean?"

"No, Rosita." Lee grinned and played dumb. Sometimes, Rosita was just so serious that Jenna had to push her. She could not help herself. "What?"

"It's just when you've been on a mission with someone. In a battle. You think you know him. You know what to expect." Gonzoles tried to explain. "Then you see him in a bar with his girlfriend and it's another person all together."

"Interesting. So there is more to our captain than meets the eye." Lee smiled. She looked across the room at the Captain talking to Mr. Kyle. She wondered what Rosita was leaving out. Looking for another button to push, she said. "And he's not bad looking either."

"Jenna, you are hopeless." Gonzoles laughed. "The man just got married!"

"I heard." Jenna lowered her voice and leaned closer to her friend as she confided.

"And I understand it was very fast. Enterprise wasn't at the Base two hours before they got married and he left the next morning."

"So?"

"Tell me that's how you would like a wedding to be." Jenna said straightening back up and turning her attention back to her food.

"I'm not planning on a wedding." Gonzoles said with a smile. She pick up her glass and sipped the Andorian celebration wine.

"Ladies." Dr. Patrick walked up to Lt. Lee and Lt. Gonzoles and smiled his most charming smile. "May I join you?"

"Of course, Pat. Have a seat." Lt. Gonzoles said. "Do you think you could have gotten anything more on that plate?"

"I've been so rushed today, I haven't had a chance to eat." Dr. Patrick said. He put the plate on the table, grabbed a chair from against the wall and joined them. "I'm starving."

"So, Doctor, what do you think?" Lt. Lee asked as Patrick started eagerly on his collection of hors d'oeuvre.

"The petrokian saugage is wonderful." Dr. Patrick said between bites.

"Pat!" Lee scolded. "I was asking about your opinion of Captain Sulu."

"He seems pleasant enough." The doctor said. He pretended to concentrate on his food but kept one eye on the somewhat annoyed Lt. Lee. "And he didn't seem to mind that I was just a little bit late."

"You're always late." Lee observed. "It's one of your more annoying traits."

"I'm sorry if I am annoying you, Jenna."

"Would you two give it a break?" Gonzoles asked, but neither Lee nor Patrick gave any indication that they heard her.

"If?" Lt. Lee asked. "Is there a reason why today should be different than any other day?"

"No reason at all." Dr. Patrick laughed. "So what's the news? What have I missed being on leave these last four days?"

"No news at all." Lee's tone had turned icy.

"The news is that we have a new captain." Gonzoles said with a laugh as an attempt to derail the tension between Patrick and Lee. But it never worked.

"What's wrong, Jenna?" Dr. Patrick asked good-naturedly. "Haven't gotten any good gossip out of this official reception? You know these things are boring as hell. Nothing ever happens."

"So you are getting your enjoyment out of baiting me." Lt. Lee got up and left the reception.

"Why do you do that?" Lt. Gonzoles asked. "The more you laugh, the angrier she gets. And you know it."

"I just can't resist, Rosita." Dr. Patrick shrugged and smiled. "She's just so easy. Always has been."

"Only to you, Doctor." Gonzoles smiled. "For reasons that neither of you seem willing to explain."

"Hmmm." Dr. Patrick nodded and changed the subject. "Have you tried the Delovian souffle? Very rich, but wonderful."

"Bridge to Captain Sulu." a man's voice came over the speaker.

Sulu glanced around and located the ship's internal com interface on the wall near the door. "Sulu here."

"I have an incoming call coming from Starbase 12, Sir."

"I'll take it in my ready room." The Captain said.

"Aye Sir."

Sulu turned and handed his glass to Mr. Kyle. "Sorry Johnny." He said and left the room, returning to the turbo lift he had taken to get to the party. "Deck one. Captain's ready room."

He entered his ready room by the door that did not go through the bridge. A desk

stood in the center of the room with a fully interfaced computer station. Except for an artist rendering of the Excelsior on the back wall, there were no decorations of any kind. Captain Sulu sat at his desk and turned on the computer screen. The communications officer on the bridge put the call through. His wife appeared on the screen.

"About time." Jimmi said. "What could you possibly be doing?"

"Trying to find my way around." Sulu smiled. "This is a big ship. Besides, you interrupted an official reception for the new Captain."

"Then you should be grateful." Jimmi laughed.

"I am." Hikaru smiled at her. "Thank you very much."

"So who is on Excelsior that I know?" Jimmi asked.

"Johnny Kyle is my first officer." Hikaru said. "Janice Rand is the communications officer and Rosita Gonzales is the navigator. I'm sure you know more, but I've barely had time to go over my senior officers records. Much less anyone else. How are you feeling?"

"Fat." Jimmi shrugged.

"Nonsense." Sulu couldn't help but smile. He knew exactly what she wanted to hear. "You are beautiful. How could the mother of my child be anything else?"

"Harry." Jimmi said softly. "You will come home when the time comes, right?"

"I'll try."

"But Harry! I am going to need you." Jimmi said. "You are in orbit around Earth. How hard can it be?"

"And the baby is not coming for almost three months, Jeanie." He reminded her "I don't know where I'll be then. I haven't gotten any specific orders yet. I'll try is all I can promise right now."

"Try hard." Jimmi pouted. "It..."

He watched her bite her bottom lip. It was one way she tried to keep from crying. When she did not finish her thought, he asked. "What?"

"I'm scared, Harry."

"Of what?"

"Of having a baby." Jimmi admitted softly. "Labor. Birth. The whole thing."

