

Unbonding

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/435) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/435>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Rihannsu
Character:	Original Vulcan Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Pre-Series , Vulcan Culture(s) , Worldbuilding , Family
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-03-22 Words: 7,323 Chapters: 2/2

Unbonding

by [Beatrice_Otter](#)

Summary

T'Nor has made her Declaration. But there are many decisions to be made before it will be time to board the ships to leave Vulcan behind.

Notes

For Sheliak in Worldbuilding Exchange 2021
Thank you to Prairie Dawn for the beta.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

T'Nor paged through the Sehe—no, the *Rihannh*—message boards. They were too great and sprawling for any one person to read *everything*, of course; but T'Nor, like most of the Declared, tried her best to see and weigh in on the important things.

The religion channels were lively, but relatively cordial and light-hearted, possibly because most gods and spirits and so forth were highly local, which meant they (probably) wouldn't be coming along on the journey. So most of the discussion was speculation as to what new spirits or gods they would find along the way, and in their new home, wherever it might be. Which was often fun to indulge in, but T'Nor wasn't in the mood.

Besides, the question was rather academic to T'Nor. She had no special affinity for any divinity, except perhaps Pani, a goddess of hunting and craftsmanship, which was good, but also of stillness and contemplation, which was more Surakian than T'Nor was quite comfortable with these days. And she'd never been a *true* devotee, she'd just had a storybook she'd been fond of as a child.

The polls on what cultural items they should take along were far more intense. They were building a new culture from the ground up, and it *mattered*, what they would bring with them. Some thought they should bring nothing and create from scratch. Some thought it should be up to the choice of each family (whether by blood or created by those orphaned by their Declaration). The discussion over physical items was bad enough, but at least there it was limited by the fact that both space and mass were, although generous for space-going vessels, still constrained.

Things such as literature and music which could be digitized—and therefore brought along in quantity—were hotly contested. Some thought they should only bring things in Old High Golic, some thought they should only bring things which had been translated into their new tongue. (Which was a nice idea, but *wildly* impractical—there was so much to do before they left, and surely they'd have time to translate things while aboard ship?)

T'Nor narrowed her feed to items that had been added or had major changes since the last time she looked.

"What?" She squinted at the screen, but she had seen correctly. *The Fall of the City*, which had been *solidly* on the "take" list (unsurprisingly) as a classic that many suspected the Surakians would ban, was now trending with "leave" votes. (T'Nor herself had voted "leave" because, while she could appreciate the artistic and cultural merit to it, it was by turns deadly dull and extremely gruesome. It was the only thing she'd ever read that had both bored her to the point of falling asleep in class *and* given her nightmares. If she could save future children from that, she would gladly do so. If the Surakians *did* get rid of it, so much the better.)

"How the name of the Ten Little Goddesses did *that* happen?" she wondered, and dove into the comment threads. And snickered at what she found.

An icon popped up on her screen. Aha! Shikusl was online. Shikusl was the best friend she'd made among the Declared; they'd been paired up as language partners, for despite living in vastly different time zones, Shikusl's schedule complemented T'Nor's. She tapped the icon to initiate a video call, and within seconds Shikusl had responded. They exchanged greetings—that much, at least, of their new language had become second nature.

"Have you saw the thread for *The Fall of the City* yet this morning?" T'Nor asked, carefully. She winced, realizing her mistake, and corrected herself. "Sorry. I mean, have you *seen* the thread?" She'd had the new language telepathically implanted, of course; but technical proficiency was not the same as fluency, and it was always hard to switch from her mother tongue to the new language.

"No, I have not," Shikusl said. "I just woke up. Let me check."

"It's now on the 'leave' list," T'Nor said. "Lots of votes. L'Dornen spoke in favor of taking it."

"I see," Shikusl said with a laugh. "And he was so insulting about it that people changed their votes so they wouldn't be agreeing with him?"

"Yes!" T'Nor said. "I hope we're not on the same ship as he is." Since T'Nor wasn't coming as part of a family or other group, she would be assigned based on where there was free space after the large groups had been given space, but she'd asked to be on the same ship as Shikusl's people, the Krheia. That would probably be approved because the prejudice against the Krheia was strong, even among the Declared.

