

C.J. sat at her desk in her ship and requested a connection to the Starship Excelsior. She was used to talking to Commander Uhura and Lt. Zarqawa on Enterprise. This would be the first time she called Pavel on Excelsior. An unfamiliar ensign appeared on her screen.

“This is Excelsior.” He said.

“I wish to speak to Commander Chekov.” C.J. said.

The ensign looked to someone that C.J. could not see. He turned back to her and said. “Commander Chekov is in a meeting right now. Would you like to leave a message?”

“Yes, thank you.” C.J. said and waited while she was connected to Pavel’s mail. When the welcome message had finished she said. “I guess you are pretty busy on your first day. Are we still on for dinner? I’ll be here on my ship. Let me know.”

Pavel Chekov hurried from the transporter room to the civilian landing bay. He stopped momentarily to place his palm against the door’s sensor. The ship recognized him and the door slid open. “Catrina.” He called as he passed through the dark cockpit into the office/living section of her small space ship. “I am so sorry that I am late.”

Cathy came out of the bathroom. She was wearing the terry cloth robe that she kept for him and was drying her hair with a towel. “I am running a little late myself.”

“You look beautiful.” Pavel smiled. He pulled the belt on the robe until the robe opened revealing her naked body. He slid his hands along her smooth skin and pulling her close to him, he kissed her. When their lips parted, he asked, “How long do we have?”

“What do you mean?” Cathy asked.

“What time does the party start at the Café?” Pavel asked.

“Party?”

“I have known Uhura for years.” Pavel smiled as he caressed her. “As soon as I told her I was leaving Enterprise, she was planning a party.”

Cathy laughed. “I am suppose to have you there at 18 hundred hours.”

“Good.” Pavel kissed her again. “Then we have plenty of time.”

“Time?” Cathy asked. She tossed the damp towel on the bed. “What do you suggest we do with this time?”

“Do I have to be specific?” Pavel laughed. Cathy started undoing his jacket. “I could give you a list.”

Cathy stopped undoing his jacket. She sighed. “If only we always had this time.”

Pavel wrapped his arms around her and held her tightly. She laid her head on his shoulder and tried not to cry. He whispered softly to her, “We will just have to make good use of the time we have.”

Commander Pavel Chekov and C.J. Vasco walked into the No Ranks Café at exactly 18 hundred hours. Besides the ensigns still waiting to report and Excelsior officers, the bar was full of Enterprise officers. Everyone who knew and worked with Chekov was there. There was

cheering, laughing and a lot of story telling. Cathy found it easy to slip away from him and find a seat at the bar.

“Hit me, J.M.” C.J. said. Jimmi poured her a vodka on the rocks. Then pulled the bar stool she kept behind the bar so that she could sit across from Cathy. They watched the party for a few minutes before Cathy asked, “So why is Excelsior here an extra night? I doubt that Hikaru stayed just so they could have this party for Pavel.”

“Hikaru said it was some routine maintenance.” Jimmi shrugged. “The scuttlebutt is that Excelsior had some battle damage that had to be repaired.”

“Damn it, don’t you hate it when he lies to you like that?” Cathy demanded.

“He did use the dreaded C word.” Jimmi laughed. “And I hate that.”

“Classified. Yeah, I hate that word too.” Cathy did not laugh at all. She took a drink of her vodka and added, “God, I hate Starfleet.”

“My father’s response to me when I say that is that I have a funny way of showing it.” Jimmi smiled.

Cathy finished her drink and said, “Hit me again, J.M.”

Jimmi poured the drink and returned the bottle to its spot under the bar. “You need to slow down, C.J..”

Cathy did not respond to Jimmi’s statement. She looked over her shoulder to a group of Enterprise officers talking and laughing with Pavel. She turned back to the bar and sipped her drink. She sighed. Her voice was heavy and sad when she said, “He’s never coming home, J.M.”

“Never say never.” Jimmi countered.

“Damn him.”

The party had been underway for quite awhile. Pavel had spent most of his time talking to Enterprise officers. C.J. had spent the entire time sitting at the bar talking to Jimmi. Pavel found himself standing next to Dr. Christine Chapel when a song he particularly liked to dance to started.

“Christine, dance with me.”

“Sure.” Christine smiled. When they were on the dance floor, she asked. “But isn’t this going to make your girlfriend mad?”

