

STAR TREK

The Lexington Adventures



The Blueprint of Sopheia

An Original Short Story
by Joey Bonice

“The Blueprint of Sophea”

**Story by
Joey Bonice**

**Star Trek: The *Lexington* Adventures based on Star Trek® created
by
Gene Roddenberry**

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“Captain’s Log, Supplemental. We’ve barely managed to recover *Starfleet One*; *Excelsior* and *Wisconsin* have to be credited with a major assist. All the Klingons are in the brig but there’s a snag... our chief engineer turned out to be a sleeper agent. While the Klingons will be repatriated back to the High Council (a side note: I think there’s going to be a massive bloodbath when they get back... in their own blood), Sophea Bennington-Fox remains our concern.”

Captain Alexander McKnight was sitting in the office of his Chief Medical Officer, having a discussion concerning their engineer. The subject of their discussion was lying sedated in an isolated room, still wearing the Klingon armor that she’d found the time to climb into while helping the Klingons on *Starfleet One*.

“So, why in the hell would Sophie turn traitor?” Alex asked. “She’s given us literally no indication that she was a sleeper agent!”

“You think that’s bad?” remarked Doctor Dawn Mathias, sitting behind her desk and drinking hot black coffee, “I personally gave that woman a few physicals and she passed *every... single... one!* Even the one several months ago when we rescued her from these same bastards! If *you’re* frustrated, you ought to trade me places!”

Alex took a sip of his iced coffee before responding. “I won’t trade you because my ass is in the *very* hot seat. I’ve got Security all over my ass about Sophie, as well as those spooks in Intelligence and that’s *still* not counting the legal eagles in the JAG corps. I’m the one who personally recruited her to come to the *Lexington*, and I’ve been a very vocal supporter of hers. It’s taking all the influence I’ve got to keep her here. Everyone else wants to throw her into a dark prison cell and lose the key for her role in *Starfleet One*’s hijacking.”

Leaning back in her chair, Dawn put the heels of her boots on the desk while holding her coffee in one hand and picking up a PADD with the other. She read the contents once again as she talked.

“There’s nothing in my scans to detect that Sophie was a sleeper agent. None. Chemistry is perfect, brainwave patterns all normal, with synaptic and neural activity right on the line.” She took another sip. “Physically, I can’t find a damn thing wrong with her.”

“Which brings us right back to why she’d do a damn fool thing like that. I’ve studied her personnel file until my eyes bled and there’s no indication there either about her turning traitor.”

“*Apparent* traitor,” amended the Australian.

“Right. *Apparent* traitor.” He finished his coffee and put the cup on the desk. “I think I’m running on too much coffee and adrenalin.”

“I think we all are,” Dawn confirmed. “Most of the casualties from *Starfleet One* are back to work but it took the best part of the last three days to do it. I feel as if I could sleep for a week.”

“Same here,” he said. “Took everything Brie, Angie, and I had to get that ship stopped so the *Lexington* could beam Cullen and his people in to take care of business.”

“When you guys found Sophie, what did she do? Other than try to kill you?”

“Couldn’t understand a damn thing since she was screaming in Klingonese.” He furled his brow. “Dawn, I know I’m missing something here but I’m coming up empty. Have you *any* ideas?”

“The only thing I can think of is that I can bring her out of sedation and maybe something in our questioning will give us a clue. Otherwise...” she shrugged her shoulders. “I’m out of any ideas.”

Alex thought for a moment, allowing Dawn to finish her coffee and slid her boots off the desk. “How long to bring her out of dreamland?”

“Not long. Maybe a minute after I give her the shot. I would very strongly recommend

restraining her since we've no idea if this is Klingon Sophie or Starfleet Sophie that'll be waking up."

The captain nodded. "Let's do it. Oh, and don't tell anyone what we're doing for the moment. If there's anything we can do to prove Sophie wasn't acting on her own free will, the better, without anyone accusing us of making it all up just to get her off the hook."

They got up and made their way to Sophea's room, which was used to keep patients in isolation. Dawn made sure that Sophea's arms and legs were secured to the bed, so if they were to encounter Klingon Sophea, she could not fight them to escape. Dawn then went over to a tray, selected a hypospray and adjusted the dosage as she walked over to the slumbering engineer.

"You ready for this?" she asked.

"Hell, no but I will be," he said, *sotto voce*. "Wake up Sleeping Beauty."

With an expertise born out of years of practice, Dawn injected Sophea in the upper arm, then turned her attention to the biobed's readouts above Sophea's head. As predicted, Sophea's vitals instantly began to climb upwards. It wasn't but forty seconds later that Sophea's eyes fluttered open. She tried lifting her arms to find out they were in restraints. She turned her head to the left so she could face Dawn.

"It's okay, Sophie," Dawn said soothingly. "You're safe."

"Where am I?" Sophea croaked in a raspy voice.

"You're in Sickbay on the *Lexington*." Dawn glued a smile on her face that she didn't feel. "How're you feeling?"

Sophea laid her head back on the pillow. "*Lousy*."

"If you said anything else but that," answered Dawn, "I'd be worried."

Alex leaned in. "Sophie? It's Alex."

That caused Sophea to roar and try to lunge at him, screaming in Klingonese. The restraints did their work so the worst Sophea could do was hurl insults at him. For his part, he didn't jump back but he did look to Dawn, who had turned on the universal translator on the biobed's screen.