"I hope he *un*-Declares himself," Shikusl said. "I would bet you anything you please that he wanted to come along because he is too—" T'Nor missed the word "—to have friends and thought the Rihannsu would be just as—" that word again "—as he is."

"Sorry, what was that word?" T'Nor asked. She tried to say it. "Is that a Krheian word?"

"No? It's Rihannsu. I *think* I'm pronouncing it right." Shikusl frowned and sent her a link to the entry in the lexicon.

T'Nor looked at it. "Oh! *Obnoxious*," she said in her mother tongue, and then repeated it in Rihannsu several times to fix it in her memory. It was somewhat embarrassing, that Shikusl was so much better at this than T'Nor was; T'Nor's main language was Golic, and she spoke enough of Old High Golic to understand and participate in the ancient rituals, and to read at least *some* of the classics in the original. Shikusl spoke neither, and yet she was much more fluent in the new language they had made from the roots of the old.

"And then S'task chastised him," Shikusl said, having been reading further down the thread. "I suppose the 'leave' votes are an attempt to curry favor with our dear leader, instead of a rebuke to L'Dornen."

T'Nor hummed noncommittally; Shikusl and her people weren't going because of any loyalty to S'task or his principles, but to get away from Vulcan, and tended to be skeptical of the reverence most of the Declared had for him.

She read S'task's post, for he didn't often comment directly on such matters, but when he did he always had something worthwhile to say:

If you believe *The Fall of The City* to be a tale of glory and an endorsement of violence, you should read it again more closely. It is, rather, an exploration of the horrors that violence and war and hatred often bring in their train. It is a story of futility. The brave defenders descend into the vilest parts of their nature as they try to hold out against their besiegers, descending lower than beasts in their fear and desperation. The invading force is even worse, once the city is breached, perpetrating greater horrors in their savage glee. I believe the Surakians will treasure it, rather than suppress it, for it supports their great justification: that warfare is so great an evil that any other course, even the extirpation of all other passions and surrendering to your enemies, is preferable.

You are also mistaken in your understanding of our purpose. We do not choose to go because we believe violence is the highest good, or in any way moral or right in the abstract, shorn from any other justifications. We go because even the worst horrors we have wrought upon one another are not enough to outweigh the joys and richness of the other passions. We would do well to remember the horrors, to avoid them; but we should not glorify them, either. War has its place, but so does peace. Hate has its place, but so does love. Fear, but also courage; jealousy, but also generosity.

Our task in selecting our library is to pick the things that show forth all facets of these passions that we hold so dear we would forsake our homes for their sake. Not merely the pretty sides of them, but the unflinching reality of their existence.

"I don't think anyone's trying to suck up to him," T'Nor said as she finished reading his piece. "Or, well, there's the usual pile-on of people praising his wisdom. But he didn't say whether we should take it or leave it, and it sounds to me like he thinks we *should* bring it with us. Just for a different reason than that jerk L'Dornen thinks."

"Yes, but do you think the average Rihannh is good enough at parsing rhetoric to notice that, or were they just going by the fact that he disagreed with the last person to argue passionately for taking it?"

T'Nor opened her mouth, then thought back to some of the discussions she'd stayed well clear of on the Rihannsu forums. "I wish I knew you were wrong," she said. They chatted about various things until Shikusl had to get ready for work.

T'Nor perused the boards some more after her friend signed off, until she could sense the presence of the family gathering in the main hall for the traditional pre-dinner social time. She considered staying in her room until dinner, but that was the coward's way out, and if she were going to do *that* she might as well follow through on her threat and find an apartment of her own to live in until the departure.

She took a deep breath, gathered her composure and her courage, and went out into the main hall, as all the aunts and uncles and cousins and the other assorted relations that lived in the compound filtered in.

Nobody spoke to her, which might or might not be a snub; as the favored daughter of the clan head and his only wife, she had a high position within the family hierarchy, but her status had been shakier since she had Declared herself. No one was willing to say anything her father might take offense at ... but there was doubt as to how long she would *be* the favored daughter of the clan head.

