

Captain Sulu was on his way to the transporter room. His ensigns were due to report at 08:00 hours. It was now 08:30. Anybody who hadn't made it by that point, he wanted to know about. He saw two ensigns hurry into the transporter room ahead of him.

"Captain." Chekov called just before Sulu got to the transporter room. The Captain turned around and watched Chekov coming towards him. As he got close, Chekov asked. "Do you have a minute, Hikaru?"

"Of course. Let's take a walk." Sulu started walking back towards the playground. "Have you made a decision?"

"I have." Chekov nodded as they walked along together. "I want the job."

"That's great, Pavel." Sulu grinned and offered his best friend his hand. "It's going to be wonderful having you on board."

"I am looking forward to it." Chekov shook his hand. They continued walking. "Last night you said something about the warp drive being out. What happened?"

"We answered a distress call near the Cardassian border." Captain Sulu explained. "A Tarellian transport full of colonist. The Cardassians took exception to our offer of aid."

"That does not make sense." Chekov said. "Why should they care that you answered a distress call?"

"It would seem the planet the colonist were bound for was in what they considered Cardassian space." Sulu said. "They saw it as an encroachment by the Federation."

"And the Excelsior as an enforcement." Chekov nodded. "Did they expect you to ignore the distress call?"

"They felt the Tarellians had gotten what they deserved and they should be an example to any one else who tried to colonize the planets along the Cardassian border." Sulu stopped and turned towards his new first officer. "We were attacked by three warships. The Tarellian ship tried to return fire and was destroyed. Two hundred and fifty lives lost. We destroyed one of the war ships. The other two retreated back across the border."

"You did not follow." Chekov said.

"Orders." Sulu said simply. They were not the kind of orders the Captain liked. Too rigid. "We are not to cross into Cardassian space. And we had sustained a lot of damage."

"And what did the Tarellian government have to say?" Chekov asked.

"You know command." Sulu said. "Everything is on a need to know basis. And they don't think we need to know."

"Well, you know what Captain Kirk would say about that." Chekov smiled.

"Yes. That we need to know everything." Sulu nodded. They continued walking along the edge of the park. "At some point in time command will realize their captains function better with complete information. Do you still know that ensign who worked in the office of the chief of planetary relations?"

"She is a Lt. Commander now." Chekov said "I haven't spoken to Sydney Russell in a long time, but I understand she is now assigned to the Inspector General's office. It wouldn't hurt to give her a call."

"I knew your long list of friends at headquarters would come in handy one day." Sulu smiled at him. "Have you talked to Captain Kirk yet?"

"No." Chekov shook his head. "I haven't had a chance."

"I'm surprised it took you all night to make up your mind, Pavel."

"It took me about two seconds." Chekov grinned. "The rest of the night I spent trying to explain it to Cathy."

"Let me guess, she wanted you to take a ground assignment."

"She wanted me to leave Starfleet." Chekov confided.

"And do what?" Sulu asked. Chekov shrugged. Sulu shook his head slightly as if to get rid of the unimaginable image of his friend as a civilian. "So, are you two ok now?"

"For now." Chekov shrugged again. His relationship with Cathy was one of the few subjects Chekov did not feel comfortable discussing with Sulu. Cathy and Jimmi were as close as sisters, yet Hikaru and Cathy barely tolerated each other.

"Good." Sulu nodded and headed back towards the transporter room. As they walked the Captain asked casually. "Why don't you just marry the girl, Pavel?"

"I have considered it." Chekov said.

"Lt. Gonzoles." Sulu said as he walked into the transporter room. The group of ensigns that surrounded the lieutenant snapped to attention. "Report."

"All present and accounted for." Gonzoles reported. "We're just sorting out the details Captain."

"Good. Carry on, Gonzoles." Sulu stepped up on the transporter pad. "Commander Chekov, when you are through on Enterprise let me know. We still have a lot to talk about."

"Aye Captain." Chekov answered.

"Excelsior, Chief." Sulu said to the transporter operator. "Energize."

Once the Captain had dematerialized, Lt. Gonzoles asked. "Are you signing on with Excelsior, Pavel?"

"Yes, Rosita. As First Officer." Chekov nodded.

"That's great." Gonzoles offered her hand. Her smile was bright and enthusiastic. "Congratulations."

"Thank you." Chekov shook her hand and returned her smile. He hoped the rest of the crew greeted him as warmly. Taking his place on the transporter pad, Chekov said. "Enterprise please, Chief. Energize."

Chekov materialized on Enterprise. Ensign Ingersoll was at the controls of the transporter. She was tall with her almost white blond hair pulled into a neat bun at the nape of her neck. She was capable but quiet. Chekov hardly knew her although she had been on board for three years.