"You don't have much choice in the matter now." Hikaru said with a smile. She just shrugged. "Have you talked to the doctor about it?"

"Of course. I've also read everything available on it." Jimmi said. "And I don't want to do it alone. I want you with me."

"It will be ok, Baby. I'll do my best to be there with you." He promised. His eyes wandered briefly around the room. "I've got to do something with this office."

"What's wrong with it?" Jimmi asked. She was glad to be talking about something else. If she continued to dwell on being alone during the upcoming birth she would certainly cry.

"It is severely austere." Sulu complained.

"Severely austere?" Jimmi laughed at his characterization. He could always make her laugh even when she felt like crying. "Sounds awful. What do you want me to send you?"

"I'm not sure." Sulu said. "It's not top on my priority list. But eventually I'm going to want some of the things I left at your place back."

"Technically this is our place now." Jimmi reminded him. "After all we did get married."

"Yeah, I seem to remember that." The Captain nodded.

"And I kind of like having some of your stuff here." She smiled. "Although since you cleaned out your quarters on Enterprise, it is getting a little crowded."

"Sorry about that." He shrugged. "I wanted to travel light."

"I know." She smiled. "I just didn't know you had accumulated so much junk."

"Junk?" He laughed. "Excuse me?"

"I don't understand the fascination with weapons." Jimmi shook her head. "A fencing foil, some kind of ancient electric gun."

"That is an early twenty first century stun gun, Jeanie." Sulu said. "And it's very rare."

"It's some collection." Jimmi nodded.

"It's getting late, Baby." Captain Sulu said. "I've got a lot of work to do. It wouldn't look right for the lowest ranking crew member to know more about the ship than the captain."

"Ok. Go back to work." Jimmi smiled. "Call me soon. I love you."

"I love you too." Sulu returned the smile. "Excelsior out."

Captain Sulu spent the next three weeks getting to know the ship and her crew. All systems were operating at peak efficiency in all simulations. More than one department head had reported there was nothing more they could do without taking the ship to warp speed.

"Bridge to Captain Sulu."

Sulu was in Commander William's office in main engineering. He turned Willie's screen towards him and answered the call. "Sulu here."

"Admiral Reese has just beamed on board, Captain." Mr. Kyle reported. "He's on his way to the bridge now."

"So am I, Mr. Kyle." Sulu said. He smiled at Commander Williams. "Maybe we'll get that go ahead order, Willie."

"I hope so, Sir." Willie nodded, but Sulu was already gone.

When Sulu reached the bridge, Admiral Reese and Commander Kyle stood at the command station. Reese was an inch or two shorter than Kyle with steel grey hair and eyes to match. Kyle laughed politely at the joke the Admiral had just told him.

"Admiral Reese," Sulu walked down the two steps to the lower bridge. "It's good to see you."

"Captain Sulu." Reese turned to him. "How soon can you be ready to leave orbit?"

"An hour, Admiral." Sulu said.

"An hour?" Reese asked.

"I have some people on leave that I need to recall, Sir." Sulu said. "Other than that, we're ready now."

"Good." Reese nodded. "It's about time Excelsior had a proper shake down cruise. We haven't even had her out of the solar system yet."

"You read my mind, Admiral." Sulu said.

"Let's talk in your ready room, Captain." Reese ordered.

"Yes Sir." Sulu said. He turned to Kyle. "Recall all off duty personnel."

"Aye."

"Can I offer you something, Admiral." Sulu said in the ready room. "Coffee, tea?"

"No thank you, Sulu." Reese settled himself in the chair in front of Sulu's desk. "I won't be in your way that long. The plan is to send Excelsior into the Beta quadrant. The scientific part of your mission will be cataloging planetary atmospheric anomalies."

Captain Sulu sat behind the desk and asked. "And the rest of the mission?"

"To keep an unofficial eye on the Klingons and Romulans." Reese said. "They've both been uncharacteristically quiet for the past couple of months. However, our outposts along the Romulan Neutral Zone report increased traffic around the Romulan outposts. Nothing definite."

"But worth watching." Sulu nodded.

"Exactly. But first take the Excelsior on a thorough shake down cruise." Reese said. "I don't want to send you into the Beta Quadrant unless the ship is in top form. How long will you need to test all systems?"

"Assuming no problems." Sulu said. "Two or three weeks. We could do it faster if pressed."

"No reason to rush." Reese said. "Take the three weeks. Heading of your own choosing."

"My crew will be happy to get these orders." Sulu smiled. "They've been getting a little restless."

"I understand." Reese stood to go. Sulu followed him though the bridge to the turbo lift. "So when is your wife due?"

"Another six weeks." Sulu said as the turbo lift doors closed. "Deck six."

"Then I shouldn't be surprised if your heading takes you by Starbase Twelve." Reese smiled. "Although, let me warn you. My wife was a real grouch the last couple of weeks of each pregnancy."

"I have been warned by several fathers." Sulu laughed. The turbo lift doors opened a short walk from transporter room six. "It seems to be a universal experience."

In the transporter room, Ensign Jellico manned the controls. Admiral Reese glanced at the young man and said. "Starfleet headquarters."

"Aye Sir."

"Good luck, Captain Sulu." Admiral Reese stood on the transporter pad. "Keep me informed."

"I will, Sir." Sulu nodded. He nodded to the ensign. "Energize."

After the admiral had dematerialized, Jellico asked. "Are we going on active

duty, Captain?"

"We certainly are, Ensign." Sulu nodded and returned to the bridge.

"About time." Jellico said after the captain had left.