But, on the other hand, none of the cousins or elders with whom she had a close relationship were currently in residence, for it was the growing season and much of the family was out managing the clan's agricultural interests. Lacking a conversation partner, T'Nor studied the elaborate mosaics and frescos which adorned the hall. Their clan was not particularly old, but skill in business and war had brought them land and wealth and the treasures of other tribes, of which this villa was not the least. She had taken the elaborately painted tiles and carved stone for granted as a child, along with the abundance of ornamental plants. She saw it with new eyes, now; whatever her descendants might build on their new homeworld, their first few generations at least would be lodged in simpler dwellings.

She suppressed her feelings of guilt for living in such opulence, while her comrades lived in poverty in order to dedicate all their funds to the building of the ships. She gave virtually all her salary to the construction efforts; moving out of her family home to an apartment or a room in a dorm would lower her quality of life and give her solidarity with the other Rihannsu peoples, but it would *also* require her to keep back a large chunk of her salary for living expenses. Which would do no one any good.

She took her accustomed seat on a cushioned stool towards the front: far enough forward to befit her status as a daughter of the Lord of the House, but still lower than her brothers. There was the usual quiet chatter, people talking about their day, as the servants passed between them to wash their hands and feet. That, too, was something T'Nor had always taken for granted, until she had gotten to know Shikusl, who served a family not unlike T'Nor's, half-way around Vulcan. Except a Krheia servant would never be allowed out where the family might see her, even to perform so menial a task as washing the family's feet.

And if her family knew she was now *friends* with a Krheia, they'd ... well, her clan was hardly prone to abuse or histrionics, they wouldn't lock her up or try to forbid her comms access or throw her out, or anything. But there would be pressure on her to block Shikusl's calls and find a more suitable language partner, from an allied clan, if possible.

But what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them, and T'Nor had no intention of letting them find out.

Her parents and brothers were washed first, of course, but T'Nor's turn came after that. She watched as a girl whose name she did not know unbuckled her sandals to wash her feet in perfumed water, while another held a basin of unperfumed water for her to wash her hands in.

"So, are you still determined to go on that mad voyage to nowhere?" Uncle Lekar asked.

"Oh, yes," T'Nor said, firmly holding on to her temper at the millionth repetition of the argument, "and it's not mad. We have secured full funding for all who wish to go, and some of the best minds on the planet are designing our ships. They will be quite comfortable and provide us with all that we need when we find our new homeworld." She held out her hands for the servant to dry them.

"Comfortable, hah! Nothing but recycled air; I'll tell you, I've *been* in space on a long-term voyage, and the fanciest hydroponics systems can't match the feel of good, fresh air. Not to mention the company—I've *seen* the demographics of those Seheik, and there are *far* more undesirables than there are our sort of people."

"As you have told me so *many* times before," T'Nor said. "They say insanity is doing—or saying—the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different outcome." His mother and one of his sons suffered from bouts of mental illness, and there had been occasional doubts about *his* competency; it was cruel of her to say, but on the other hand, he had ignored every gentler rebuke she had given him.

"T'Nor!" Her father chastised her.

She raised her chin and stared at him, challengingly, but he wasn't looking at her. Instead, he was frowning at Uncle Lekar. Well. If he'd reigned in his half-brother earlier—or *any* of the family, in the year since she had Declared herself—she would not now be so ready to respond to any challenge with a fight.

She decided that she wasn't ready to forgive Uncle Lekar just yet, though she did regret the cruelty of her words. "But of course your extensive experience in space travel and the hardships of it will be a great gift to me as I prepare for my journey." There: respectful enough to keep the peace and soothe the hurt her words had caused without actually apologizing for them.

He harrumphed and eyed her for a few seconds before turning to ask Cousin S'hali about his ornamental garden. T'Nor turned to Aunt T'Han to ask how the planting was going, this season, and what the long-range weather forecasts were.

"The projections are good," T'Han said, "perhaps a trifle rainier than normal, possibly even enough to store the excess in cisterns and use to grow a second crop during the dry season. Shouldn't you know that? I know you have the Han-pok gift of prophecy."

"It doesn't do weather, unfortunately," T'Nor said. "Or anything else business-related." Truly, her gift was small, and not well-controlled; she could not call up a prophecy on cue, or divine the future of a person or thing merely from touching it, as the Han-pok were said to have done.

"Huh," T'Han said, "Well, I should have known; if their fortune-telling skills were any practical use, we wouldn't have been able to conquer and absorb them." She returned to the subject of farm reports, and the projected yields, and the expected prices of their cash crops, and how that all fit into the larger business of the clan.

