

Out with the Old in with the New

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Out with the Old in with the New

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

Summary

Ashley and Rana deal with the possibility of never seeing their old homes, families, and friends again while at the same time finding new friends and discovering that they have a new place for themselves.

Notes

On AO3, I have these stories published in a separate multi-part story called "Transitions", but I think they work much better in this format for Ad Astra. I've removed the framing parts that I have in Transitions as they include spoilers for later. What I was hoping to capture here was that while Ashley and Rana might feel some loss at losing their old lives and connections, they also find that they have new friends and are now able to pursue new hopes and dreams without the baggage of the old. It also shows the developing friendship between Ashley and Shelana who, as the story progresses, become best friends.

Part 1: Ashley

The Spoiled Princess--Ashley's quarters shortly after the events of Not in Kansas Anymore

Home is what you make of it. “Hmph.” Ashley grumbled as she gazed first at the holographic image her family and then at one of her comrades on the old *Normandy*. “What a pile of horseshit.” Hearing her door chime, she barked out angrily, “Who is it?”

“Sounds like someone’s having a bad day.” A voice responded sarcastically. “It’s Shelana. We’re about to dock at DS-9 and I scored a pair of tickets to the Niners-Blue Bores game, but if you don’t wanna go, I can always ask Nelia or Belen...”

“I’m sorry.” Ashley quickly responded, “You caught me at a bad time. Come on in.”

The door sliding open, Shelana sauntered in. Glancing at the images on her friend’s desk, the Andorian tactical specialist immediately diagnosed the problem. “Feeling homesick?”

“It’s that obvious?” Ashley quipped, a wry grin on her face.

“Let’s see...” Shelana remarked in a half joking-half concerned voice, “Gazing at holograms on the desk...family? Friends?”

“Both.” The former gunnery chief replied with a sigh. “They’re all from memory. I didn’t bring any pictures and Nelia still hasn’t found a way to get mine and Rana’s omnitools working, so...”

“You had the computer gin up some holograms for you.”

“Yeah.” Ashley replied with a snort, “Stupid, isn’t it.”

“Nope.” Shelana bluntly answered. “It’s not easy getting used to new surroundings—especially if you don’t have family or friends to latch on to. But Ash...” the human looked up in surprise at the Andorian woman’s use of the shortened form of her name, “that doesn’t mean you can’t make new friends.”

“And family? What about my mother...my sisters?” Ashley responded sorrowfully, “Are you gonna tell me I can find them here too?”

“Ashley.” Shelana answered back, her features taking on a harder edge, “I’m Andorian. Family and clan...that’s practically written in my DNA. I’m *zhen*. Andorians have four biological genders.” she explained, “*Zhens* are the one who bear and care for children.”

“Four genders?” The extra-universal human interjected in surprise.

Shrugging her shoulders, Shelana remarked, “So what? Your friend’s species is monogendered. I’m no biologist, but even I can tell you that life takes on a lot of different forms. But...we’re getting off track. My *Keth*...what you humans would call a clan...essentially disowned me because I refused the marriage they had arranged for me and went off into Starfleet. I made new friends and...” she shrugged her shoulders again, “Family’s not all about blood you know.”

“There’s a human saying that blood is thicker than water...” Ashley countered only to have her shipmate quickly riposte.

“A lot of Andorians—including my keth—say the same thing. But is that always the case?”

“No.” Ashley replied as she remembered friends who had been adopted as orphans. “I guess not.” Taking a deep breath and exhaling, the former gunnery chief remarked, “It’s just that things are so different here.”

“True.” Shelana allowed before chiding, “But there are things that are the same. Like...there are humans in this universe too. If anyone has a right to complain about being all alone, it’s Rana. She’s the only one of her species here that we know of. And I’m betting that if I were to have found myself in your universe, I’d have been all alone. At least you have humans you can interact with.”

“But the people here are so different...”

“Maybe. But you have stuff in common too.”

“Like what?” Ashley challenged.

“Baseball.” Shelana quickly responded. “Didn’t you tell me you had a baseball league back home?”