Dawn didn't need to hear his question. "She's saying something about your upbringing and shedding fidelity on your mother's heritage."

"In other words," he said dryly, "she's calling me a dirty sonofabitch."

"I'm being polite," meekly answered Dawn. But just as suddenly as Klingon Sophea appeared, Starfleet Sophea appeared. She relaxed and looked at Alex.

"Captain?" she moaned.

He came up to beside the bed, looking at the engineer. "I'm here, Sophie."

"What am I doing here? Last I remember, I was in Engineering, working on the warp core."

"What happened," answered Alex, "was that you were a major player in hijacking *Starfleet One*. Why would you do that?"

"Captain, I... *arghhh!*" she screamed in pain.

Dawn instantly looked to the readouts. "Her pain receptors are off the chart!"

Sophea screamed as Dawn gave her another injection, but this time for the pain. The pain reliever did little to relieve her suffering. It took a few more seconds for Sophea to stop screaming and relax, her body and vitals returning to normal way too quickly than they had the right to.

"What the hell was *that*?" asked Alex.

Dawn ran her scanner over Sophea, switching her gaze between Sophea and the bed's monitor. "I've no idea where that came from, Alex. But I do know it would be better if we continued discussing this tomorrow. It'll give me some time to run more tests and dig a little

deeper.”

“Yes, please,” muttered Sophea. “I’ve got the mother of all headaches.”

The next morning, Alex walked into sickbay. He found Sophea still tied up with Dawn already there in the little room, taking scans with a psychotricorder nearby. As soon as Sophea saw Alex, she again said something in Klingonese and it didn’t take a linguist to figure out that she had cursed Alex once again.

“Do you *really* want to know what she said?” Dawn’s Australian accent was getting thick, meaning she was nearing total exhaustion.

“I don’t need a translator to know she just cussed me out,” replied Alex.

Just like a switch had been thrown, Sophea returned. “Good morning, Captain.”

Alex threw her a puzzled look. “I’ve no idea how the hell you are doing that but it’s driving me crazy.”

Sophea looked at him questioningly. “What am I doing?”

“Have you ever taken a language course for Klingonese?” Dawn jumped in.

“Of course not. I can’t speak, read, or understand it.”

Alex crossed his arms. “But every time you lay eyes on me, you scream at me in Klingonese and to my ears, it sounds like you’re a native.”

“I swear, Captain,” Sophea protested, “I don’t know a word of Klingonese!”

“So, how is it that you’re speaking a language you claim *not* to know like a native speaker?”

Before she could respond, Sophea convulsed and screamed. Once again, Dawn instantly injected her with a muscle relaxer and tranquilizer combination. And once again, Sophea kept screaming in pain and convulsing with the drugs not having any effect. A full thirty seconds later, Sophea finally relaxed and settled down.

Both Dawn and Alex looked at each other. “I gave Sophea enough of this concoction to put a charging rhino down for a week!” Dawn was simply amazed as she put the hypo on a nearby tray. “She should be out like a light! There’s *no way* she should be back to normal this quickly!”

“What did I do?” meekly asked the engineer, looking at the doctor.

“You mean you don’t remember what just happened to you less than thirty seconds ago?” Dawn asked.

The Hawaiian looked back to the ceiling. “It’s all a blank.”

“Just what the hell is going on here?” pondered the captain. He motioned for Dawn to follow him and without another word, they walked over to her office where there was some privacy.

“You submitted your report yet?” he asked, knowing the answer but asking anyway.

“What’s there to report? At this point, it’s a tossup that either Sophie is the best actress I’ve ever met or there’s something wrong with me that I can’t read my own machine’s readouts.”

“Don’t report anything,” he ordered. “Hold off as long as you legally can.”

“Can I be nosy and ask why?”

“Because I’m going way out on a limb for Sophea.”

Dawn crossed her arms. “Just how far out? As in borderline insubordinate?”

“As in complete and total insubordination. The only reason I’m getting away with it right now is that I’m a senior captain and all the officers I’m talking to are my juniors. It won’t last very long before they get someone senior enough where I will be up a certain brown creek without

a proverbial paddle.”

“What if I report it before you give me the go-ahead?”

“Then Sophie will be in the brig within a few hours, and I’ll be right beside her. I’m putting everything on the line for her.”

“I don’t get it,” Dawn said. “Why are you sticking your neck that far out for her?”

“Because I’m a damn stubborn fool. If you look at it from the JAG, Security, and Intel side, there’s a mountain of evidence that shows Sophie actively collaborated with the Klingons. If she goes to trial, she’s convicted and there won’t be a jury anywhere that won’t convict her. Hell, there’s even recordings of her *talking* like a Klingon agent! The way they’re looking at it, I’m just as guilty for *not* locking her up!”

“Let me play devil’s advocate for a moment,” said Dawn. “If the case against our engineer is so strong, then why are you the only one saying she’s not guilty?”

“Because something in my gut tells me she’s not a willing participant,” he pleaded. “But I’ve no evidence to back that up. It’s simply my instinct saying it, and that will not hold up in any court. I need proof, *concrete* proof, we’re right. Otherwise, I’m going to jail right beside her.”

Dawn cocked her head. “If you’re telling me to manufacture evidence...”

