

Excelsior had left Earth not quite two months before, but already Captain Sulu had become accustomed to the luxury of a ready room just off the bridge. He found himself working one and a half to two shifts every day. Quite a bit of the time was spent in the ready room with all the detail work involved in running a ship this large.

Dr. Patrick and Captain Sulu were in the ready room as Excelsior approached the rendezvous point. Pat asked. "How long have you known, Captain Habib?"

"He was a year behind me at the Academy." Sulu said. "I've always been aware of him. Our paths have crossed on several occasions since we've been on active duty."

"Aware?" Pat asked

"My room mate dated his sister. He was captain of the fencing team at the Academy." Sulu shrugged. "That kind of thing."

"Ok." Pat said. "What about Captain Warren?"

"I've seen him a few times." Sulu shook his head. "But I didn't know the man."

"Captain." Commander Kyle called on the senior officer comline. "Approaching the rendezvous point."

"Acknowledged." Sulu answered. Dr. Patrick followed the captain onto the bridge. It was early in the second shift. The Excelsior's senior staff had gone off duty less than two hours before. Commander Kyle was just ordering all stop. He vacated the command chair for Sulu.

"Hail them, Lt. Kohistani." Sulu said as he sat down.

"Aye Sir." The young man answered.

The bridge of Saratoga appeared on the Excelsior's main view screen. Saratoga was Constitution class so the bridge looked very familiar to Sulu. The center seat was occupied by a Human man of Sulu's height and age. He had thin dark hair and an olive complexion. Jacob Habib smiled. "Good to see you again, Captain Sulu. I understand congratulations are in order. You are a lucky man."

"It seems that word travels quickly." Sulu returned Jacob's smile. "Why don't you beam over, Captain Habib? We have a lot to discuss."

"The home court, Hikaru?" Habib asked. Sulu shrugged. "Of course, I'll be right there. Saratoga out."

"Home court?" Dr. Patrick asked.

"Habib and I took a command seminar together several years ago. The advantage of your own territory. It was one of the strategies discussed." Sulu stood up to leave the bridge. "Lt. Hauser, you have the bridge. Doctor, Mr. Kyle, you're with me."

They were in the transported room when Habib materialized. "Permission to come aboard, Sir."

"Granted." Sulu smiled and extended his hand. "Do you know my first officer, John Kyle?"

"Only by reputation." Habib said as he shook Kyle's hand. "From Lt. Commander Alice Cowan."

"My goodness, that's a name from the past." Kyle was slightly taken aback. Sulu made a mental note of his first officer's reaction. He hoped the story was worth the wait.

"This is my CMO, Dr. Patrick." Sulu said.

"Doctor." Habib shook his hand and nodded.

"Captain Habib." Patrick said.

"My ready room." Sulu said and led the way to the turbo lift. He was glad the designers had the foresight to build the room with two doors. One led to the bridge, the other made it possible to come and go without passing through the bridge. Sulu wondered how many Captains had to request this one luxury before Starfleet designed it into the Excelsior.

The Captain took his seat behind the desk. Habib and Kyle sat opposite him. Dr. Patrick perched himself on the edge of Sulu's desk. The room looked no different than the day Sulu walked into it for the first time. He had not yet had the luxury of time to think about what he would like to add to personalize his office.

Captain Sulu got right to business. He touched a control on his computer station and said. "Computer record meeting. Present in the room are Captain Jacob Habib, Captain Hikaru Sulu, Commander John Kyle and Dr. Timothy Patrick. OK, Jacob. Let's have it, what happened?"

"I'm sure you are familiar with all the reports." Habib started. Sulu nodded. "About a month ago, the Captain started acting odd. He switched assignments around, lost track of the chain of events, and even became wary of the senior staff. I have served with Captain Warren for ten years. This was not normal behavior."

"You didn't report it?" Kyle asked.

"Not at first. The change was subtle then it got worse. I noted the change in my logs. I suggested he see the doctor."

"Did he?" Patrick asked.

"Finally. After several requests, Dr. Hui and I told him he had no choice. Either he submitted to an examination or she would relieve him of duty. But it didn't do much good. She never found anything."

"Pat, beam over to the Saratoga." Sulu said. "See Dr. Hui. Go over the medical reports and autopsy with her. Give me a full report."

"Aye Captain." Pat nodded and left the ready room.

Sulu turned back to Habib. "You reported that the captain's death was suicide. What do you base that on?"