“It would not be possible to make her more angry at me right now.” Pavel said with a smile as they danced. “But Jimmi tells me that the dance floor is the best place to have a private conversation here.”

“Ok. What did you want to talk about?” Christine asked. Pavel did not answer immediately. “You are not nervous about your new assignment, are you?”

“It is a step up.” Pavel admitted. “A lot more responsibility.”

“But you are ready for it.” Christine said. “More than ready. And you certainly don’t have anything to prove to Hikaru.”

"True." Chekov nodded. "I am not worried about that."

"Then what?"

"I don't know." Pavel shrugged. "He has just always made it look so easy, you know?"

Christine laughed. "You know it is not easy. And I have seen you in command. You also make it look easy. So sure of yourself and your decisions."

"I hope so." Pavel laughed. A little more seriously, he added. "I hope so."

"I know so." Christine said. "So what about, C.J.?"

"You will make a good CMO one day, Christine." Pavel laughed. "You know all the hard questions to ask."

Christine laughed with him. "And I am not going to let you side step like that."

"Well, she would like me to take a civilian research job somewhere." Pavel shrugged.

"Really?" Christine asked. "You are not seriously considering that, are you?"

"She does have a point." Pavel said as they danced easily together. "There are many science positions that are not in Star Fleet."

"Of course, if research was what you are interested in." Christine said. "It never has been. You could have been strictly a science officer from day one, but you chose the navigation department because it put you on the bridge. In the middle of the action."

"Yes." Pavel nodded with a smile. "If it wasn't for Mr. Spock, I would probably never have become a certified science officer."

"And what a waste that would have been." Christine smiled. "So what is C.J. going to do now that you have taken the job?"

"I honestly don't know." Pavel shrugged again. "She is angry and hurt. She is yelling one minute and crying the next."

"Aren't you angry?" Christine asked.

"What do I have to be angry about?" Pavel laughed. "This is the best thing that has happened to me in years."

"If I was you, I would be angry that my lover was not supporting my career." Christine shrugged.

"Well, there is that." Pavel nodded and laughed. More seriously he added. "She will come around."

"See, I told you. You sound so sure." Christine smiled. The music stopped. As they walked off the dance floor together, she said. "I am going to miss you, Pavel."

They walked over to two Excelsior officers sitting at the far end of the bar. Lt. Commander Yazdani put his arm around Dr. Chapel's shoulder. "Chrissy! How are you?"

"I'm good, Yaz." She laughed

"You know Pat, right?" Yaz asked.

"We've met." Christine smiled. "Nice to see you again, Doctor."

"Please, not so formal, Christine. Everyone calls me Pat." The tall doctor smiled. He turned his attention to Chekov. "Congratulations on the first officer job, Pavel. Nervous?"

"Thank you, Pat." Pavel said and smiled. "Not nervous at all. I am looking forward to it."

Captain Sulu inserted himself into the group between Chekov and Chapel. He winked at

the doctor who now had her arm around Yazdani's waist. "Making new friends, Christine?"

"Oh shut up, Hikaru." Christine laughed. "Besides, Yaz is an old friend."

"Really?" Chekov and Sulu said at precisely the same time and in precisely the same way, causing Christine to just laugh more.

Sulu added. "Is there anyone in Star Fleet that you don't know, Yaz?"

"There must be some, Captain." Yaz grinned. "But if I don't know them, I doubt they are worth knowing."

Captain Sulu left the group and walked the length of the bar to where C.J. and Jimmi were sitting. He leaned on it and smiled at his wife. "Are you going to stay back there all night or will you come out and dance with me?"

"Well, how can I turn down an invitation like that?" Jimmi asked with a smile. She met her husband at the end of the bar. They walked onto the dance floor together.

"How is C.J. doing?" Hikaru asked.

"Not good." Jimmi sighed. Shaking her head slowly, she added. "But I don't seem to be able to say anything to make her feel better."

"Baby, there are some things you just can't fix."

Dr. McCoy sat down next to Cathy Vasco at the bar. Except for the very sad look on her face, she looked beautiful in her simple black silk dress. McCoy caught the bartender's eye.

"Randy, a cup of coffee, please."

"Sure, Doctor." Randy put the coffee on the bar in front of McCoy.

"Sugar, cream?" McCoy asked.

