

"Pavel!" Cathy looked up from the padd in her hand. She was reading to the boys to pass the tense time. The three of them were crowded around her on bed. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes." He smiled. The boys jumped off the bed and ran to him all asking questions.

"Was it a battle?" Jamie asked.

"Of course it was a battle!" Peter said. "Did we win, Dad?"

"Did you destroy the other ship?" Joey asked. "Did you blow it out of space?"

"Who were they?"

"Klingons?"

"No stupid! We are no where near Klingon space!"

"Boys!" Cathy called still sitting on the bed. "Give your Dad a minute to answer."

"There was a battle with the Cardassians." Chekov explained to his sons. "Did the three of you come right home when the red alert sounded?"

"Yes." All three answered together.

"They did." Cathy added.

"Good. I am proud of you." Chekov sat down at the desk and allowed himself a sigh of relief. The boys crowded around him. He kissed and hugged each. They bugged him for details of the battle. "I can not tell you everything. Some of it is classified. But we were facing three Cardassian ships that would not let us complete our mission. We did not want to fight, but there was no choice. Captain Sulu had the Excelsior keep the Cardassians busy while our other ship, the Tian Nan Men, left to complete the mission."

"They ran away?" Peter asked.

"No, Peter." Chekov said. "It was part of the plan. One of the Cardassians followed the Tian Nan Men. We are a bigger ship and better armed. It was logical that we stay and fight."

"But is it over?" Cathy asked from the bed.

"For now." Pavel smiled at her.

"Did you blow up the Cardassians, Dad?" Joey asked adding exaggerated explosions sounds as he twirled around and let himself fall on the floor. Jamie followed his example and landed on his twin brother.

"No." Pavel laughed at their game. "But we disabled their ship enough that they can not hurt us."

"Then they have no weapons?" Cathy asked.

"Not exactly." Pavel shrugged.

"It's almost dinner time." Cathy announced suddenly. "Go wash up, boys."

"Ah Mom!"

"Don't give me a hard time now, Peter." Cathy said. "Go James! Go Joseph! Now!"

"Now." Pavel added firmly. As with almost everything in the Chekov household, the boys turned it into a race. Each called out loudly that he was the winner as they ran into the bathroom.

Pavel joined his wife on the bed. He put his arm around her shoulder. Cathy turned into him. She closed her eyes and said a silent prayer of thanks. They lay down together and held each other. He whispered her name and kissed her.

"Pavel. The boys." Cathy reminded him.

"Ah, and they have never seen us kiss before." He teased her and kissed her again. Pavel

hugged her tight and slipped his hand under her shirt.

"I don't want to turn this into a sex education class." Cathy laughed. "Are you always like this after a battle?"

"There is an adrenaline rush. And it does..." Pavel smiled wickedly as he caressed her bare skin. "Get my blood up. We could send the boys to the gym and lock the door."

"I just promised them dinner." Cathy sat up and pushed his hands away. Pavel gave up and lay back with his hands behind his head. "Why didn't you destroy the Cardassians?"

"Catrina, I can not--"

"I know." Cathy cut him off. "Just tell me what you can."

"Ambassador Spock believes someone is trying to provoke a war between the Federation and the Cardassians." Pavel said. "We are trying to keep that from happening."

"This battle doesn't start a war?"

"Not if we don't let it." Pavel said. "We were defending ourselves. We did not take that defense any farther than necessary."

"You think Spock is right?"

"I do not have access to all of Spock's information. But I trust him with my life." Pavel sat up next to her. "I have no reason to question him on this."

"All right." Cathy sighed.

"Did you speak to anyone at the Deneb Co.?" Pavel asked.

"Commander Rand has not made the connection yet." Cathy shrugged. "I guess she was as busy as the rest of you."

"Can we come out now?" Peter asked from the bathroom door.

"Of course." Pavel looked over at his oldest son. Peter stood in the doorway with Jamie and Joey looking out from behind him. "Why did you think you could not come out?"

"You and Mom wanted to talk, right?" Peter walked slowly into the room. The twins bolted past him and jumped onto the bed. "Are you done now?"

"Were you listening, Peter?" Cathy asked.

"A little." Peter admitted.

"Come." Pavel gathered the twins in his arms. "Let's get some dinner."

In the mess hall, the Chekov family commandeered one of the larger tables. It took a few minutes to get organized, but soon the family was enjoying dinner together. The mess hall was crowded. Chekov noticed Ensign Bianco eating with a few friends. He kept an eye on him while savoring the family time together.