Habib took a deep breath. "When he did not report for duty or answer the priority comline, I went to check on him."

"You?" Kyle questioned. It was not standard procedure.

"Captain Warren had become unstable." Habib answered every question without hesitation. "I thought it best to go myself. I found him dead in his cabin. According to the autopsy he was poisoned."

"But why did you assume it was self induced?" Sulu needed this pinned down.

"His behavior had changed so dramatically. He had even disregarded orders from Command." Habib met Sulu's gaze steadily. "It just seemed to be the only logical explanation."

"What about an investigation?" Kyle asked.

"When I reported to Command, I was told to do nothing and wait." Habib said.

"Ok Jacob." Sulu said. "That's all for now. I want to see all the Captain's logs for two months before his death."

Habib stood to go. "Of course, the crew will give you complete access. If you need anything else, you know where I am."

"Thank you, Captain Habib." Sulu nodded. Habib got up and left. Sulu sat back in his chair and looked at Mr. Kyle. "Computer, stop recording. Well Johnny, what do you think?"

"He seems like he's telling the truth..."

"But..."

"It's an awfully shaky story, Captain."

"Agreed. Let's get to the bottom of it Johnny." Mr. Kyle got up to leave. Sulu was deep in thought. He caught Mr. Kyle just before he went out of the door. "Who is first officer over there now?"

Mr. Kyle shrugged. "Captain Habib could have changed things around, but I saw a report from second officer, Lt. Commander T'Penn. She should have moved right up."

"Get with her. See what her take on this is. I'll start going over the captain's logs. Between you, me and Pat maybe we can make some sense of this."

The two starships linked their computer systems. Sulu used his level one clearance code to access the captain's log. Two months ago Captain Warren was a typical starship commander if there was such a thing. Sulu found himself liking the man. He had a very dry sense of humor. As time went on, the changes Habib had talked about became evident. After several hours, Sulu returned to his cabin. He accessed the main communications station. Commander Rand had come on duty. Sulu checked the time. Third shift had just started.

"Janice, get Starbase 12 for me." Sulu said. "I'd like to speak to my wife."

"She's probably asleep, sir."

"Probably. But do it any way." Sulu rubbed his neck while he waited for the commander to make the connection.

In a moment Jimmi's smiling face appeared on his screen. He knew the message by heart. "This is not me. I'm not here. Leave your message and I'll deal with it accordingly."

"Hi baby. Sorry I missed you. How are you feeling? Pat tells me both you and the baby will sleep quite a bit the first couple of days. So if you feel up to it, give me a call. They'll put you through no matter what time it is. Jeanie, it's been a very long day. I'm going to get some sleep myself. Kiss the little guy for me. I love you. I love you both. You know Jeanie, I don't think I've ever missed you as much as I do right now."

The next day Sulu checked in on the bridge. All conditions were normal. He returned to his ready room to go over the logs again. He checked Warren's correspondence files also. He checked Habib's logs and correspondence files. He kept coming up blank. When the door signal sounded, Sulu welcomed the break.

Drs. Patrick and Hui walked in. The contrast between the two CMOs was

dramatic. Dr. Patrick was in his late thirties. He was over two meters tall, had blond hair, and a very easy manner. Dr. Hui was at least ten years older and a foot shorter than her Excelsior counterpart. Her manner was very straightforward and business like.

"So have you come to any conclusions, Doctors?" Sulu asked after everyone was seated.

"You know that the Captain was poisoned." Dr. Hui said. Sulu nodded. "At Dr. Patrick's suggestion we ran some further tests. We can conclude from the level of poison in different body tissues that he was receiving low levels of poison for some time."

"The body stores substances at different rates in say fat tissue, muscle tissue, glands, or organs." Dr. Patrick continued, "From this we can see that it was an ongoing process. Most likely it was the poison that caused the personality changes."

"Why couldn't you see this when you examined the Captain before his death?" Sulu asked.

"It was solely my mistake, Captain." Dr. Hui said. "I was not looking for poison. I did not run the proper tests."

"Not entirely true." Dr. Patrick came to her defense. "This poison, a derivative of Cybic tobacco, would not show up in the standard tests."

"Tobacco?"

Dr. Patrick looked his Captain in the eye and said. "One cigar a year may not kill you, Sir, but tobacco is still a poison."

Sulu ignored Pat's statement and turned to the other doctor. "Did Captain Warren smoke, Dr. Hui?"