Randy put them on the bar. "I thought you drank it black, Doc."

"I do." McCoy nodded as he added a spoonful of sugar and a generous amount of cream to the cup. He slid it slowly in front of Cathy. Randy just nodded and walked away.

McCoy lowered his voice and spoke to Cathy. "This is not the way you want to handle this, Dear."

Cathy sighed and turned towards her best friend's father. She thought about asking him just how she should handle it, but instead she just shook her head. She understood why McCoy would be concerned about her drinking. She knew that he knew about her brother's condition and that she could develop the same condition. "I am not drunk, Doctor."

"Not yet." McCoy agreed. There was no point in challenging that assertion. He moved her vodka glass away from her. "Drink the coffee."

Cathy sipped the coffee and put the mug back down. She stared into the coffee for a few minutes, not saying anything. McCoy just waited. She did not look at McCoy when she finally said, "I just thought it was my turn."

"Your turn?" He asked quietly. Resting his hand lightly on her back, McCoy drew her

closer to him.

She would not look him in the eye, her head was down as she whispered. "My turn to be happy. To have him home with me."

"If you make him give up what he wants for you," McCoy was whispering in her ear now. "He will resent it. He will resent you. Is that what you want?"

"No." She sighed. A single tear ran down her cheek. After a moment, she added. "I just don't understand why he doesn't want to be with me."

"Cathy, really! Who could resist you?" McCoy asked gently. He smiled and added, "Now, if I was only 15 years younger."

"Only 15?" Cathy could not help but giggle. She wiped the tear away. It was the first time in their conversation that she actually looked at him. McCoy shrugged and smiled. She realized she had been wishing her own father was there. McCoy was a good substitute. Cathy leaned closer and hugged him. "Thank you, Doctor. I think I am going to go wash my face."

"Good girl." McCoy smiled.

After Cathy left for the ladies room, Randy served McCoy his usual and said. "You got a real talent there, Doc. I didn't think anything would make her feel better tonight."

"Watch her, Randy." McCoy said. "Don't let her drink too much tonight."

"You got it, Doc." Randy nodded.

Jimmi and Hikaru were coming off the dance floor together when Cathy was coming towards them. She stopped and hugged Jimmi, "Good night, J.M. Have fun on Excelsior. I will come see you when the baby is due."

"You're leaving now?" Jimmi asked.

"Nothing to stay around for." Cathy said and started for the door.

Jimmi started to follow her but Hikaru still had her hand in his. He pulled her to a stop. "Let her go."

Jimmi looked to the door as it closed behind C.J. then back to her husband, "But..."

"It's not your problem." Hikaru said.

"But..."

"Come on." Hikaru walked off towards Pavel.

Jimmi followed him. When they reached the group that Pavel was talking to Jimmi said, "Did you and Cathy have another fight?"

"We are not through with this one yet." Pavel joked. He turned his back on the group to give Jimmi his full attention.

"You know she left, right?"

"She did not say anything to me, but I saw her go." Pavel shrugged.

"Jeanie." Hikaru said. "Leave it alone."

"But you ship out in the morning." Jimmi said, ignoring her husband's advice. "Pavel,

you can't go without working this out."

"What would you have me say to her, Princess?" Pavel asked. "What can I say that I did not say last night, or this morning, or this afternoon?"

"I don't know." Jimmi admitted. All her life she had been all too aware that when her family left on a star ship, it was possible she would never see them again. "I just know I never let anyone I loved ship out when we were on bad terms."

"I know." Pavel said. "But Catrina is not you, Princess."

"When you walked in here together tonight, I thought everything was ok." Jimmi said. "I mean, I know she is not happy about it, but I thought..."

Pavel just shrugged. Hikaru decided to change the subject. "Jeanie, you have been on your feet too long. Come sit down with me."

He did not give her any choice. Hikaru walked her over to the table where her three father's were sitting together. There was one empty chair. Without waiting for an invitation, he told her to sit down and pulled up a chair for himself next to her.

"Hi." Jimmi smiled brightly at her fathers. "I am being sat down because I am a bad wife."

"I did not say that." Hikaru laughed at her.

"No. You said I had been on my feet too long." Jimmi said. "And until you asked me to dance, I have been sitting all evening."

"What were you doing that was so bad?" Jim Kirk asked with a smile.