That set Alex off. “*I’m not telling you anything of the sort!*” he said angrily. “I’d rather go to prison than have you cook up evidence! But I’m convinced that the secret to all of this smeg is locked in Sophie’s brain so if you aren’t able to find something to back up my hunch, two innocent people are going to jail! That’s how big the stakes are!”

Dawn swallowed nervously and she wasn’t the nervous type. “I think I understand. If there’s evidence, I’ll find it.”

“That’s all I’m asking. But don’t go finding anything there that isn’t there. I’ll go to the brig before I have anyone manufacture evidence.”

The intercom whistled. “*Bridge to Captain McKnight.*”

“Alex here. Go ahead, Angie.”

“*I’ve got Rear Admiral Peter Boyington on the line for you,*” said the British comms officer. “*And to say he’s a little upset is... not precisely accurate.*”

Alex chuckled at the Englishwoman’s habit of understatement. “Tell Pete I’m out walking my dog and not available.”

The silence was deafening. When Captain Angelica McKnight’s voice returned, it was full of disbelief. “*And you’re taking the mick. You want me to tell him what?*”

“Tell Pete Boyington that I’m out walking my dog and I am *not* available. Is that clear, Commander?” If Alex was calling his own wife by her rank, you knew things were deadly serious.

“*Aye, Captain,*” she answered. “*Walking the dog. Bridge out.*”

Dawn’s eyes were wide at what she had just witnessed. “You weren’t joking that you’re being straight up insubordinate.”

“You just help Sophie. I’ll handle the fleet.” With that, he walked out of Dawn’s office. For her part, Dawn looked down at her desk and looked at the wedding photo of she and her husband, drawing strength from the image before walking back to where the Hawaiian engineer was waiting for her.

“How you doing, Sophie?” she asked as she walked in, then instantly kicked herself for asking that question.

“You were just here, Doctor,” replied Sophea. “I don’t think I changed much in the few minutes you were out of the room.”

“If there was ever a stupid question, I just asked it.” Dawn looked at the biobed’s readout.

“You’re not making this easy, Sophie. I’m just not seeing anything that would cause you that intense pain or being as random as this seems to be.”

“So, why is it that every time I think about what happened to me that I don’t remember anything of what happened?”

Dawn had a hunch. The few times that Sophea tried to remember what happened to her or confess it, Dawn had concentrated on relieving the pain and not scan the other woman for any abnormal readings. While her Hippocratic oath did not permit the Australian to do harm, the pain Sophea would be feeling might lead to her creating a treatment, so she felt right in bending it this one time.

“Tell me what’s happened to you, Sophea.”

“But Doc...!” Sophea protested but Dawn held up a finger.

“Trust me on this. What happened to you out there?”

“Well, I was... ARRRGGGHHHH!” Sophea screamed and this time, Dawn was ready with her tricorder, recording everything. After about ten seconds, Sophea screamed, “GODDESS DAMN IT, GET THE HELL OUT OF MY HEAD! YOU DON’T BELONG IN THERE!”

Almost instantly, the pain resided and Sophea looked to Dawn as if nothing had happened. “What specifically did you want to know, Doctor?”

Dawn almost dropped her tricorder in shock. All other times, Sophea would blackout and claim not remembering what had just happened.

“Sophie... you *remember* what’s happened to you?”

An odd expression crossed the engineer’s face. “That’s odd. This time, I remember everything. I even screamed out something, didn’t I?”

Dawn was no fool. She knew that the only times Sophea ever said “goddess damn it” was when she was frustrated or really mad. Since there was nothing externally to really be frustrated with and she had mentioned to someone or something about “getting out of her head,” it was telling Dawn that Sophea may have just given her the key to the brainwashed engineer’s recovery.

“God, I am so sorry for what I’m about to do,” said the Australian under her breath before committing herself. “Sophea, you’re a horrible engineer.”

“*What did you just say?*” Sophea said indignantly. One only insulted an engineer’s capabilities at their own risk.

“Not only are you a horrible engineer but you’re a weakling. A soft touch. A wimp. You *allowed* someone to reprogram you, and you did nothing to stop it.”

Sophea growled. “You’d better watch what you’re saying!”

“Yeah, you gave in too easily,” taunted the doctor, even crossing her arms across her chest to add a non-verbal insult to injury. “You were made a willing slave. Yeah, a slave to the Klingons. How does that feel? To do the bidding of another like a dog?”

“You’d better shut the hell up...”

“Or what? I’m up here and you’re tied up down there. You’ve got to be the worst Klingon agent ever! You were caught way too easily for a *real* agent! But slaves don’t care, do they? They just care about pleasing a master.”

“I AM NO ONE’S GODDESS DAMNED SLAVE!” Sophea screamed in rage. “THEY TOOK MY MIND FROM ME! THEY HOOKED ME UP TO A GODDESS DAMNED MIND SIFTER, EMPTIED MY MIND, THEN PUT IN ANOTHER SOPHEA! THEY TOOK EVERYTHING FROM ME! I CAN FEEL THE OTHER SOPHEA ALL THE TIME IN MY MIND AND IT’S THE WORST FEELING I’VE EVER HAD!!”

Dawn looked at Sophea, who was seething with rage and not aware she just admitted to

something she could not have done otherwise. Sophea was huffing and puffing as Dawn waited for her to calm down. That took a while since the doctor had really gotten under her skin.