“Yeah.” Ashley replied with a crooked grin, “Dad was a Cubs fan while Aunt Ellie pulled for the Cardinals. Best thing to do when those two got together during baseball season was duck for cover.”

“See?” Shelana triumphantly declared, “We found one thing. Listen...” the lovely Andorian prompted, “We should be just about ready to dock. Get changed and I’ll meet you in the lounge and then we’ll go hit the Promenade and do some shopping before the game. Sound like a plan?”

“Yeah.” Ashley replied with a chuckle, “Let me get out of my pjs and into some clothes and I’ll meet you.”

“All right! See ya’ in a bit.”

Deep Space Nine—Promenade

“This reminds me of the Wards in the Citadel.” Ashley exclaimed as she and her Andorian shipmate walked down the Promenade, window gazing at the often exotic shops and kiosks.

“See!” Shelana grinned, “What did I tell you? You’ve found something else familiar.”

“What are those?” Ashley pointed at a stall where a Bajoran woman handed something on a stick to her child. “It looks like a popsicle.”

“It’s a jumja stick.” Shelana explained, “It’s made from the sap of the jumja tree that’s grown on Bajor. They make it in lots of flavors. Wanna try one?”

“Sure.” Ashley shrugged her shoulders as the pair approached the kiosk owned by a Bajoran man with close cropped brown hair.

“Two jumja sticks please.” Shelana ordered, “One yutann flavored and the other...”

“Do you have tangerine?” Ashley asked, smiling as the proprietor replied with a yes and nod of his head.

“Here you go.” Shelana grinned handing one of the Bajoran candies to her companion. “This one’s on me.”

Taking a cautious lick, Ashley smiled in contentment. “This is good!”

“Told you.” Shelana laughed as they passed a shop with a sign that read ‘Garak’s Fine Tailored Clothing.’ “Want to take a look? I’ve been looking for something new to wear.”

“Why don’t you just replicate what you want?” Ashley replied with a snort, “That’s what everyone else does.”

“Not if you want an original Garak.” Shelana replied with a wry grin. “Everything here is tailor made. No replicators used. That’s why you gotta pay in gpl.”

“Seriously?” Ashley exclaimed, “Hand tailored clothes?”

“Seriously.” Shelana deadpanned. “Come on...we’ve got a couple of hours before we have to get to the holosuite for the game. Let’s take a look.”

“Lead the way.”

Sometime later

“So where was the owner? Garak?” Ashley asked as she and her companion left the tailors shop each carrying a bag containing clothing. “Is there really someone by that name?”

“Oh yes.” Shelana replied as the pair strode down the Promenade. “He used to run the shop years ago—before the Dominion War. It seemed he was also at one time an agent in the Obsidian Order...”

“Obsidian Order?”

“Cardassian intelligence.” Shelana explained to her teammate. “But he was also a very good tailor. After the war, he helped to get the Cardassians back on their feet again, but still kept the shop. Funny thing was...he actually liked being a tailor. Now...” she shrugged, “...he’s involved in other stuff from what I’ve heard through rumors, but keeps his shop open and has employees running it and he also sells franchises elsewhere. You’ll probably find a Garak’s on every major Starbase or planet in the Federation, Romulan Republic, and even the Klingon Empire.”

“Damn. Sounds like he hit on a good scheme.” Ashley exclaimed.

“Yep.” Shelana laughed before turning momentarily pensive. “Replicated stuff is all well and good, but there’s something about touching something hand-made...eating a home-cooked meal...do you know what I mean?”

“Yeah.” Ashley replied with a warm grin, “I think I do. I guess we have something else in common. Where’s the game?”

“Right here.” Shelana gestured towards a casino already bustling with people. “Quark’s. It’s in one of the holosuites. We better hurry!” She urged, “Game’s gonna start soon and I want to grab a good seat.”

Quarks after the game

“Sorry about your team.” Ashley grinned as the two women made their way up the stairs and, finding an open table, sat down.

“That Niners pitcher killed us.” Shelana sighed as a half Bajoran-half Trill waitress appeared.

“What can I get you?”