"I was not listening to my husband and I was sticking my nose in other people's business." Jimmi grinned at her husband. When his junior officers were around, she could never say any thing like this. But this was family and she could tease him for his old fashioned ideas about marriage as much as she liked.

"That is your nature." Spock said.

"That's what I say." Jimmi laughed. "And there is no point in going against nature. Is there?"

"I wouldn't go that far." McCoy said. "There is still freedom of choice."

"What's that got to do with it?" Jimmi asked.

"Just because it is in your nature to be concerned for you friend's happiness, does not mean you can make their decisions for them." Spock said. "They must choose their own way."

"And you can choose to stay out of it." McCoy said.

"Since when are you two on the same side of any argument?" Jimmi asked.

"This has got to be a first." Kirk added.

"Come on." Sulu patted his leg, and ordered "Put them here."

Jimmi laughingly complied, resting her ankles on top of his thigh. Hikaru slipped one of her shoes off and let it drop to the floor. He started massaging her foot. Jimmi sighed, "Oh, that feels wonderful."

"You know, in some cultures, you could get arrested for doing that." Kirk grinned.

"Foot massage?" Jimmi asked. "You're kidding? I am not sure I could get through a pregnancy without it."

"On Gemmark, it is considered having sex." Kirk laughed, "Just to have your shoes off in

public is considered very low class. Your family would disown you.”

“On Lodurn Three, it is punishable by death.” Hikaru nodded.

“Everything is punishable by death there.” McCoy complained. “I have never seen a culture with less respect for their own lives.”

“Chekov was a lieutenant when we were there, wasn’t he?” Kirk asked. Spock, McCoy and Sulu all nodded. “We nearly lost him then.”

“What happened?” Jimmi asked. Her husband took her other shoe off and started working on her other foot. “Did he take his shoes off?”

“He kissed a girl.” Hikaru said.

“Punishable by death?” Jimmi asked. The others nodded. “Well, that’s just stupid.”

“She was pretty.” Kirk laughed.

“And she had saved his life.” McCoy added.

“However, she was already married to the leader of one of the warring factions that we were trying to negotiate with.” Spock mentioned.

“Oh. Well, that doesn’t sound like a good thing.” Jimmi said.

“It wasn’t.” Sulu laughed.

Commander Uhura walked up to Commander Chekov and slid her arm around his waist. With a nod of her head, she started a slow stroll away from the group he had been talking to. Pavel put his arm around her shoulder and followed her lead as they walked through the partying star ship crews. Uhura smiled at him and said, “First officer! My, my, my.”

Pavel chuckled. “And about damn time too.”

“I am surprised it took Hikaru so long to ask for you.”

“We had talked about it before.” Pavel said. “But he did not have an appropriate opening until now.”

“Perhaps John Kyle put off transferring until he knew you would be available.”

Chekov laughed. “Somehow I doubt that figured into his decision at all.”

“So I hear it is science officer as well as first officer.” Uhura said. “Excelsior is a big ship. That’s got to be a lot to get a handle on.”

“You don’t think I can do it?” Pavel teased.

“I know you can do it.” Uhura smiled at him. “I am just so jealous.”

“What will you do?” Pavel asked. “Have you decided to turn down the job on the Lexington?”

“Yes.” Uhura said. “It was the same job I have been doing on Enterprise for so long. I want a new challenge. I would have moved on before this, but...”

“Enterprise has been home and family.” Pavel nodded. He felt the same way. “So if not Lexington, then what? The Academy?”

“I am returning to Earth with Enterprise to consider my options.” She shrugged. “Captain Kirk has signed me up for Admiral Reese’s command seminar. I will do that before taking any other assignment.”

“I recall Hikaru saying that seminar was very worth while.” Pavel said. They had ended up at the bar. “Randy, another beer and what is that you are drinking?”

Uhura laughed. "It's called a may day. Appropriate, don't you think?"

"Yes." Chekov laughed.

"Coming right up." Randy said.

When Jimmi was back behind the bar again, she refilled Dr. Chapel's drink and placed it on the bar in front of her. Chapel was wearing her blonde hair in a short layered style tonight. Although it seemed a paler blonde than the last time Jimmi had seen her. "Enjoying the party, Christy?"

"You bet." Christine smiled. "How are you feeling, Jimmi?"