T'Nor disagreed with her on whether the price of ch'aal would continue to rise or hold steady at its present value, and the conversation carried them until dinner was announced.

They ate the meal in silence, dedicating their minds to a contemplation of the food and the presence of all the minds around them. Seldom were the subtle, subconscious ties between and among them so perceptible as during mealtimes. T'Nor had basked in her family's presence thousands of times in her life, and ached to know that someday soon she would sit here among them for the last time. There was a part of her that wished to believe that she could take back her declaration and stay here with them forever.

But it was not a *large* part of her. T'Nor's gift of prophecy was small and unpredictable, but this she knew with absolute certainty: her fate was not here on Vulcan, but in the stars.

After dinner, her mother asked to speak with her, and T'Nor was fairly certain she knew why.

"I told you that I would only stay if people stopped harassing me about my choice," she said.

"Even the head of the House can only do so much," Mother said dryly, "especially about his older brother. Nevertheless, your father is speaking with Lekar. That doesn't explain *your* cruelty."

"I shouldn't have said it," T'Nor said, "but he shouldn't have—"

"T'Nor, I love you," Mother said. "I want you to stay here, with us, until you leave; I don't understand your choice, but I do accept that I can't change your mind, and I want as much time with you as possible. But I want those memories to be *good* memories. And I think you do too. Granted that your father and I will be doing what he can to prevent anyone in the household from harping on what they think of your choice, will *you* be willing and able to respond in kind by restraining your behavior within the bounds of courtesy and kindness?"

T'Nor sagged. "Yes, mother," she said.

Mother reached out a hand, and T'Nor brushed it with her own; the maternal bond between them, never wholly vanished despite T'Nor's adulthood, flared up. T'Nor stepped closer and wrapped her arms around her mother. It wasn't the same as when she'd been a child; for one thing, she was now slightly taller than her mother. But the sensation of her mother's arms and mind around her were comforting nonetheless, and T'Nor was glad she was old enough now that such an indulgence no longer felt like a threat to her own maturity.

"Will you require me to apologize to Uncle Lekar?" she asked.

"No," her mother said. "But you should do it anyway."

"Honored cousin?"

T'Nor typed out a note about her thought processes and what needed to happen next before looking up, knowing it would save her a lot of time after the interruption. "Yes?" she said when she was finished.

The cousin—Lith, daughter of one of her grandfather's lesser concubines—bowed to her. "Your betrothed is here and wishes to see you."

"Oh," T'Nor said. During a workday? If he'd agreed to sever their bonding, he—or rather, his clan's Eldest Mother—would have sent a formal document to open negotiations as to the legal aspects of their (and through them, their families') separation.

He was waiting in one of the formal sitting areas just outside the intimate family areas. He'd been in the family spaces several times, of course

(much of it spent in her bedroom), but she was grateful for whichever servant had had the delicacy to put him here, instead. Given that they would not become family after all, the additional intimacy of the family's private quarters would only have made things awkward.

"Sepak," she said, his new Surakian name falling awkwardly on her tongue. "Have you agreed to sever our bonding?"

Sepak licked his lips nervously, which was funny coming from a Surakian. Not so capable of the serenity they claimed to offer, was he? "If you are truly committed to going, it would be illogical to wait until distance severs the tie between us."

"I'm glad you agree," T'Nor said. 'Illogical' was one word for trying to cling to her when she wasn't going to be *here* for him; stupid was another. Or suicidal. "I *am* going. I don't want you to suffer for my choices."

"Thank you," he said. "But ... I wonder—" he hesitated, then rushed on. "—I wonder if it is *me* you are wanting to escape? If I agree to free you with no conditions, would you be content to stay on Vulcan?"

"I like you," T'Nor said, with some surprise. "I'll be sad to leave you. But you aren't going, and I'm not staying. It's not about *you*."

"Oh," he said, not sure whether to be pleased or offended. Was he *really* conceited enough to think she'd made the choice to uproot her entire life just because of *him*?

"Would it make a difference if I agreed to give up Surak's philosophy?" he said plaintively, and not for the first time.

"No, *Sepak*, it would not," T'Nor said bluntly. "I'd think less of you for abandoning your principles; it certainly wouldn't induce me to stay!"