"Catrina." Pavel said when they were just about finished. "I must go back to the bridge for a short time."

"All right." Cathy shrugged. "I'll try to get through to the Deneb Co. while you are gone."

Pavel kissed Cathy and left the family. He had seen Ensign Bianco leave the mess hall directly before him. He called him in the corridor. "Mr. Bianco. A moment, please."

"Yes Sir." Bianco stopped. The two ensigns with him continued on their way.

"Dr. Patrick has released you from sick bay already?" Chekov asked.

"Yes Sir." Bianco nodded. "I had a couple burns and a bump on the head. The doctor took care of that and told me to take the rest of the day off. He wants me to stop by before my

next duty shift for a check. But it shouldn't be a problem."

"Good." Chekov nodded. "Walk with me, Ensign."

"Yes Sir." Bianco and Chekov walked down the hall together. "Is there a problem, Mr. Chekov?"

"This was your first real battle, Mr. Bianco." Chekov said. "And you performed admirably."

"Thank you, Sir."

"It can be confusing. Things happen quickly. And we all get caught up in the battle." Chekov said. "However, even in the heat of battle we do not use racist terms on the bridge."

"Racist, Sir?" Ensign Bianco asked.

"Cardi." Chekov stopped walking and turned to face the young man. "There is no place for it on the bridge. Understood?"

"Yes Sir." Ensign Bianco could feel his cheeks starting to burn. "It won't happen again, Mr. Chekov."

"Good." Chekov nodded. He started walking again, calling over his shoulder. "Then I'll see you tomorrow, Mr. Bianco."

When Commander Chekov returned to the bridge, it was in much better shape than when he left. Except for the repair crews working on the two damaged stations, everything was fairly normal. Captain Sulu turned the command chair around.

"Everything ok?" Sulu asked.

"Fine." Chekov nodded. "Cathy has not yet been able to contact the Deneb Co. She'll let me know what they say when she does."

"I just sent Rand, Smith, and Gonzoles on dinner break." Sulu said. "I want senior staff to stay on duty at least until we get warp power back."

"All right." Chekov nodded. "Why don't you go do the same."

"Yeah, I'm going to grab a quick bite with Pat." Sulu nodded. "The Eagle should be back here in about an hour and a half to take our survivors off our hands. Are you going to send Cathy back with them?"

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "I hate to see them go, but..."

"I know." Sulu turned command over and left the bridge for his own dinner.

"Hello Dr. Patrick." Smith said when he walked into sickbay.

Pat did not stop the treatment on a young civilian woman's forehead when he said. "Mr. Smith. I thought I had seen all the bridge officers that had managed to crash into something during the battle. What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing." Smith said. "I was looking for Ensign Hoban. She's in my department and I just wanted to see how she was doing."

"Ignes." Pat called loudly for his head nurse. She came around the corner from the recovery ward with a medical tricorder in her hands. "Is Hoban still back there?"

"Yes." Lt. Ignis tried to keep the edge of annoyance out of her voice. "You wanted her to stay overnight. Remember?"

"Touchy today, Ann." Pat finished what he was doing and smiled at his nurse. "Thank

you for your assistance."

"You're very welcome, Doctor." Ignes replied with exaggerated politeness and returned to her work.

"All right, Ms. Farley." Pat said to the civilian on the table. "You should have no more problems. Go back to your quarters and get a good night's sleep. If you have any dizziness or nausea, call us. We'll come to you."

"Thank you, Doctor." She nodded. Pat helped her down from the table.

After she had gone, Dr. Patrick picked up the padd from the table and checked the records. "Oh yes. Hoban. She's the one with the eyes."

"Been busy today, Pat?" Smith asked.

"I love to work non stop." Pat smiled. "Ensign Hoban should be fine. She had some damage to her eyes and that's always a little tricky. But she is responding to the treatment."

"Can I talk to her?" Smith asked.

"Of course." Pat nodded and pointed him towards the recovery room. "Don't let her open her eyes too much. They are still sensitive. Too bad. Her eyes are beautiful."

"Thanks Pat." Smith turned to the recovery room while the doctor turned to his next patient. All of the beds in the recovery ward were filled. Most were Odessa crewmembers who had been injured during the raid. The rest were Starfleet officers. Lt. Ignes nodded to the end of the row of beds before he could even ask. Hoban appeared to be asleep, but she must have heard him approach. Hoban's eyes flickered open for a second then she closed them tight. "The doctor said to keep your eyes closed."