"Sophea," said Dawn apologetically as Sophea worked on getting her cool back, "I'm really sorry for saying what I said. But I had to get you mad. I mean full on, stark raving mad."

"Why?" Sophea demanded, still huffing.

"I know now what's happening to you. They programmed a biofeedback loop so every time you tried to confess or admit to what happened, it would cause you pain and black you out. Those Klingons knew what they were doing. But I am *so sorry* I insulted you."

Sophea leaned back on her bed. "Doctor, if getting me so mad that I was seeing red got you what you needed to fix me, that's fine. I forgive you but next time..." She left the sentence hanging in the air, allowing Dawn to draw the dots.

"I ever get you that mad again; you'll have earned the right to knock out my two front teeth."

Sophea weakly laughed. "Deal." She looked at the ceiling. "So, how are you going to fix me?"

Dawn thought for a moment. "You're in luck. Unfortunately, Starfleet... *acquires* a few victims of that damned mind sifter every year. Last year, there was an experimental breakthrough using targeted neural frequencies via electro-magnetic pulses to isolate the implanted programming. It's similar to what the Klingons use to change your neural pathways and program you."

"So, you're putting me into Starfleet's version of a mind sifter?" Sophea looked very weary. "There's no way in hell I'm going through that torture again!"

"It's not really a mind sifter as it's a mind restorer. I'll be looking for the altered neural pathways and putting them back as they were. I'll have you sedated and secured to the bed as I can't have you move. If you move even a centimeter..." now Dawn looked uncomfortable, "...I could lobotomize or even kill you."

Sophea still looked leery, but she absolutely trusted Dawn. "So, I know the downside. But why do I have to be asleep?"

"In a mind sifter, the pain comes from the electrical impulses fed through the skin making up the scalp into the brain. The human brain doesn't feel pain at all. Our machine... if I had you awake, it would feel as though you were getting a head massage."

"But you can't have me awake." Sophea thought for a moment. "I'm ready. When's this going to happen?"

"Once again, you happen to be in luck. In all of Starfleet, only one hundred of us are certified to do this procedure and I'm one of them. I'm going to move you over to the surgical suite just to be sure."

Sophea leaned back again. "I trust you, Doctor. Let's get this done."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. Legally, since you're compromised, I'll have to get consent from the captain. But given what's happened, that's a formality. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

"Well," Sophea said, lifting her arms to show her restraints, "I'm not going anywhere. Fix me."

"I will," said Dawn, then turned to the door. Before she made the doorway, Sophea called, "Doctor?"

The doctor turned to face her patient. "Yes?"

"I trust you. And I can only say that about a dozen people. I know you'll do your best."

Dawn smiled. "Uh... thanks. But where did the sudden confidence in my abilities come from?"

"I had an aunt with eyes just like yours," Sophea teased.

Eight minutes later, Sophea was being escorted into the surgical suite. Four Marines were just inside Sickbay, hands on their phasers and ready to gun down the woman in a Klingon warrior outfit. For her part, Sophea weakly smiled at them and showed them her hands in an effort to show she wasn't intending on breaking out.

"You know they're not going to believe you," Dawn commented as she entered the suite.

"If I were them, I'd not trust me either." Sophea said as she looked around the room. In the center was an examination bed with a machine beside it. There was a lightweight mesh cap with many white electrodes covering it. Sophea could feel her pulse rise and the pain in her head was threatening to take over.

"Oh, goddess, not again..." she whispered with dread as Dawn activated the machine. She looked over to the panicked-looking engineer and gave a reassuring smile.

"I know this looks bad," Dawn said in a comforting tone, "but I promise you won't feel a thing. When you wake up, you'll be a new woman."

You could see Sophea fighting the fear she was feeling. "Promise?" she asked weakly.

Dawn froze the smile on her face, knowing that Sophea could still try to bolt out. "I promise you, Sophie. I just need you to hop up and lay down. I'll do the rest."

Slowly, cautiously, Sophea walked over and lay down on the bed. Gently, Dawn put the restraints on Sophea's arms and legs, making sure they would prevent Sophea from moving.

"Comfortable?"

"Not really."

Dawn raised the head of the bed to about forty degrees to make the Hawaiian a little more comfortable.

"I'll give you a choice. Either I can put this cap on you right now then put you under, or I can put you under and then put on the cap. I'll leave it to you."

Sophea's gaze never left the cap and her eyes were wide. That all but gave Dawn her answer but she needed Sophea to say it.

"Put me under. I don't think I can handle you putting that thing on me and me keeping still."

"I thought as much." Dawn reached for her hypo, filled with a fast-acting sedative. Before she injected Sophea, she squeezed her friend's hand.

"I promise you'll be fine, Sophie."

Sophea finally moved her gaze from the cap to her friend. "I trust you, Dawn. With my life."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." With practiced ease, she injected Sophea in the neck. "This is quick so you should be asleep very quickly."

"I think... it's... al... rea... dy... do...i... n... g..." Sophea slowly closed her eyes and was instantly in a deep sleep. Dawn confirmed this with the bed's monitor before putting the cap on the sleeping woman, making sure the electrodes were secure on Sophea's head before turning to the machine the electrodes were connected to.

"Now to put my money where my mouth is," said Dawn as she started working on the

controls.