"Would you ... want me to come with you?" Sepak asked. "If I wasn't a Surakian?"

"Not unless *you* genuinely wanted to come for a better reason than because you're scared of facing life without me," T'Nor said. "We're going to have a hard time. There will be many difficulties and some suffering. Dragging someone along who isn't truly committed to our cause and way of thinking ... would be a recipe for disaster. Not good for either of us, or our families, or the rest of the Declared."

"I suppose," Sepak said, looking down at his hands. "Do you know that for sure?" he asked. "With your touch of your family's gift?"

"Yes," she said. No one in her own family had asked that question. The Han-pok had relied too heavily on their powers of prophecy; it hadn't prevented their downfall, only made them rigid and delayed their actions at critical moments as they had sought the wisdom of their seers. Which was why her own clan neither bred for it nor spent much time training and honing such talents when they appeared.

"Then why are you so determined to go, if it will cause pain?"

She considered what to say. If she had tried to explain this to anyone in her own clan, they would have harped on the story of how their clan had acquired the ability to see the future in the first place, and argued that it was useless and should be ignored. And that was not an argument T'Nor wished to have. But Sepak would not. "If I tell you, will you promise not to tell my family?" The last thing she needed was giving them extra fuel for their attempts to dissuade her.

"You have my word that I will not share with anyone what you tell me," Sepak said.

"There is no future for me on Vulcan," T'Nor said. "There is ... there is *nothing*. I am not here. I will not be here. Surak's philosophies will prevail and cover the entire planet, and that is not my fate."

He frowned, baffled, and she went on before he could say anything.

"Beyond Surak's victory, I see nothing of Vulcan. It's empty, at least for me. The journey of the Rihannsu will be hard, and long—longer and harder than anyone really thinks. But I see myself there. I see ... *possibility* there. There are many different futures for me, among the Declared. Some good, some bad. Some short, some long. But they *exist*. There is no future for me in Surak's Vulcan."

"Can you ..." Sepak said "... can you see *my* future?"

"No," T'Nor said. "I only ever see things which are connected with me, and you will not be."

"Oh," he said, sagging.

"Why are you so reluctant to release me?" T'Nor asked. "You said yourself it isn't logical, and while we do—did—well enough together, it's not as if we're so specially attuned to one another that we both wouldn't do equally well with other bondmates."

"I think Surak was right," he said slowly.

"Well, yes, obviously, otherwise you wouldn't have changed your name and joined his parade."

"No," he said, "I meant, specifically, he was right about fear."

When he didn't go on, T'Nor prodded him. "You do realize I have *no* idea what he's said on *any* topic?"

"Here is the first part of the secret," Sepak said, his voice taking on the slight lilt it had when he was quoting poetry. "Cast out fear. There is no room for anything else until you cast out fear. I've been telling myself all along that I'm acting out of compassion for you, hoping to spare you from having to leave your home, but that isn't true. It's not for you; it's for me. I am afraid of losing you, and it is clouding my mind. I am afraid of what life will be like without you. I am afraid of having someone who has been a part of my mind since childhood replaced by a stranger."

"I thought you weren't supposed to feel emotion," T'Nor said.

"It's not about *feeling* emotion, or not," Sepak said. "It's about whether you let it control you. I have been, I think; and the first step is recognizing that." He nodded, coming to a conclusion. "I apologize for allowing my emotions to cloud my judgment where our marriage and divorce are concerned."

T'Nor squinted at him and thought this over. "I think," she said at last, "that if you *hadn't* reacted with emotion to the idea of ending our bond, I'd be far *more* offended than I could ever be by your trying to convince me to stay. I wouldn't want to think I was easily forgettable, or replaceable. And we have been in each other's heads for almost twenty years now. I'll miss you too, you know."

"Yes," he said. "I understand. And thank you. I will tell my Eldest Mother to begin arranging for our dissolution, and finding me another wife."

"A Surakian," T'Nor said.

"Is that a prediction?"

"No, but I don't need precognition to know *you*. And I think you'd be happier that way."

He gave her a small smile, the first she'd seen on his face in a long time. "Live long and prosper, T'Nor," he said, bowing.