"That is against regulations, Sir." Hui answered.

"That was not the question, Doctor."

"According to the conditions of his lungs, yes. However, I never saw him. I was not aware that he did until now."

"I find that hard to believe, Doctor." Captain Sulu said. "I know Dr. Patrick could list off all of my vices, Starfleet sanctioned or not." Dr. Hui had no answer. Sulu went back to the main issue. "How was this poison ingested?"

"I couldn't say for sure." Dr. Patrick answered this time, "But the evidence points to a slow ingestion. Smoking seems the most obvious answer, but he could have taken it orally."

"Is there anything else?" Sulu asked. The two doctors looked at each other then back to the captain. "Dismissed."

After the two doctors left his office, Sulu asked. "Computer. What is the location of Commander Kyle?"

"Commander Kyle is not on board the Excelsior." The computer answered.

Sulu went to the bridge. Lt. Lee gave up the center seat. She reported all normal before retaking her seat at the helm. Sometimes Sulu missed that station. Lt. Foote was at the communications station. "Open a channel to the Saratoga, Mr. Foote"

"Aye Sir, channel open." Captain Habib's face appeared on the main screen.

"Captain Habib, " Sulu said. "Do you still have my first officer on board?"

"I believe so. Do you want me to send him home?" Jacob seemed almost

hopeful.

"No. With your permission, I'll come to you."

"Of course, Captain. I'll meet you in the transporter room. Saratoga out." Habib said quickly before his face was replaced by the view of the Saratoga on the bridge's main screen.

"He doesn't seem too happy." Lt. Lee commented.

"No, he doesn't." Sulu agreed. He got up and started towards turbo lift. "But he is cooperating fully. I can't ask for any more than that. You have the bridge, Lee."

Captain Sulu arrived on the Saratoga to find Captain Habib, Commander Kyle and Lt. Commander T'Penn waiting in the transporter room. T'Penn was a young Vulcan woman. She wore her light brown hair pulled back with a wide black headband that covered part of her forehead and accented the particularly high point of her ears.

"Permission to come aboard, Captain."

"Granted and welcome, Captain." Captain Habib smiled.

"Can the four of us sit down together?" Sulu asked Habib. Captain Habib led the group to a small conference room. Since Saratoga was Constitution class, she had no ready room. Sulu let Habib take the head of the table, even though he planned to run this meeting. It was still Habib's ship, at least for the time being. As soon as they were seated, Sulu asked. "Commander Kyle, what do you have to report?"

"Most of the things Commander T'Penn and I have come up with, we've heard before. The sequence of events is well documented. Changes in Captain Warren's behavior are reported independently in several logs. It looks to me like the changes started shortly after the ship took shore leave on Space Station New Freedom. But any motivation to harm the Captain or the ship remain elusive."

Sulu thought this over. He turned to Habib. "How long were you at New Freedom?"

"We were there five days. The computers had experienced some serious data corruption so we put in for repairs."

"Why there? Why not Starbase 18?" Sulu asked.

T'Penn spoke up "The data corruption was interfering with the life support systems. Space Station New Freedom was the closest station that could handle emergency evacuation if it became necessary."

"Lt. Commander T'Penn, did you know of any bad habits of Captain Warren?"

"Sir?"

"Did you know that Captain Warren smoked tobacco?"

"Not personally, Sir. "

Commander Kyle spoke up. "Excuse me, Captain. Smoking? If this is a reason for suicide...or murder...."

"I get your drift, Commander." Sulu said. Johnny had been giving Sulu a hard time about his love of cigars since they had served together on Enterprise. "But smoking is possibly the method the poison was ingested. It was a tobacco derivative. I wonder if the Captain's smoking was common knowledge among the crew."

"I knew." Captain Habib said. "I don't know who else in the crew knew, but

Captain Warren had a fondness for cigarettes. He did not indulge in any other drugs and I thought he only smoked off ship. I take it that was not the case?"

"It's only a possibility at this point." Sulu said, "Are the captain's quarters sealed?"

"Of course." Habib answered. "No one has been in there since his death."

"You did not search it?"

"No, Captain." Habib answered again. He was starting to get a little annoyed, but he tried to keep his voice calm. "We were ordered to cease our investigation and await your arrival."

"I'd like it searched now. And any cigarettes analyzed." Sulu requested.