For Sophea, as the antiesthetic took effect, the boundary between perception and reality dissolved. The hum of the suite melted away to the dark room where the Klingons had held her captive all those months ago. Bound securely into a heavy chair, Sophea felt the cold restraints locked tight around her wrists, torso, and legs, her sight obscured by a heavy neural visor displaying propaganda videos and thick head-mounted sensors attached very uncomfortably on her head. The heavy headphones were playing white noise with subliminal messaging. Floating in the air around her head were translucent, ghostly holographic panels displaying live 3D brain scans, where bright synaptic fires mapped every agonizing twitch of her subconscious mind.

In the surgical suite, Dawn was busy flooding Sophea's brain with high-intensity electromagnetic pulses to locate the Klingon's sleeper agent programming. But the Klingons' programming was a lot more involved and hidden than the Australian expected. "I love a challenge," she muttered to herself as she worked the controls, keeping one eye on the readout and the other on Sophea, sleeping peacefully, not betraying the battle shaping up in her head.

Back in Sophea's mind, from the murky shadows emerged her tormentor: the Klingon version of Sophea. Clad in high-collared, blood-crimson leather and silver-plated warrior armor, her dark alter-ego leaned in uncomfortably close, a predator savoring her trapped prey.

"Look at you," Klingon Sophea hissed, her voice dripping with venomous pleasure as she studied the glowing neural schematics surrounding the chair. "They call you a traitor, Starfleet, but how can you betray a uniform that was never truly yours? You were forged by the Empire. You are our weapon. An operative we programmed to compromise their best starships from the inside out. To make them ours."

Sophea strained violently against her cuffs, straps digging into her skin, her head slightly wilting under the gear that was broadcasting their messages into her brain. "I am a goddess damned Starfleet officer!" she rasped, her voice thick with the sedative Dawn had injected into her system. "My life... my service... my oath... it's all real, you bitch!"

"Your life is a lie written by Klingon scientists, baked into your neural pathways like a parasite." Klingon Sophea drew a long, razor-sharp steel dagger from her belt, the polished blade catching the stark overhead light. She held the knife high, pointing its lethal tip down toward Sophea's chest just as red error flags began to flash violently across the floating brain monitors. Klingon Sophea looked at the readouts and instantly knew what was going on.

"Your doctor is trying to erase me with targeted neural frequencies via electro-magnetic pulses. What a *fool*. But before she can purge me, I will slit your throat wide open and take full control of your mind forever!"

In the real world, Dawn saw trouble on her monitor. She had found the pathways that had been altered but they were resisting her treatment. Dawn worked the machine's controls but the pathways were fighting her. Clenching her jaw, she manually bypassed all the safety overrides and dialed the pulse generator to full, risking a cerebral hemorrhage and a near fatal cardiac arrest to destroy the rogue programming residing in Sophea's mind.

The effect inside the dreamscape was instantaneous and blinding. A violent burst of high-voltage energy rippled through the chamber, causing the wires and electrodes to erupt in a cascade of white-hot electrical sparks. Glowing holographic readouts turned bright crimson, screaming various systems errors across the back wall displays.

The force of pulse shattered the restraints holding Sophea down. The black headphones and visor were ripped free from Sophea's head, flying through the air as raw electrical current burst from the metallic contacts strapped across her brow. The shockwave and headgear hit

Klingon Sophea like a physical explosion, throwing her off balance, knocking her hands back, and forcing her to drop the gleaming blade onto the cracked stone floor.

Sophea took a moment to gasp for air, her dark hair wildly matted, her forehead crowned by a flickering halo of leaping electrical sparks as the electromagnetic pulses tore through the Klingons' conditioning. Sophea didn't hesitate any longer than a moment. Mentally shaking off the lingering paralysis of the sedatives, she launched herself out of the chair, her boots striking the floor with heavy force.

"I am not your goddess damned puppet!" Sophea roared, her hands reaching out toward her enemy as spires of crackling electricity rained down from what remained of her headgear. Klingon Sophea recovered her footing, her face twisting into an animalistic snarl. She thrust a heavily armored fist forward to block Sophea's advance, locking arms with her Starfleet self in a desperate, grinding struggle for dominance.

"You cannot destroy what you are!" Klingon Sophea screamed over the deafening noise of their shared but collapsing neural pathways. Sparks danced between their straining bodies as they traded heavy, punishing blows, throwing shoulders, elbows, and knees in a brutal, tight-quarters pub brawl. "I am your strength!" shouted Klingon Sophea between blows. "I am the fire that kept us alive! Without me, you would be just a fragile little thing thinking she belongs in Starfleet!"

"To kill you, I'll burn this whole goddess damned thing to the ground!" Sophea ducked beneath a wild hook, caught her alter-ego by an armored shoulder plate, and rammed her left knee hard into Klingon Sophea's midsection.

Before Klingon Sophea could recover her breath, Sophea executed a swift, brutal sweep kick, taking the warrior's legs out from under her. The Klingon agent crashed hard onto her back against the floor.

In a flash of pure survival instinct and hatred, Sophea dove down, straddled her alter-ego, and slammed her left hand firmly around Klingon Sophea's throat, both throat punching her and pinning her violently to the ground at the same time. High above them, the monitors flashed their final, fatal warnings. Sparks continued to violently burst and sizzle from the nodes along Sophea's scalp, casting dynamic, flickering light across both of their identical faces. With her right hand, Sophea snatched up the dagger off the floor, leveling its sharp tip directly over Klingon Sophea's chest. Right over her heart.