"Great." Jimmi said. "I am still in that 'burst of energy' stage. Another month and I will hit the 'will this pregnancy never end' stage."

Christine laughed at her categories. "I believe most people still use the trimester system to describe pregnancy."

"Only you medical types." Jimmi laughed. "And speaking of medical types, you seem to be spending a lot of time talking to Pat tonight. Something going on here?"

"Going on?" Christine asked innocently and sipped her drink.

Jimmi grinned. "Christy, you are blushing."

"Am not." Chapel laughed then immediately turned bright red. Jimmi laughed at her.

Dr. Tim Patrick walked up to the bar next to Christine. He looked from one woman to the next. He asked, "Why do I get the feeling I want to know what is going on here?"

"Because you're nosey?" Jimmi asked, still laughing.

"Moi?" Pat asked full of mock indignation. "Nosey?"

"You mean you aren't?" Christine asked. He just grinned and shrugged. "So what brought you over here, Pat?"

"I need a drink." He answered immediately and put his empty glass on the bar. Jimmi picked it up and mixed him another drink. He couldn't help smiling as he looked into Chapel's sparkling pale blue eyes.

"A likely excuse." Christine said as Jimmi put the glass on the bar in front of Pat. "Look, your glass is full."

"So it is." Pat said. "Guess I will have to come clean and tell you I came over to ask you to dance."

Smiling, Christine said, "I'd love to dance with you, Pat."

Pavel walked into the civilian landing bay again. When he reached Cathy's ship, he placed his hand on the door sensor. But it did not open. He just stared at it for a moment. Pavel tried it again, when it still did not work he buzzed the signal and waited. He buzzed it again.

Still she did not come to the door. He banged on the door with his fist and yelled. "Catrina!"

After he had yelled her name several times, she finally came and opened the door. She stood there with her robe held tightly around herself. Her voice was hard and angry when she demanded, "What?"

"You locked me out?" He asked in Russian. He did not realize he was speaking louder than normal because he had been drinking. "You have never locked me out!"

"What did you expect?" Cathy yelled at him in their native language. "I left the party 2 hours ago. I guess you did not notice."

"I noticed."

"Excuse me, Sir." A security guard said as he came towards them. He was a thin young man no taller than Chekov. His rank was ensign. "Is there a problem?"

Chekov turned to the security guard. He noticed the security officer's partner standing several feet away. He was older and larger. He was watching for signs of trouble from the slightly inebriated commander. Chekov switched to from Russian to Standard automatically. "There is no problem, Ensign."

The security guard did not look convinced. He studied them for a minute before saying, "I would appreciate it if you could keep it down, Sir."

Pavel was about to reply when Cathy grabbed his arm and pulled him into the ship. "I don't think your new captain would appreciate it if you got arrested tonight, Pavel." Once she had him inside, she leaned out and smiled at the young security guard. "Sorry about the noise. There won't be any more problems."

"Thank you ma'am." The young man nodded and walked back to his partner who had waited by the next ship. "I think we should circle back here in a bit."

"Good idea." The Lieutenant nodded. "It would seem the party at the Café has broken up. We'll check back here after we make sure there are no problems in the park."

"Damn Pavel," Cathy said. He was leaning against the wall of the cockpit. "How much did you have to drink?"

"Not enough." Pavel dismissed her question quickly and asked his own. "Why did you walk out without a word to me?"

"You were busy." Cathy walked back into the living area.

"The party was thrown in my honor." Pavel followed her. "Was I suppose to just ignore that?"

"Of course not." She said and turned to face him. Her arms were crossed in front of her, holding the robe tightly closed.

"Then why are you giving me a hard time?" Pavel asked.

"Me?" Cathy asked. She was not about to let him turn this all on her. "I am doing nothing to you. I did not make a snap decision that changed all our plans."

"I had no plans." Pavel could not help but yell at her. "You had plans!"

"I thought those were joint plans." Cathy yelled back. "You certainly let me think that."

"Sorry." Pavel said sullenly. "I don't know what else to say."

"There is nothing else to say." Cathy agreed. They stood a few feet apart, staring at each

other. Finally, Cathy added, "No reason for you to stay."

"Catrina." Pavel's voice softened considerably. He closed the short distance between them. "This is our last night together."

Cathy turned her back on him. "Every time we reach an impasse, you think if we just make love it will all be ok."