"Morning Ingersoll."

"Good morning Mr. Chekov."

"Is Captain Kirk on board?" Chekov asked.

"Yes Sir." she said checking her logs to be certain. "He has not logged out this morning."

"Computer. Location of Captain Kirk." Chekov asked.

"Captain Kirk is in sick bay." the computer reported. Chekov headed towards sick bay without another word. As Chekov got off the turbo lift, Kirk was just coming out of sick bay.

"Captain." Chekov said.

"Chekov." Kirk stopped in mid step and looked at Chekov expectantly, one eyebrow raised. When Chekov hesitated, Kirk asked. "What can I do for you?"

"Captain Sulu has offered me the position of first officer of Excelsior." Chekov said quickly. "And I have accepted, Sir."

"Good for you, Pavel." Kirk said. "When do you report?"

"He needs me right away, Captain." Chekov said. "Commander Kyle has already left for Earth. But, Captain I wanted to say..." He hesitated again.

"What?"

"That I will miss being on Enterprise." Chekov said. He was unable to express his feelings of loss in greater detail.

"So will I, Mr. Chekov." Kirk sighed. He managed a smile and added. "But Excelsior is a beautiful ship and I don't have to tell you that Sulu is a good captain. I envy you, Pavel."

"I will inform Captain Spock before I clean out my quarters." Chekov said.

Kirk nodded. "Good luck, Commander Chekov."

"Thank you, Captain Kirk."

There wasn't anything else to say so Chekov headed off to the bridge to talk to Captain Spock. He found Spock at the bridge science station. Lt. Okuda was at the helm and Commander Uhura was busy at the communication station. Other than those three the bridge was empty. Enterprise was operating with a constantly shrinking staff. They had lost personnel at each of her last three stops.

"Captain Spock." Chekov said. "I wanted to tell you personally that I am leaving Enterprise today."

"You've taken Captain Sulu up on his offer." Spock said standing up to talk to Chekov. "Congratulations. Captain Sulu is fortunate to be getting an officer with your abilities and experience as his second in command."

"Thank you Sir." Chekov smiled. "I will do my best to live up to that assessment."

He wanted to say more, but again he was at a loss for words. He just nodded to Spock and turned to go. As Chekov was about to get on the turbo lift, Uhura left her chair and accused him. "Sneaking out, Pavel Chekov?"

"Of course not." Chekov grinned. "But you looked busy."

"Minor details can wait. It's not like we have any real business to take care of." Uhura hugged Chekov affectionately. "I'm going to miss you Pavel."

"I will miss you too." Chekov said. "But we will not lose touch. Let me know what you decide about your job offers."

"If I can just make up my mind. A different ship, different crew or the Academy." Uhura nodded. "Teaching full time, I just don't know if that's what I want. But another ship? I just don't know."

"I know exactly what you mean." Chekov agreed. Until the First Officer job came his way, he was having the exact same internal discussion. "But right now I have to go. Hikaru is waiting for me. You will be at the Café tonight?"

"Yes, I'll see you then." Uhura smiled. After Chekov left the bridge, she turned to Spock

and said. "We are just going to have to throw a going away party for him tonight."

"I can think of no one more capable of arranging such a party, Commander." Spock said.

"Neither can I." Uhura agreed. She returned to her station and started making plans. The first thing she did was call Excelsior to enlist Captain Sulu's help.

Later that morning, Cathy buzzed the door of the closed Café several times. Jimmi and her staff were just setting up for the lunch crowd. Everyone was busy. George and Randy were in the kitchen. Mike had the waiters and table bussers readying the bar and tables. They were letting Jimmi supervise. The No Ranks Café would open in less than an hour.

"I know you're not open yet, J.M." Cathy said when Jimmi opened the door to answer the insistent buzzing. "But I am in desperate need of coffee and company."

"No problem, C.J. Come on in." Jimmi stepped behind the bar. She poured Cathy a cup of coffee and herself a large glass of iced fruit juice. Cathy followed her over to the bar and sat down. "So what's up? Too much vodka last night?"

"No. It's Pavel." Cathy poured a bit of milk into her coffee. "I guess he has told your husband of his decision already."

"What decision?" Jimmi asked.

"To sign on as first officer of his precious ship." Cathy seemed to think this was old news to Jimmi. Surprise was obvious in her voice when she asked. "Didn't you know?"

"No." Jimmi smiled. "But that's good news for both Pavel and Harry."

"Doesn't your Captain tell you anything?" Cathy seemed annoyed.

"He wouldn't tell me something like that until Pavel said yes." Jimmi explained. "So what does that mean for the two of you?"