Beneath her, Klingon Sophea clawed desperately at the hand crushing her windpipe, her dark eyes wide with sudden, shock-filled realization. "If you kill me... you'll kill the only part of you that survives..." she gasped out, blood trickling from her lip.

Sophea leaned down, her eyes burning with fierce, unshakable clarity as electrical arcs danced across her temples.

"I don't need a monster to survive!"

With a swift, unrelenting thrust, Sophea drove the dagger straight through the brass armor plating and deep into Klingon Sophea's heart.

Klingon Sophea gasped once, her body spasming violently as the dark energy representing her blood dissipated from her veins. Her eyes went wide, then glazed over into static silence before her physical form dissolved into a haze of glowing particles. The red error alarms on the walls flatlined.

The Klingon was dead.

In the quiet hum of the suite, Dawn stepped back from the control panel, wiping sweat from her brow as the monitors provided reassurance that everything was right in Sophea's mind. Dawn put a different vial into her hypodermic and injected Sophea once again.

It took a little longer but finally, Sophea opened her eyes, drew a deep, steady breath, and looked up at her friend.

“How you feeling, Sophie?”

Sophea said something completely unintelligible but had a twinkle in her eyes that had been missing for a long time.

“What were you saying?”

“I thought I was speaking Klingonese,” Sophea dead-panned. Dawn’s eyes widened slightly before Sophea wickedly smiled. “I wasn’t?”

“No, you weren’t.”

“Good,” breathed Sophea. “I never want to speak that freaking language ever again!”

Dawn took Sophea’s hand comfortingly and smiled. “Welcome back, Sophie. You’ve been missed.”

Sophea smiled back warmly. “I’m glad to be back. I’ve really missed you guys.”

Five hours later, Dawn had allowed Sophea to shower and clean up. Sophea semi-jokingly claimed the Klingon outfit had done nothing for her figure and tossed it in the garbage. Dawn rescued it just so it would go to the Intelligence people to see if it held any new secrets. After Sophea had showered, dressed in a medical white cotton jumpsuit, and made her hair presentable, Dawn led Sophea to her quarters.

“What are we doing here?” Sophea asked before they entered her quarters.

“We’re rebuilding that shattered psyche of yours,” Dawn answered. “You may feel all right but part of your recovery is surrounding yourself with familiar things. What would be more familiar to you than your own quarters?”

The engineer nodded and they entered the room. Sophea liked to keep things neat, so the room was clean, even the semi-completed model of the battleship *New Jersey* that she had been working on. Dawn moved to the side to allow Sophea to inspect her quarters. She walked around, touching and looking, occasionally whispering. Sophea finally stopped in front of the models on the shelf on the wall as Dawn quietly walked around her to pick up the blue on-ear studio headphones lying beside the incomplete model.

“I remember working on this,” quietly said Sophea, clearly in remembrance. She put her finger on a model painted in blue. “This is a one to three hundred fifty scale of the old *Essex*-class aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Lexington*, hull number CV-16, just as she appeared in June of 1944. Camouflage measure twenty-one... all Navy Blue while the decks were painted Deck Blue. Eight hundred twenty feet long and weighed 36,380 tons at full load. Capable of achieving thirty-three knots and carrying up to 103 aircraft.” Her voice almost became reverent. “One of the most decorated aircraft carriers of her era. And to think it only took nineteen months to build her.”

“Spoken like an engineer,” smiled Dawn.

Sophea ignored her and kept looking at the model as she talked. “Thirty-two of these ships were ordered by the old United States Navy. Twenty-six were laid down but only twenty-four were completed. Two were scrapped mid construction, the *Iwo Jima* and the *Reprisal*, and the remainder were never started. The longest serving *Essex*-class ship happened to be the *Lexington*... 1942 to 1991. Forty-nine-year career with the US Navy.”

“Are you sure you’re an engineer or are you a historian?” teased Dawn.

Sophea finally turned to look at Dawn. “To build these models takes a lot of research. But

look at what it took to build these ships... Dawn, they didn't even have computers to do the drawing or anything. They used pencils, paper, and crude, almost primitive calculators. It's remarkable they were able to build these things."

Dawn didn't say anything as Sophea resumed her inspection. She came to the table holding her latest build and stopped there, looking down at it.

"And here is a one to three hundred fifty scale of the old U.S.S. *New Jersey* as she appeared in 1988. *New Jersey* carried nine sixteen-inch guns in three separate gunhouses... two forward and one aft. Those gunhouses were a remarkable piece of engineering as they rotated on a set of bearings and they weren't actually connected to the hull. If the ship were to capsize, those gunhouses would fall out on their own." She lightly drew a finger over the model's hull. "*New Jersey* was 887 feet long and weighed 60,000 tons that could move over the ocean at 33 knots. Again, no computers to help with the design. But I'd love to meet whoever did the forward superstructure. That's been driving me nuts!"

Dawn had picked up a PADD while Sophea was talking. There was a slew of messages on there from Sophea's family. The PADD was connected wirelessly to the blue headphones in Dawn's other hand.

"How about we do something else?" Dawn asked as she started to hand the headphones to Sophea. Instead of taking them, Sophea hesitated, looking at the headphones with a sense of dread.

"They... used earphones to help program me," Sophea said, fear filling her voice. "They also used a visor on my eyes. I could only hear and see what they wanted me to see and hear."