"Lt. Commander T'Penn can take care of that." Captain Habib said. T'Penn stood to go. "I think it would be a good idea if Commander Kyle gave her a hand. Just to keep everything above board."

"Fine." Sulu nodded. Mr. Kyle stood as well and the two commanders left.

The two captains faced each other across the table. Sulu broke the silence. "I'm not accusing you of anything, Jacob. I'm just following orders."

"I know Hikaru." Habib sighed heavily, "This is not how I wanted to get a ship. Captain Warren was well loved, almost worshiped, aboard this ship. Sometimes I feel like the crew is just waiting for me to make a mistake."

Sulu smiled. "I know the feeling. Believe me, it gets easier; at least as far as the crew is concerned. I walked cold into a new ship. I had only served with a few of my officers before. At least your crew knows you."

"But, will the ship be mine or will they bring a new captain in over me?"

"I don't know, Jacob."

"But your recommendation will carry a lot of weight." Habib pushed for some definitive answer. "What will your report say?"

"Let's get all the facts in first." Sulu said. This was not a conversation he wanted to get into any further. He stood to go. "Let me know what the search turns up."

When Sulu returned to the Excelsior, he stopped at sickbay. Dr. Timothy Patrick was in his office. Sulu leaned in the doorway and asked, "Got a minute, Pat?"

"Sure," The Doctor smiled and said. "I was just going over this report again. I could use a break. What's on your mind?"

"Is that report for Dr. McCoy?" Sulu asked. If it was, Sulu had no right to ask what was in it. Dr. McCoy was the supervising physician for the surgeon's general's office and that kept him totally separate from the command structure. All medical personnel in this sector answered to him. Patrick nodded. "Ok, unofficially, what is your assessment of Dr. Hui?"

"How unofficial are we talking here?" Pat asked.

"Very. I can't put my finger on it, but something is not right here." Sulu said. "Do you believe that Dr. Hui just missed the tobacco connection? Is she incompetent or is she hiding something?"

"I don't think the choices are that clear cut."

"Give me another choice, please!"

"Consider, Captain, how that crew felt about that captain." Patrick started. "As far as they were concerned, he could do no wrong. Many of them had served with him for years. I'm sure you know the type."

"Make your point."

"In such a situation, for a chief medical officer to question that captain, to question his competence, requires a certain aggressiveness." Dr. Patrick was trying to be as delicate as possible. "An aggressiveness that I believe Dr. Hui lacks."

"You're suggesting that if she questioned Warren's smoking, he told her not to worry about it, and she did nothing else?"

"Unofficially, I think that may be the case here." Dr. Pat hesitated. But he decided to go on, "Also unofficially, I know that while Dr. McCoy has complete confidence in Dr. Hui's medical knowledge, he has questioned her abilities in this area."

Sulu smiled. "I am sure Dr. McCoy has no questions regarding your abilities in this area."

Dr. Pat returned the smile. "No Sir. His questions for me lie in other areas."

Sulu wanted to ask what other areas. But that was inappropriate. If it was something he needed to know, Sulu trusted both Dr. McCoy and Dr. Patrick to tell him. "Well...unofficially, you've given me a lot to think about."

"Captain." Pat said, as Sulu was half way out the door. Sulu stopped. "Have you eaten tonight?"

"Hmmm. I knew there was something I forgot." Sulu walked over to the desk and touched the intercom. "Sulu to Yeoman Banks."

"Banks here." A young man's voice answered.

"Bring a dinner tray to my ready room."

"Aye, Sir."

Sulu looked at the doctor, "Satisfied?" Dr. Patrick nodded and Sulu went on his way. By the time he got to his office, Yeoman Banks was arriving. The boy set the tray on Sulu's desk. He was just out of high school. "Thank you, Mr. Banks."

"Anything else, Captain?" He asked eagerly.

"No, that will be all." Sulu sat down at his desk.

Banks started to go, then stopped. "Captain," Sulu looked up. "Congratulations, Sir. On your new son."

"Thank you, Yeoman." Sulu smiled. The young man left. Sulu ate while he was working.

"Computer, access the bridge crew duty roster." Sulu studied the screen for a minute, then touched the intercom. "Commander Rand."

"Yes Sir?" Rand's face appeared on his screen.

"Come by my ready room when you're off duty."

"Aye, Sir."

Lt. Commander Rand came to the office less than an hour later. He had known her years ago on the Enterprise. Her career had taken her to several other assignments and Sulu hadn't seen her in at least ten years before taking command of Excelsior. She now headed the communications department and so far had proved a valuable member of

the bridge crew.