“A pitcher of beer and keep them coming.” Shelana responded.

“Be right back.” The waitress acknowledged with a smile.

As the young woman walked away, Ashley muttered, “That’s another thing I can’t wrap my mind around.”

“What?” Shelana asked.

“The fact that two different species can have a child.” The ex-Alliance gunnery chief declared with a grimace.

“That they can have a child or be married?” The Andorian challenged.

“Both.” Ashley responded.

“Mind telling me why?” Shelana countered, “What difference should species make? You know…” the lovely Andorian pointed out, “it wasn’t that long ago that humans had laws forbidding marriage based simply on skin color or gender.”

“We had those laws in my old universe also. “ Ashley snapped back, “They were ridiculous there too.” Her face reddening in embarrassment as she heard her words, the extra-universal human lowered her head. “You’re right. It’s just interspecies relationships were kind of rare in my universe and with most of them, the other partner was an asari, so it’s not something I’m used to seeing.”

“From what you’ve told us…” Shelana observed, “in your universe humans had only recently discovered that there were other species. That’s a shock to any culture. Added to that, the fact that your first contact resulted in a war…”

“Yeah.” Ashley grumbled, The First Contact War with the turians. Me and my family are still dealing with that.”

“Okay, now that our beer’s here, why don’t you tell me about it.” Shelana entreated, “Take as much time as you need and don’t worry about buying. The beer’s on me tonight.”

A couple of pitchers of beer later, Ashley looked up at her Andorian friend, “So…that’s it. Am I some sort of speciest or bigot?”

“Of course not.” Shelana replied with a chuckle. “You wouldn’t have asked that question if you were. It sounded like you made some good friends on your old ship: that asari…what was her name again?”

“Liara.” Ashley smiled warmly as she recalled the young—by asari standards—archaeologist.

“Right.” Shelana nodded, “You worked with her and from what you told me, turned her into a frontline fighter.”

“Well…she did have a lot of natural talent.” Ashley modestly responded.

“Hey…don’t sell yourself short. She got that way from your training.”

“I just did what I would have done for anyone else.” The ex-gunnery chief countered, “I’m a professional. I take pride in my work.”

“Exactly.” Shelana rebutted. “You treated her just like she was a human recruit.” A smug grin on her face, the Andorian woman pressed her point, “And what about Garrus and Wrex? From what you told me, they were already combat vets. But you still hung out with them…”

“After Shepard pressed me to.”

“Your old CO just gave you a nudge in the right direction. The rest was all you.” Shelana declared, further affirming, “You’re not a racist…speciest…or bigot. You’re a damned good soldier and I’m thinking a damned good friend. So…” she held up her mug in a toast, “To friendship.”

“To friendship.”

Part 2: Rana

Chapter Summary

This part looks at how Rana was struggling to deal with her circumstances and how Twesata helped her to adjust. It also sets the stage for their growing relationship as we'll see in the future

The Spoiled Princess—Rana's quarters

Sitting at her desk, Rana concentrated on the medical text displayed on her monitor, ignoring the incessant chiming coming from her door until she heard a voice.

"Rana? It's Twesata. Either let me in or I'll override computer access."

Gritting her teeth, the lonely asari grudgingly gave her new Betazoid crewmate permission to enter.

"What's up?" The raven-haired Betazoid quipped as she breezed into Rana's quarters. Then walking to the computer, she clicked her tongue, "Tsk...Tsk. Medical texts again?"

"I've got a lot to learn." Rana replied morosely. "In many ways, you're far more advanced than we are."

"You don't have to learn it all at once." Twesata counseled, "You're more likely to go crazy first." After a momentary pause, the telepath remarked in a low, gentle tone. "You're in pain."

"Get out of my head." Rana snapped back with a scowl.

"I'm sorry." Twesata apologized, "But you're so loud it was hard for me to block it." Sitting down next to the distraught asari, she pleaded, "Talk to me."

"What is there to talk about?" Rana moaned. "I'm stuck here all alone trying to find something I can be good at. Your genetics are far more advanced than anything I've ever seen! There's so much you can do that I've only just dreamed about!" Letting out a breath of air, she sighed dejectedly, "I'll never fit in."