"Do you trust me, Sophie?"

"I do."

"Then believe me when I say what's here is a pleasant surprise. I promise... no subliminal messages or propaganda. I'm going to put them on you." Dawn slowly put the headphones on Sophea's ears, deliberately being slow as not to startle the engineer. She could see the fear in Sophea's face, but she allowed the doctor to place them comfortably on her ears. However, she put her hands on them, ready to rip them off if what she heard wasn't nice. Dawn slowly pressed Play on the PADD and the voice of Christina, Sophea's wife, filled her ears.

"It's Christina!" shouted Sophea, all fear evaporated and replaced with a joyous expression. "She's talking to me!"

Dawn looked down long enough to make sure the reason Sophea was yelling wasn't due to the volume.

"Who's Christina?"

"She's... she's my wife! *Christina's my wife!*"

"How long have you two been married?"

Sophea was beaming from ear to ear, holding the earphones tight to her ears to hear her clearer. "Twelve years! We were married in July 2276!" Her grin got even wider as a new voice entered Sophea's ears. "My goddess! Eleonor!"

"Who is she to you?"

Sophea finally looked to Dawn, about to burst with joy. "My daughter! My precious pre-teen daughter! We adopted her as a baby, but *I love her as my own daughter!*"

As the message finished, Sophea's mood swung from being joyous to being sad. In fact, it looked as though Sophea was on the verge of crying.

"What's wrong?"

"EVERYTHING!" Sophea shouted, still holding her headphones to her ears. "Everyone thinks I'm a traitor... a willing spy for the Klingons! But I wasn't! Everyone thinks I betrayed

them and I can't stand the thought of that! Especially my wife and child!" Now she was crying as Dawn put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "I wasn't strong enough to stand up and fight! I can't stand to think everyone hates me! Maybe I should let them throw me in jail!"

Sophea sat down and Dawn bent down, putting her arms around the Hawaiian, holding her as she cried. "That Klingon bitch hurt me more deeply than if they'd just tortured me! She was *me*! She knew what I knew, felt what I felt, and I *couldn't stop her*! I wasn't *strong enough*!"

Dawn pulled her tight, and Sophea cried into the doctor's shoulder. "It's all right now, Sophie. The Klingon's gone. We made sure of that."

Sophea looked up with red-rimmed eyes. "Yes. I don't feel her lurking in my mind anymore. I can't thank you enough, Dawn. You want it, name it. It's yours."

"Just knowing you're all right is my payment." She picked up her PADD as Sophea went to wipe her eyes. "You've got a lot of messages here. How about you play them as you work on your model? I'll be back to check in on you in a bit."

She handed the PADD to Sophea, who took it and looked at the screen. "I usually blast Andorian rock as I work but I'll make an exception this time. I need to hear Christina and Eleonor."

Sophea hit the play button and turned to work on the gunhouses she had talked about admiringly just a few minutes ago. Dawn started for the door, but she felt she had to say something.

"Sophie?"

Sophea turned to her friend.

"I know you're not a traitor. And so does the captain. No one hates you, least of all any of us. I don't casually toss around the term 'friend' but you are certainly someone I'd call my friend. And I know the captain thinks the same. Don't *ever* feel that you're alone. You're not. We're with you."

Sophea smiled. "I don't make friends easily, but I have since I arrived here. And you're my friend, Dawn. Thanks for being in my corner."

"That's what's friends are for," smiled Dawn, meaning every word of what she had just said. She walked out and Sophea turned back to her model with her family talking in her ears.

Just hearing their voices made her day and for now, all her worries about people thinking she had turned traitor were laid to rest.

The next day, Sophea decided she would visit the captain. After spending the remainder of the day working on that problematic forward superstructure and finally getting it accurate for her engineer's eye for detail, she had gone to bed and slept well for the first time in weeks. There was no nagging Klingon warrior on the fringes of her mind to cause Sophea grief and to say the silence was a relief was an understatement.

Next morning, she had gotten up late, due to being on recovery leave but she felt she had to talk to the captain about what had happened. In her mind, she felt that she should have been in the brig but yet, she was in her quarters to recover. She had to know why Captain McKnight wasn't throwing her in the brig. She remembered everything she had done on *Starfleet One* and she was completely embarrassed by what she had done. Not only was she embarrassed but totally ashamed, a feeling she rarely made an acquaintance with. And the only way to get over both emotions was time.

After showering, she took the doctor's advice and decided to try something new with her dark hair. *New look for a new woman*, she had told herself as she worked on her hair. Sophea

looked closely at her freshly curled hair, and she liked what she saw. Afterwards, she put on a simple white T-shirt, dark blue jeans, a red leather biker's jacket that almost matched the color of their uniform jackets, and sneakers. Once she felt that she was presentable, she looked at herself in the mirror and was satisfied. *I am a new woman*, she thought. *I even feel new!* She walked out of her quarters, surprised that the door wasn't locked but not surprised to see two Marines standing guard there.

"I'm going to see the Captain," she said with, she hoped, enough sincerity in her voice. "Any objections, gentlemen?"

"The Captain anticipated you'd want to see him," said the bigger Marine. "Our orders were to escort you, ma'am. And to keep an eye on you."

Sophea nodded. "That's fair. Hell, it's what I'd have done if I were him. Do either of you know where Captain McKnight is at the moment?"