Pavel placed his hands gently on her shoulders and spoke into her ear. "I don't need the impasse. I just want to make love to you again. Is that so wrong?"

"It's not going to change anything." Cathy said. "So what's the point?"

"It would tell me that you still love me." Pavel whispered. "That even though you don't agree with me, you still want to work it out."

"I don't agree with you." Cathy said emphatically. "I don't want you to go off on another star ship. I don't want to hear about your ship being destroyed on the news."

"You did not say that you don't love me." Pavel smiled and turned her around to face him. "You can't say that, can you?"

"I could." Cathy looked him in the eye. But she could not look him in the eye and lie to him, not about this. "But it would not be the truth."

"Catrina, I love you with all of my heart." Pavel said. "I want to stay with you tonight."

"Oh Pavel." Cathy sighed. She had told herself when she left the Café that she would not let him stay. The two hours before he came to her ship, she fumed and stewed over it. She was adamant about it. But now, he was standing in front of her, with his beautiful brown eyes and his straight-forward manner. Cathy could not deny him. "Why do I always give in to you?"

Pavel took her in his arms and said with a grin. "Because I am irresistible."

Cathy could not help but laugh at him.

The computer on C.J.'s ship brought the lighting up to fifty percent of normal. She opened her eyes. Pavel was still asleep. She sighed and asked, "Computer, what time is it?"

"The time is zero six thirty three hours." The computer responded in its artificial monotone.

"Damn." Pavel whispered. He rubbed his eyes. He reached for Cathy and pulled her close to him. She rested her head on his chest.

"What time do you have to be there?"

"In time for first shift." Pavel said. "We will leave a few minutes after that."

"I wish Jimmi wasn't going with Excelsior." Cathy said with a sigh. She needed to talk about the emotional roller coaster of the last two days with someone and Jimmi had been like a sister to her since early high school.

"I wish you were." Pavel said. She closed her eyes and snuggled into him. "You know, if we were married you could."

"What?" Cathy asked. "Come on board Excelsior for a week or two like Jimmi and little Harry do?"

“Why not?”

Cathy sat up and looked at him. She smiled and asked, “You think Hikaru would allow me on his precious ship?”

“I know he would.” Pavel said. He got up and headed for the bathroom. “If I asked him, he would probably let you come along as is. But I would prefer the formal family relationship for command.”

“Face it,” Cathy called even though the door was now closed. “You just want to be married.”

Pavel opened the door and looked out at her, “Yes. I do.”

“I know.” Cathy sighed. He retreated back into the bathroom. She added quietly, so that he would not hear her, “Me too.”

Cathy got up, put on her robe and went to the small galley for coffee. It was a narrow room, barely big enough for one person to move around in. She flipped the two chair seats that were attached to the wall down to the sitting position and pressed the button that extended the small table out from the wall. When Pavel joined her, he was dressed in his uniform except for the jacket. She poured him a cup of coffee.

“Thank you.” Pavel smiled across the tiny table at her and added a spoonful of sugar to his coffee. “You know, Catrina, anyone looking at us would assume we were already married.”

“I know that we fight like we are already married.” Cathy laughed. Pavel shrugged and sipped his coffee.

Pavel put on his uniform jacket. Cathy watched him from the doorway to the galley. Pavel smiled at her and asked, “Are you ok?”

“I guess so.” Cathy sighed. She walked into his arms and hugged him. “Just promise me one thing.”

“What?”

“That you will be very, very careful.”

“As first officer, the safety of the ship and her crew is one of my prime responsibilities.” Pavel said. “And I am very good at my job.”

“I know you are.”

“Now it is your turn to promise.” Pavel said. He pushed a stray strand of her ash blonde hair off her face and behind her ear.

“What?”

“Promise me that you will try not to worry.”

“That is a tall order, Commander.” Cathy sighed. But she smiled at him when she said, “But I will try. I promise.”

“It is time.” Pavel said.

Cathy nodded and whispered, “I love you, Pavel.”

“I love you too.” He said, then kissed her. It was a long loving kiss that neither wanted to

end. When it did, he hugged her tight and whispered into her ear, "And no matter what you say, I feel married to you."

"Pavel."

"I must go." He said, slowly stepping back from her.

"Come back to me soon." Cathy whispered as he went out the door.

"I promise."