"He doesn't seem to really care how I feel." Cathy sipped her steaming coffee carefully. "He wants it all his own way."

"Well if that's not the pot calling the kettle..." Jimmi laughed.

"I don't understand what's so special about Starfleet." Cathy complained. "There are plenty of civilian science positions. He could work anywhere."

"Come on, C.J." Jimmi said softly. "You know Pav went into the Academy before he was even eighteen. Starfleet and especially Enterprise has been his family since then. You can't just ask him to leave. It's been his whole life."

"I know." Cathy said. "But when he told me that Captain Kirk was retiring and they were decommissioning Enterprise, well I thought all that was over. But just when he was ready to come home to me, Sulu comes along with this offer. And bam! He's gone again."

"Sorry." Jimmi said sipping her juice. "But you can't fault a person for doing what he loves. After all you do. And so do I."

"Is that how you live with it?" Cathy asked. Jimmi just shrugged. "It just seems there should be an easier way."

"I never said it was easy." Jimmi said. "But until the day command wakes up and let's families live on ships, it's the only way."

"Families on starships?" Cathy laughed. "Really J.M.! That would never work. There is no way I could run my business from a starship."

"True." Jimmi agreed. "Running the Café long distance wouldn't work either. And I'm not about to give up my life just because he's on a starship."

"Are you trying to be subtle, J.M.?" Cathy asked.

"Who me?" Jimmi laughed. Before she could add anything else, the communication station in the kitchen buzzed. Jimmi left Cathy sitting at the bar to answer it. When she returned to Cathy, Jimmi said "I need your help tonight, C.J."

"Tonight?"

"I need you to get Pav here by eighteen hundred hours." Jimmi said "But not before."

"Why?"

"Because his friends on Enterprise are throwing him a good bye party." Jimmi explained. "And it's a surprise. That was Commander Uhura calling."

"All right." Cathy said. "I'll keep him busy. That is if I even see him before then. I'm sure he has a lot to do to take over as second in command."

"I'll make sure that Hikaru doesn't work him to hard." Jimmi said. "At least today. It will be a big party. Pav has a lot of friends."

"Yes, he does." Cathy agreed.

Little Harry came running into the Café from Jimmi's office. "Mom, is it time yet?"

"Yes Harry, it's time." Jimmi smiled and came out from behind the bar.

"Time?" Cathy asked.

"To go to the playground." Jimmi said. "Come with us. This hour before the Café opens is a great time to sit and watch the kids play."

Harry grabbed her hand and pulled. "Come with us, Aunt Cathy."

"Ok Harry." Cathy laughed. "How can I resist an invitation like that."

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Captain Sulu logged the transfer as soon as he got to his ready room. With Kirk's recommendation it was immediately approved by Starfleet Command. Commander Chekov transferred his belongings to his new cabin on Excelsior. The ship was much larger than Enterprise with an equally larger crew. A few minutes after Chekov found his office on deck two, Captain Sulu joined him.

"Find everything?" Sulu asked from the door way. Chekov looked up from the computer screen.

"John Kyle left me several files to bring me up to speed." Chekov said as Sulu came in and sat across the desk from him. "You did not tell me that I would also be the chief science officer."

"Would you have it any other way?" Sulu asked.

"No." Chekov grinned. "But it is a lot to get a hold of."

"Concentrate on the bridge science crew first." Sulu advised. "The other science departments pretty much run themselves. Johnny relied heavily on Lt. Ziminski for administrative matters."

Chekov turned his attention back to the computer screen. "Two third of the new ensigns

are in the science departments. This is twice as many ensigns as Enterprise had in any July that I can remember."

"We're a big ship." Sulu smiled.

"Chekov to Lt. Ziminski."

An officer in his late twenties with reddish brown hair and a face full of freckles appeared on his terminal screen. "Ziminski here."

"Schedule a staff meeting for all science department heads at thirteen hundred hours." Chekov said.

"Aye Sir." Ziminski nodded. "And the new officers, Sir? Do you want a meeting with them?"

Chekov thought a moment. "Yes. Schedule them for fourteen hundred hours. Chekov out."

After Chekov closed the connection to Ziminski, he spent two hours with Sulu going over details of his new assignment. It was a conversation that should have taken a lot longer. But Sulu and Chekov knew each other well. They were of one mind on most subjects.

"I'm starving." Sulu announced. "Let's get some lunch."

"You go ahead." Chekov said. "I should at least know my department heads names before going to this meeting."

"All right." Sulu stood up and started out the door. "Don't work too hard."

"Aye aye Captain." Chekov called as the door closed behind Sulu.