"Sit down, Commander." Sulu said looking up from Captain's Warren's logs on the computer screen. She did. "When you sent the message to the Enterprise about the baby, how did you send it?"

"Via regular subspace channels, Sir." Rand said.

"Last I heard, Enterprise was in sector 13." The Captain said. Rand nodded. "So our signal would have gone directly away from the Saratoga. How did Habib know to congratulate me when we first contacted him?"

Rand thought about it for a minute. "The Saratoga could have been monitoring our communications. Or he may not know about the baby. The wedding was just three months ago, so congratulations are still in order for that."

Sulu sat back in his chair. "I did not receive a lot of congratulations for the wedding, Janice."

"Well, there was some talk, Sir; that you had been trapped into it." Rand confided. Sulu just shook his head. "Strictly people that don't know you, Sir."

"Well." There was no point in speaking to that issue now. "Is there any way you would know if someone were monitoring us?"

"No Sir. Not on an unsecured channel." Rand answered. "But Captain, the Saratoga would have more likely heard transmissions between us and Starbase 12. We weren't that far away. They would have had to monitor open channels, but I routinely pick up transmissions meant for other ships."

"So we have another piece of the puzzle that could possibly, but not necessarily, be a coincidence."

"Frustrating." Rand commented.

"You have a gift for understatement, Commander." Sulu smiled. "But I am cutting into your free time. Get out of here."

Shortly after Commander Rand had left the ready room, Mr. Foote's voice came over the intercom, "Captain, incoming call from Ms. Sulu."

"Thank you, Mr. Foote. Put her through."

Jimmi smiled at him on the computer screen. "Hi Captain. Are we alone?"

"As alone as humanly possible with hundreds of light years of space between us." Sulu replied. He felt himself relaxing. He sat back comfortably in his chair. "It is so good to see you."

"Up to your ears in your captain stuff, Harry?"

"Yes and I've had enough of it."

"Enough to resign and come help me run the bar?" She teased him.

"Can you see it? Me tending bar?" He laughed. "No as frustrating as it is, I'll take the captain stuff, as you call it. So how is our little boy?"

She smiled. "All he's done so far is sleep. But I'm told that will change. I don't know if I'm ready for this, Harry. The very idea of this little person depending entirely on me. I just don't know."

"You'll do fine. Trust your instincts."

"My instincts are good for choosing a good wine that doesn't cost too much. For

knowing when to tell a joke and when to shut up and pour the drink." Jimmi said. "I'm not sure that will translate to an infant."

"When I'm in over my head, I call for help." Sulu said. "I'm sure Mike, Randy and George will help as needed."

"They've all offered already. I think insisted is a better word. And Cathy is coming for a visit. Even though she's still mad at me, at us, because she did not make it to the wedding."

"Sorry." the Captain said evenly. He knew Jimmi would have liked her best friend there. "But what's the big deal?"

"We were going to be each other's maids of honor." Jimmi explained. But there was no point in making a big issue of it now. "She'll get over it. She's coming to help, to see the baby."

"Good. I'm glad you're not alone."

"You seem preoccupied, Harry" Jimmi observed. "This business with the Saratoga is not going well?"

"What would you know about it?" Harry asked good-naturedly. Jimmi was up on all the Starfleet scuttlebutt. Sometimes she heard things he never would.

"Oh, I hear things." She smiled. "You know James T. was pretty good friends with Captain Warren."

"No, I didn't know."

"Yeah, Dad and James T. called earlier. James T. promised to bring the Enterprise around as soon as he could work it out. You'd think he was the grandfather. But don't tell him I said that. He would think I was calling him old."

Sulu laughed. "You wouldn't want to do that. What about the Doc.? What did he have to say?"

"Well, He couldn't be happier or prouder. Said he couldn't wait to hold his first grandson. I don't know what makes him think there will be any more." Jimmi smiled

"Oh and your mother called."

Sulu smiled. "Did she?"

"Yeah. And she was very happy that we named him after you." Jimmi laughed. "But she was upset I didn't have a cradle. She's sending me one. It matches the rocking chair."

"And you thought she didn't like you." Harry teased. He looked away from the screen. Jimmi didn't say anything. It was obvious that someone had come into the room. But that had been the longest conversation they had since he had been aboard Excelsior. He turned his attention back to her. "I've got to go."