"Mr. Smith?" She asked.

"Yes." Smith said.

"It's hard not to be able to look at anyone." Hoban said.

"Dr. Patrick expects you to make a full recovery." Smith said. She just nodded. He did not know her. He hadn't even said hello to her at his first staff meeting. "How long have you been on Excelsior, Ensign?"

"Almost two years now, Mr. Smith." Hoban held her hand over her eyes to keep her from opening them. "I can't imagine serving on any other ship."

"Well, if today was an example of your normal work, I can't imagine the captain would ever let you go." Smith smiled even though she couldn't see him.

"Thank you, Sir." Hoban said.

"Well..." Smith said. "Let me know when the doctor certifies you fit for duty."

"Yes Sir."

"Bridge to Ms. Chekov." Lt. DuBois called from the communication station of the bridge.

"Mr. DuBois." Cathy smiled when she accessed the visual comline. "What happened to Commander Rand?"

"Everybody gets a break sometime." He returned her smile. "I have a Mr. Semar Ligo for you calling from the Deneb Transport Company."

"I have been waiting for his call, Mr. DuBois." Cathy said. "Thank you."

"Stand by."

"Semar." Cathy said when her contact from the Deneb Transport Company finally appeared on the screen in Chekov's cabin. Cathy couldn't help but smile even though her call was very serious. The Denebons were a notoriously cheerful people.

"C.J." Semar Ligo said. He was a pudgy humanoid with over sized ears. His fleshy cheeks and large nose looked like they were trying to block his small eyes. But to Cathy it was the sparkle in those dark eyes and his rather nasty sense of humor that made him irresistible. "I am so sorry to hear about your convoy."

"It's a mess, Semar." Cathy sighed. "And getting a straight answer out of Starfleet, well you know how that is."

"With your connections?" Semar said. "I find it hard to believe you are having problems."

"Are you crazy?" Cathy asked. "I have never heard the word classified so many times in my life."

"C.J., please." Semar said. "If you put on the right outfit, the right music, the right wine. How can he resist? He'll tell you anything."

"Someday you will have to meet Pavel." Cathy laughed. "I am telling you, I could walk onto the bridge naked and he would laugh and tell me he couldn't tell me."

"Now that's a sight I'd like to see." Semar smiled.

"I am so glad I finally got through to you, Semar." Cathy said. "You always make me feel better."

"I understand all the cargo was lost." Semar said.

"Yes." Cathy nodded. "But I called about a specific shipment. I need to know what was in cargo crates F4938 through F4940."

Semar looked down at his control panel. He accessed his database. "Computer parts. Why?"

"That's what I have" Cathy nodded. "But Pavel tells me something was transported off the Odessa before the attack. And they seem to think it's important."

"I thought he did not tell you anything." Semar grinned.

"I didn't say he didn't tell me anything!" Cathy laughed. "I said he doesn't tell me everything. And that drives me crazy. Anyway, do you know exactly what it was? And who sent it?"

"Hold on a minute, C.J." Semar worked on his control panel again. Cathy waited. "It was shipped by Ripti Holding Company."

"Never heard of them." Cathy said.

"Me neither." Semar shrugged as he went through the account. "The crates came from Valo Two to Deneb. We shipped to Beltane and transferred to you with the destination of the colonies."

"That's the long way around." Cathy said. "Valo Two isn't that far from the colonies. Why bring it all the way out to Deneb?"

"You know how hard it's been to get anything to the colonies the last six months." Semar shrugged. "Now it's going to be harder. Maybe Starfleet will provide the escort from now on."

"Maybe." Cathy shrugged. "Do you know what kind of computer parts, Semar?"

"Standard stuff. Looks like it could be navigation equipment." Semar said. "You want me to forward the details to you?"

"I'd appreciate it, Semar. Thanks." Cathy terminated the connection and left the empty cabin. She went directly to the bridge. When the turbo lift doors opened, she saw her husband in the command chair. As Cathy came out of the lift, Lt. Mirek nodded to her and got onto the lift. Cathy walked down to her husband. "Are you allowed to sit there?"

"Only on occasion." He answered in the same teasing tone. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought you wanted to know what Semar said." Cathy shrugged. Smith and Gonzoles came back from their dinner break. Mr. Smith went directly to his station and relieved Ensign Murphy.

"Hi C.J." Gonzoles said as she passed them.

"Hi Rosita." Cathy said. She turned back to Pavel. "Everybody seems to be coming or going."