"He's in his office on the bridge," the Marine replied. "His orders also said that if you asked, we were to escort you there."

"Then lay on, MacDuff," she said, surprising both guards. Neither expected that the Hawaiian would know any Shakespeare, much less quote the Bard.

True to their word, they escorted her to the captain's ready room just off the bridge on the port side. The three of them waited for the captain to answer the chime.

"*Send Sophea in but you two stay out*," he ordered over the intercom. "*Four's going to be a crowd in here*."

The door opened and Sophea straightened her jacket before entering. She found him in the back of the office, behind his oak desk and wearing his Class A uniform... a rare thing to see, especially when he would only wear it when circumstances required it. *I remember him calling it a 'monkey suit'*, she thought. *Can't say I blame him*.

He looked up from his monitor and motioned for the engineer to enter and be seated, which she did.

"I had the feeling you'd come to see me, Sophie," he said in greeting as she walked to the indicated chair.

"I had to, Cap," she said, sitting down. "I felt I had to come talk to you."

He looked her over and there was appreciation in his eyes. "That's a new look for you, isn't it?"

She touched her hair, then jacket, before responding. "New look for a new woman. Least that's what Dawn said."

"The hair looks good... but are you trying to be in uniform without being in uniform?" he joked.

Sophea looked down at her clothing, trying to stifle a giggle and failing. "It's comfortable and I like the red color of our uniform jackets, but I wasn't deliberately trying to 'wear without wearing' our uniform."

Alex issued a slight chuckle. "Whatever it is, it's a good look on you, Sophie."

"Thanks, Cap." She smiled for a moment. "It's always nice to hear a compliment. Especially after all I've been through lately."

He sat back in his chair and crossed his arms casually across his belly. "You've got my full attention, Sophie."

She looked at him and in her peripheral vision, she saw on the computer screen a long list of text. "What's that?" she asked, pointing at the monitor.

Alex followed her gaze to the monitor. You could tell he didn't want to go down this road.

“It’s the list of charges against you.”

He slid the monitor over so she could read it. What got her full attention was the top sentence that all the charges had been dropped. “Cap,” she said as she read on, “I should be jail for what I did! Why aren’t I there?”

Alex leaned back in his seat. “Until about fifteen minutes ago, that’s exactly where you were going to go. I just found out that I was successful in getting all these charges dropped.”

Sophea was no fool and she caught the hidden meaning pretty quick. “You mean... you *fought* for me?” She looked at him quizzically. “Why? Why would you do that?”

Alex took a deep breath before he started. “You mean why put my command, my career, and my freedom on the line for you?” She nodded. “Because I had a feeling.”

Before she could protest, he held up a hand. “Stop. If you really want to know, then yes, all the evidence against you would have made sure you spend the rest of your days in prison. And the lengths I went to just to keep you out... by all rights, I should be joining you in that cell. But I had a feeling you weren’t you since you weren’t acting like the Sophie I knew. So, I put everything on the line and bet that my instincts were right.”

“But why?” she asked simply.

“I told you when you reported aboard that I take care of the people under my command... especially when they’re right. You’ve gotten a raw deal since graduating from the Academy, all because commanders don’t like a headstrong and very blunt engineer who will tell it as it is, regardless of the rank or station of the person on the receiving end. Me? I prefer it. You’re one of my best and most loyal officers, as well as stubborn, outspoken, and headstrong. I like that about you so when I saw you in collaboration with those renegade Klingon bastards, I knew something was off. And I wasn’t about to lose you unless I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt you were you.”

Sophea was dumbfounded and the look on her face showed just how flabbergasted she was at his words. She literally could not form words to speak.

“I put myself on the line all because I felt something was off about you. I fought off four different agencies who wanted nothing more than throw you into a hole and lose the key. And when you look at it from their point of view, all the evidence pointed to you being a knowing and willing collaborator. Hell, there’s video of you talking in Klingonese and admitting you were an agent! Just by holding off on arresting you, I became the bad guy! And if Dawn hasn’t figured out that it was some sort of neural gag order they implanted in you... well, I would have gone to prison peacefully, quietly.

“I thank God we were right.” Alex concluded.

Sophea finally found her voice. “Cap... I...” Words failed her for the moment until one single thought formed. “I don’t know what to say.”

“A simple ‘thank you’ will do, Sophie.” He grinned at her. “As I said, I look after my own when they’re right. What happened to you wasn’t your doing; you were brainwashed. And I’d do the same for every single person in this crew if what had happened to you had happened to them.”

Sophea was in near tears of joy and pride. She didn’t know he thought that way of her and it made her want to work even harder not to disappoint him. “Thank you, Captain.” She paused. “I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t.” He sat up. “Anything else?”

Sophea had an instant reply. “Yeah, I do. I’ve got something I think you’re going to want to hear.”

“I’m all ears,” Alex said, leaning forward in his chair.

“As payment for all you did,” she said, smiling wickedly at the thought of screwing over the Klingons who programmed her, “I will tell you how they took over *Starfleet One* and how we can prevent that from ever happening again.”

“I think I won’t be the only one wanting to know this,” Alex said, activating the recorder on the monitor. “I know of a lot of people who are going to be most interested in hearing what you’ve to say about this.”

She held the wicked smile on her lips. “I’ll gladly do anything to screw over those bastards who screwed with my mind.”