"Ok, " She signed off without the 'I love you' because she didn't know who had come into the office. Her father had talked to her several times about not compromising her new husband's authority. Jimmi wasn't good with authority. But she understood command. There were still a lot of things they would have to work out.

Mr. Kyle was the one that came into the captain's office. He took a seat and waited for the captain to sign off. He did not like what he was about to report and was in no hurry. After a moment, Captain Sulu turned to him. "Well, what have you come up

with?"

"Cigarettes laces with Cybic tobacco." Kyle said. "There was quite a supply in the captain's quarters. It would be my guess that he had no idea that anything was wrong."

"According to his logs, the Captain was starting to worry about an impending mutiny." Sulu said. He thought for a minute. Mr. Kyle waited. "Any indication where these cigarettes came from?"

Kyle nodded. "Space Station New Freedom. No surprise there. In Captain Warren's personal records we found a transaction with someone noted only as Matriix. The exchange was not specific. No indication as to the nature of the commodity."

"So what did you come up with on this Matriix character?" Sulu asked. He knew Kyle would not have brought this information without following it to its logical conclusion first.

"The Matriix is a ship, Captain. A freighter out of Kali Guari." Kyle said. "A dealer in exotic and sometimes illegal contraband. The information is sketchy."

"Anything else?"

"I talked to the dock master at New Freedom. The Matriix had been lately in Cardasian space." Mr. Kyle reported.

"Cardasian space? That's pretty far out." Sulu said. "What would a smuggler be doing there?"

"Smuggling?" Johnny smiled.

"True," Sulu agreed. "But we know so little about them, except that they want nothing to do with the Federation."

"Klingons in drag." Johnny commented dryly.

Sulu laughed. Mr. Kyle was generally straight-laced and rarely made such comments. The Captain wondered if there was a story here that he did not know. "Is that an official assessment, Commander?"

Johnny shrugged it off. "No Sir. But that is all I have to report." Johnny stood up to go. "I shared this information with Commander T'Penn."

"Good." Sulu said. "Continue to keep them informed." Commander Kyle nodded and left the captain's office.

Sulu sat deep in thought. As far as he could see, the captain and crew of the Saratoga had done nothing wrong. But they had been sloppy. They had not asked the proper questions. No one, especially the first officer, had taken the necessary initiative. It was not a report Sulu wanted to send to headquarters. It could wait. Sulu went to bed.

In the morning, when Sulu took the bridge Lt. Lee was again in the center seat. She was an excellent helm officer and so far had handled command of the bridge well. Sulu made a mental note to give her some assignments to further test her command ability. Her Academy personality tests did not show an inherent ability in that area, but then neither had his. In this captain's opinion, some things developed later.

"The Saratoga is hailing us, Captain." Lt. Commander Rand reported.

"On screen." The Captain ordered. Captain Habib appeared. "Good morning, Jacob."

"We need to talk, Captain." Habib said abruptly.

Captain Sulu was surprised at his tone. "Of course. Your ship or mine?"

"I'll come to you." Habib said and terminated the transmission. Sulu refused to let Jacob set the tone of his day. He strolled down to the transporter room. He arrived just as Captain Habib was beaming over. Habib did not bother with any of the normal pleasantries or protocol. He stepped off the transporter pad. "I need to know."

Sulu glanced at the officer at the controls. "Dismissed." He said quietly and waited for the young man to leave. He turned to Habib and asked calmly. "What is it you need to know, Captain?"

"Have you made your report yet? And what is it going to say?" Habib was not so calm.

"I haven't made it yet." Sulu said calmly. He would not let Habib upset him. "And it will contain the facts as we know them. What else do you need to know?"

"I need to know where I stand." Captain Habib demanded. Sulu could be calm; it was not his career on the line. "I need to know what your take will be on the whole incident."

"My 'take' will be that mistakes were made." Sulu said. He hoped that his calm, measured response would calm Habib down. "And because of that a man died."

"You son of a bitch." Habib said softly, almost under his breath. Looking Sulu in the eye, he added. "You will cost me my command."

"Your command?" Sulu asked coolly. "What I have to say will not cost you anything. Only your own actions will be judged. That is what it means to be captain."

"I will return to the Saratoga now." Habib stepped back onto the pad.

"Fine." Sulu said stepping behind the controls. He could see that the conversation was pointless. "Energizing." In a moment Habib was back aboard the Saratoga. Sulu opened the senior officer comline and said, "Sulu to bridge."