"Did your friend at Deneb have anything important to say?" Pavel asked. "Did you record the conversation?"

"Yes, I did." Cathy said. "But I have to warn you..."

"Warn us?" Captain Sulu asked. He had just come off the turbo lift. Chekov stood up.

"The conversation." Cathy turned to Sulu. "Is between old friends. I mean on the personal side it is a bit...well..."

"Perhaps we should take this off the bridge." Chekov suggested.

"My ready room." Sulu nodded and led the way. Once in the captain's office, Cathy called up and played the conversation with Semar Ligo. While it played she studied Hikaru's baseball paraphernalia arranged on his wall. She did not look at either Pavel or Hikaru.

They let the entire recording play. When it was over, Captain Sulu looked at Chekov. "Ripti. Isn't that the name of the disgruntled employee at the ship yards?"

"Yes." Chekov nodded. "Her name is Cros Ripti. We have not been able to locate her since she left Rigel."

"I don't think Semar was trying to hide anything." Cathy said.

"We did not suspect Deneb." Pavel said. "That would be like suspecting Vasco. Has he transmitted the details?"

"Yes." Cathy said. "I put them in your mail file so you would have them right away. Looks like ordinary computer parts to me."

Chekov accessed the file and studied the list of parts. "Hikaru. Look at this."

Sulu looked. It was an ordinary list of parts. There were definitely navigation systems involved. He did not see anything out of line. "What?"

"This is more than a navigation system." Chekov said. "It is a guidance system. a very sophisticated guidance system. It is part of a bomb."

"How can you tell?" Cathy asked.

"Catrina, the Eagle will be taking you and the boys back to a safe sector." Pavel said instead of answering her question. Captain Sulu sat at his desk and studied the list of parts. He did his best not to notice them. "It will be here in less than an hour. Are you and the boys ready to go?"

"No." Cathy pouted. "I was enjoying our stay. And the boys are off in the gym or

somewhere."

"If you will go finish the packing. I will gather the boys and meet you on the landing deck in half an hour." Pavel said.

Cathy whispered to him in Russian. "I wanted to finish what we started earlier. After the boys were asleep."

"Me too." Pavel whispered back. "You should have taken me up on it then. I am sorry, but it is time for you to go."

Cathy switched back to Standard. "You still owe us a vacation. The boys really want to go to that amusement park."

"We will work it out." Pavel said. "I will meet you shortly."

"Ok." Cathy kissed him. On her way out of the ready room she called. "Goodbye Hikaru."

"Goodbye, Cathy." Sulu returned just as the door slid shut behind her. Sulu and Chekov returned to the bridge. "On the bridge naked, huh? Is this one of your wife's fantasies?"

"My wife's fantasies are none of your damn business." Pavel laughed. "Sir."

The senior staff were all back on duty when the Eagle caught up with the Excelsior. She was a Constitution class star ship and looked almost exactly like the Enterprise A.

"Captain." Commander Rand reported. "The Eagle is hailing us."

"On screen." Sulu said.

Captain David Rosenblatt appeared on the Excelsior's main view screen. Sulu had never met the Eagle captain before this incident. He was a Human of average height and build with a pale complexion and dark wavy hair. "Captain Sulu, we are ready to take on your survivors."

"Thank you, Captain Rosenblatt." Sulu nodded. "Besides members of the convoy itself, I have C.J. Vasco and her sons on board. She has a small ship in my shuttle bay. If you could escort her to safety, I would appreciate that."

"The more the merrier." Rosenblatt said. "Tell Commander Chekov I would be happy to take his family along."

"You know Mr. Chekov, Captain?" Sulu asked.

"We did a brief stint together on Reliant some years ago." Rosenblatt smiled. "I don't think he ever talked about anything other than that girl. God, he was annoying."

Sulu laughed. "I will tell Pavel his family will be in good hands. Thank you, Captain Rosenblatt. Excelsior out." After the screen returned to the view of Eagle, Sulu said. "Gonzoles, coordinate the transfer of the survivors."

"Yes Sir." Gonzoles took a deep breath and got up to leave the bridge.

"How many?" Captain Sulu said before she could pass the command chair.

Gonzoles stopped. "Forty two from the Odessa that are in good shape. Eighteen that are still in sick bay with severe injuries. And thirty six that we took on from the Potemkin."

"That's quite a job." Sulu said. "Take Mr. Smith with you."

"Aye Sir." Gonzoles said. Lt. Commander Smith turned the helm station over to the relief officer and followed Lt. Commander Gonzoles onto the turbo lift.