"That's what this is really all about—isn't it?" Twesata remarked sympathetically. "You're all alone."

"I'm the only one of my kind here." Rana sobbed, tears flowing down her cheeks. "Ashley's not completely alone. She has other humans to relate to and there's plenty of stuff that's familiar to her. The Earth here isn't that dissimilar to the Earth she knew, and a lot of Earth art and culture from our universe is present here."

Nodding her head in understanding, Twesata commented, "She has familiar structures to fall back on. But you..."

"I've got nothing." Rana moaned, "As far as I know, I'm the only asari living in this universe. There's nothing for me to hold on to here. I'm just drifting—no idea who I am...where I'm going...what I'm going to do."

"I know what I'm about to tell you might sound trite or clichéd..." Twesata implored, "But you should know that there is one secure place for you and that you have at least one friend to turn to."

"You're right." Rana replied with a despondent chuckle, "It does sound trite and clichéd."

"Warned you." Twesata joked, forcing a smile from her asari friend. "I'm kinda curious...what was Thessia like?"

Shrugging her shoulders, Rana answered back, "Can't you just read my mind?"

"Yeah." Twesata nodded, "But that's not the same as hearing it in your own words or experiencing it with my own senses." A smile appearing on her face, she glanced towards the door. "Why don't we go to the holodeck and you can show me."

"It won't be the same." Rana sighed.

"No." Twesata conceded, "But it'll be close. C'mon...what do you have to lose but a little time?"

"All right! All right!" Throwing up her hands in resignation, Rana let out a breath of air as she rolled her eyes. "Let's go. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner I can return to my moping."

Holodeck

"Run Rana One. University of Serrice" Rana commanded as the pair approached the holodeck door.

"*Rana One—University of Serrice ready.*"

As the door slid open, Twesata remarked on seeing the asari campus, "This is beautiful."

Nodding her head, Rana replied in a gloomy tone of voice, "Yeah. I always took my home for granted. I never realized that I might not ever go back."

"Don't say that." Twesata responded encouragingly. "We know that there's at least one portal between our universes. No reason to think that there aren't more."

"Maybe..." Rana sighed as the pair walked together, ignoring the holographic asari as they made their way down a trail. "Or maybe I'm going to have to get used to this being my home."

"Would that be such a bad thing?" Twesata asked, "From what you've told us, you were in a bad situation when you jumped in that portal with Ashley. It sounds like things were beginning to go bad in your universe."

"Yeah." Rana reluctantly confessed, "And I played my part in bringing it about."

"Tell me about it." Twesata implored as she guided her companion to a nearby bench and sat down with her.

"What can I say?" The asari geneticist moaned, "I screwed up. I picked the wrong boss to work for."

"Go on." The lovely Betazoid prompted.

"I was on the Citadel and looking for work and not having any success." Rana recalled, "Things were getting pretty tight—I was even considering applying for a dancer's spot at Chora's Den."

"It was that bad?"

"Yep." Rana nodded her head, "Degrees in genetics and medicine and couldn't get a job anywhere."

"Why not?" Twesata inquired.

"Funny..." Rana replied, cocking her head to the left, "I asked myself the same question at the time. It's not as if there weren't any jobs available. Maybe it's because I'm still in my maiden stage? No..." she shook her head, "...that couldn't have been the reason. I was coming up on my two hundredth birthday when I applied—still technically a maiden, but by this time a lot of maidens were beginning to settle into one job and were about to enter into their matron stage."

"Were you?" Twesata asked.

"No." Rana replied with a snort. "I wasn't ready to settle down with anyone just yet—and I definitely wasn't ready for children. No...the more I think about it, the more I think it was something else."

"What?"

"I think I was blacklisted—but at the time I had no idea as to why. I asked a friend of mine who worked for Armali if that was going on and who might be pissed at me, but she never got back to me. So...after a couple months, I tried to reach out to her again only to be told by her VI that she was 'unavailable' at the time and to leave a contact number and message."