"Lee here."

"Lt. Lee, contact Starfleet command. I need to speak to Admiral Reese. I'll be in my ready room."

"Aye, Sir."

Sulu went to his office and waited for the Admiral's call. He was glad it was taking some time because he needed to collect his thoughts. Basically what he had was a collection of small mistakes. None of which by itself would ever cause much of a problem. But it was the scene with Habib in the transporter room that bothered Sulu.

"Captain Sulu." Admiral Reese said. "Jim Kirk just told me you are the man to see about that legendary poker game on Starbase 12 every year."

"Admiral." Sulu smiled. "We'd love to have you join us."

"What have you found out about the problems aboard Saratoga?" The older man asked. Sulu's smile faded, his manner became all business.

"We've determined that Captain Warren was poisoned. It was ingested by smoking cigarettes laced with the poison. He seemed unaware of the slow effect on him. The poison has been traced to a smuggler on a ship known as Matrix. We do not know which of the Matrix owners or crew was involved. No one in the Saratoga crew made

the connection or took the initiative to ask the hard questions. I will of course forward all the details to you, Admiral." Sulu said carefully. He did not want to make any mistakes when other people's careers are involved. But Admiral Reese knew Sulu too well. He and Kirk went back to the Academy together. Reese had been the one that had assigned Sulu to Excelsior. He had listened when Kirk had recommended Sulu.

"What else, Captain?"

"The rest is just opinion, Sir. I have no facts so I am reluctant to bring it up."

Sulu stalled.

"Then I will treat it as such."

"I am concerned about Jacob Habib's part in this, Sir." Sulu said.

"Go on." Admiral Reese said.

Sulu again proceeded carefully. "As first officer he should have questioned the captain more aggressively."

"An error in judgment, Captain." The Admiral said. "You can't hang a man for that."

"True," Sulu agreed. "However I just had a conversation with him that makes me question him."

"Explain."

"He asked me what I would report. I told him. He was concerned that my report would cost him. He did not explicitly ask for my help. But I felt the implication was there that he wanted me to put a good light on the facts." Sulu said. "I was not comfortable with it."

"Thank you, Captain, for your report and opinion." The Admiral said very officially. "I will advise you of the results of this investigation. You will receive new orders forthwith. Reese out."

Sulu breathed a sigh of relief. He would be happy to have this business behind him. There were just a few loose ends to tie up. He went back to the bridge. Mr. Kyle stood up as Sulu came down to the center seat. "Mr. Kyle, forward all information we have on the Saratoga incident to Admiral Reese. Coordinate with Dr. Patrick."

"Aye sir." Mr. Kyle said and left the bridge.

"Rand, signal Saratoga that Admiral Reese is expecting a full report from Captain Habib, Dr. Hui, and Lt. Commander T'Penn today."

"Aye sir." Rand carried out her orders. The crew waited. Sulu gave no further orders. He was waiting too. Finally, Rand said. "Incoming message from command, Captain."

"On screen, Commander."

Commander Sara Glorioso appeared on the center screen. She was Admiral Reese's top aide. "Good day, Captain. I have new orders for you."

"Good thing, Commander. My crew was starting to get bored." Sulu said and smiled. He hadn't seen Sara in months, but she never changed. She wore her black hair in a regulation braid and her manner was all business. Sulu preferred to think of her as he had seen her at a picnic at headquarters while on extended leave; her hair down and her kids crowded around her.

"Command wants to speak to the crew of the Mattrix. You are to locate and secure that ship by what ever means necessary." she said. "I have forwarded all information Starfleet has on the Mattrix to you on a secured channel."

"By whatever means necessary?" Sulu asked.

"Those are your orders, Captain." Glorioso replied.

"Acknowledged." Sulu nodded, thinking over his new assignment. "And Saratoga?"

"She's been ordered back to headquarters." Commander Glorioso shrugged noncommittally. Her orders were to answer the captain's questions, but not to volunteer anything else. When he did not ask anything else, she smiled warmly and said. "And Hikaru, congratulations on your new son."

"Thank you, Sara." Sulu returned her smile. "Excelsior out."

"Course, Captain?" Lt. Lee asked after the main screen had returned to the normal view.

"Set course for Space Station New Freedom." Sulu said. "Warp three."

"Course laid in." Gonzoles consulted her control board and reported. "ETA twenty three hours, seventeen minutes."