"So where do we start?" Smith asked.

"Damned if I know." Gonzoles sighed. She ordered the lift to sickbay. "I guess the easiest thing to do with the healthy is get them all in one place and start transporting."

"How about one of the cargo bays?" Smith asked. "Use the open area to get them organized, then use the freight transport to send large groups to the Eagle. "

"Yeah." Gonzoles smiled. "Cargo bay two is pretty empty right now. You are starting to think like an overachiever, Mr. Smith."

"Maybe it's contagious." Smith grinned.

Dr. Evelyn Ping was on duty in sickbay when the two command officers walked in. She was a petite dark brown woman with long curly black hair. "Hi Ev." Gonzoles said. "Have you met Tomas Smith?"

"I certainly would have remembered him." Dr. Ping winked at Gonzoles. She extended her hand to him. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Smith."

"Doctor." Smith shook her hand. "We're here to take this crowd off your hands and send them all to the Eagle."

"Great." Ping said.

"Any special requirements?" Gonzoles asked.

"I'd really prefer if we set up a transport from our sick bay to theirs." Ping said. "Eagle is constitution class, right?"

"Yes."

"Their sick bay is smaller but should be adequate." Ping said. "How about I call Dr. Bakoulis and set it up?"

"Great." Gonzoles said. "You're taking a load off our hands. If you have any problems, let me know."

"That was easy." Smith said after they left sickbay.

"Be grateful Evelyn was on duty." Gonzoles said. "Pat would have demanded my first born child before he helped. I've already promised him five or six kids."

"When do you plan to pay up?"

"Never." Gonzoles stopped at a communications access panel on the wall and entered her command code. She selected ship-wide comline. "Attention all convoy crew members. Please proceed to cargo bay two on deck ten for immediate transport to the U.S.S. Eagle. Destination Starbase Thirty Three."

"I guess we should be in cargo bay two to meet them." Smith shrugged and started walking down the hall. Gonzoles nodded.

Cathy walked into cargo bay two. Over fifty people were milling around and more were coming in all the time. Lt. Commanders Smith and Gonzoles seemed to be in the center of the crowd trying to count and separate the crowd. Cathy walked through the crowd talking to each Vasco employee she met.

"C.J." Gonzoles said. "What are you doing here?"

"I just wanted to make sure there weren't any problems before we left Excelsior." Cathy said. "I'm not sure what I can do, but I felt like I should stop here before taking my ship out."

"We have it under control, Ms. Chekov." Smith said.

"I'm sure you do, Mr. Smith." Cathy said. "I just wouldn't want my people to think I forgot them."

"I'm sure they don't blame you, C.J." Gonzoles said.

"I hope." Cathy shrugged. "I guess I better get out of your way. Pavel is probably waiting for me by now any way."

"See you in July." Gonzoles said. Cathy nodded and started making her way back through the growing crowd.

"Marty, what's the matter?" Cathy stopped. Marty had been with Vasco for quite awhile and was usually happy go lucky. But now he looked very sad to her.

"Nothing, Ms. Vasco." He sighed.

The man next to him was tall and muscular with a long light brown ponytail. "He's just lovesick, Ms. Vasco. Thinks he'll never see her again."

"Someone from the convoy?" Cathy asked.

"No." Marty shrugged. "Met her on Rigel."

"But we're there all the time." Cathy said. "Next time your new ship stops there, you'll look her up."

"She's gone." Marty sighed.

"Left Rigel?" Cathy asked.

"I tried to call her. They let us send out recorded messages. But mine to Cros was returned. She closed her computer address." Marty said. "She's gone."

"Maybe I can help you find her." Cathy suggested. "What's her name?"

"Cros." Marty sighed. "Cros Ripti."

"Maybe my husband could locate her." Cathy said. "He's very good at that."

"No." Marty shook his head slowly from side to side. "If she wanted to talk to me, she would have left a message."

"Excuse me, Marty." Cathy said. "But I need to talk to Commander Gonzoles before I go."

When she walked up to the two officers, Gonzoles said. "You just can't leave. Can you?"

"Listen Rosey." Cathy said quietly. "I just spoke to Marty Choi. He is upset because a woman he met and was close to on Rigel is no longer there. Her name is Cros Ripti. I'm not sure what it means but Pavel and Hikaru were very interested whenever her name came up."

"You're sure?" Gonzoles asked.

"Yes." Cathy said.

"Thanks."

After Cathy walked away, Smith looked at her and asked. "Rosey?"