"Been there...done that." Twesata nodded in sympathy. "Did you ever find out why you got put on the shitlist?"

"No." Rana shook her head before exclaiming, her expression a mixture of surprise and disbelief. "No...that couldn't have been the reason. Could it?"

"What was it?" Twesata asked, "You can tell me."

"Don't you already know?" Rana replied suspiciously.

"I'm doing everything I can to block your thoughts." The Betazoid telepath responded, "Not that it's easy—you are fucking loud." Gazing into her asari teammate's eyes, Twesata declared, "I'm not going to pry it out of you. You have to decide whether you trust me enough to tell me or not. If you can't trust me—then I'll comm Nelia, Shels, or Belen and you can talk to one of them. If you can't even do that—then you are going to be one very lonely woman. So...what's it going to be?"

"All right." Rana let out a breath of air. "You have to understand one thing. Here...this paper wouldn't have even raised an eyebrow. But back home, if it had circulated, it would have caused a firestorm."

"Okay..." Twes prompted reassuringly, "What was the paper about?"

"I wrote it for a conference on genetics. In the paper, I argued that given proper genetic resequencing it could be possible for asari and non-asari couples to have truly hybrid offspring—they wouldn't be born as pure asari. At the time, I considered it little more than a thought experiment—something to promote discussion and debate. But shortly after I submitted the paper, I received word that it had been rejected."

"Did they give a reason why?" Twesata asked.

"They just said that they'd already determined their presentation schedule when they received it." Rana replied with a snort, "But that was a damned lie because an old classmate of mine submitted her paper the same time I did and they found a spot for her. They just didn't like what I wrote."

“And that was enough to get you blacklisted?” Twesata exclaimed in surprise.

“Apparently it pissed off a highly placed matriarch because next thing I knew I was told by my employer at the time that my services were no longer required.”

“You were shitcanned.” Twesata bluntly concluded.

“Right.” Rana nodded, “After that, every asari or asari affiliated firm I applied to turned me down.” Rana sobbed, “I was so desperate for work that when Saren came along and offered me a job, I snapped it up without really inquiring too much into what the job entailed until it was too late and I was already on Virmire. That’s when I found out that my first patient was the man who had the job before me, so the work got decidedly personal.”

“From everything you’ve been telling me, it seems like you were going through hell back at your old home.” Twesata commented. “Maybe jumping into that portal was the best thing that happened to you.”

“Oh...don’t get me wrong.” Rana protested, “I’m happy to be off Virmire and still alive and unindoctrinated. When I think about what could have happened to me...” the asari scientist shivered as her companion placed her hand over hers. “It’s just that...” she said as she picked a holographic flower and sniffed it, “...sometimes I miss home...you know...”

“Yeah.” Twesata smiled, “I understand. Believe it or not, there are times I miss my home on Betazed and it’s in same universe.” Gazing into her friend’s eyes, the lovely Betazoid stated with a rare serious tone in her voice, “I’m not going to say I completely understand what you’re going through. I can’t. All I have to do is go walking about on DS 9 or Earth or Drozana or any of thousands of other places and odds are I’ll run into another Betazoid. Maybe I’ve taken that for granted. I guess I’d be pretty miserable if there weren’t at least the possibility of talking to another Betazoid. But one thing I can tell you...” taking a deep breath and exhaling, Twes put emphasis on every word she uttered, “You. Are. Not. Alone. I’m here. Nelia...Shels...Belen...Ashley. They’re here for you too. You see...you already have four friends and you’ve just arrived.”

A smile appearing on her face, Rana replied, “Thank you. And...I am grateful for all of you. It’s just that sometimes I feel a little...”

“Homesick.” Twesata grinned, “Yeah. I understand. Next time you’re feeling homesick, give me or one of the others a comm and we can get together. You can tell us about your home...preferably over drinks. Deal?”

“Deal!” Rana smiled back as she got up from the bench and grasped her friend’s hand. “Come with me. I wanna show you a biotiball game. My team, the Serrice Sun are playing the Lerama Shockers.”

“What are we waiting for, then!” Twesata chuckled, “Let’s go.”

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