She didn't know the Surakian response, and wouldn't have used it if she did. "To you as well," she said. "May all the gods smile on your path."

When she got back to her desk, the note she had made herself was useless; she couldn't concentrate enough to finish the section.

"Well, at least he was nice enough in the end," Shikusl said that night over the comm, when T'Nor told her about the day's meeting with her soon-to-be-former bondmate.

"Oh, definitely," T'Nor said. "He's always been nice enough; not the most *exciting* boy—man, now—but dependable and kind."

"I'd say 'dependable and kind' are far more important than excitement, in a spouse," Shikusl said dryly.

"Oh, I agree now, though I didn't when we were adolescents together," T'Nor said. "I'll miss him—I can't really remember what it was like to not have him in my head, so this will be a major change. And I won't have an Eldest Mother; I'll have to find a new spouse on my own, and I've *no* idea how to even *begin*. But I'm sure I can't be the only Rihannsu going into this divorced; surely there will be *someone* acceptable." How it would work, she didn't know; most people were going with at least part of their families with them. Would they include Eldest Mothers, to make arrangements like this? Would she attach herself to such a family? Did the Krheia have Eldest Mothers? They were so different, culturally, from most Vulcan ethnic groups.

Shikusl didn't respond, just gave her a funny look.

"Oh, I'm sorry, we've only been talking about me, haven't we," T'Nor said. She tried to remember if Shikusl had ever mentioned a bondmate. She wasn't old enough to be *fully* married yet, T'Nor knew that. "Given that your whole clan and so many of your ethnic group are going, I suppose you haven't had to break a betrothal?"

Shikusl snorted. "We don't betroth our children. We consider it cruel—and stupid—to tie developing brains together like that. People change a lot, in the path from childhood to adulthood. How can *anyone* know that two children will be suitable partners as adults? It doesn't do anyone in the family any good or further whatever alliance you're trying to make if the couple in question can't stand each other as adults."

"So, when *do* you betroth your children?" T'Nor asked, baffled. "Fourteen?"

Shikusl rolled her eyes. "Of course not, that's scarcely better than seven. Krheia don't bond until the mid-twenties, generally."

T'Nor sagged in shock. "You're joking, you must be," she said. "What if you come upon an unbonded man near to his time? If you're not bonded, what is to protect you?" Even men in Plak Tow generally wouldn't try anything with a woman bonded elsewhere, when their madness might drive them to attack unbonded women.

"If a hi'Ssagkl male in the grips of the Fire wants a Krheia woman, he's not going to care if she's *bonded*," Shikusl said.

It took T'Nor a few seconds to remember that 'hi'Ssagkl' was a rude Krheia word for anyone not of their ethnic group. "But—"

Shikusl shook her head. "You Golians put so much weight on bonding, and on a person's Time. And then you ignore everything that doesn't fit your ideas. A woman's bond to another will only dissuade a man in his Time if he respects or fears her bondmate or her clan. Which means that being bonded is no protection for any woman of *my* people. If you're targeted, all being bonded does is make it more unpleasant."

"Oh," T'Nor said. That couldn't be right, but then, it wouldn't be the first time Shikusl told her things that T'Nor couldn't believe, but which turned out to be true when she looked it up. She'd learned not to challenge her friend without doing research first. "I'm sorry," she said, hoping that there was no *personal* experience there.

She groped around for another subject to talk about, and Sepak was the only thing she could think of. "It was weird, that he had a new name; it doesn't match my memory of him. But it matches who he is *now*, and at least everyone knows what he is as soon as he introduces himself. I've heard some of the Rihannsu are making Rihannsu names for themselves. What do you think of it?"

Shikusl snorted. "*I'm* not changing my name," she said, which didn't surprise T'Nor. "I'm not sure why you'd want to. I mean, I get why the Surakians do, but why should we follow their lead?"

"True," T'Nor said, "but why do you see a difference?"

"Well," Shikusl said, "the Surakians are trying to change themselves and all of Vulcan with them. That's the *point* of the movement. To make something completely new. What *we* want is to have space to be truly *ourselves*, even if all Vulcan will not accept that. Why should *we* change our names? The point is that we don't *want* to change!"

"Good point," T'Nor said. "Actually, it's rather ironic, when you think about it, that *we* are the ones creating and adopting a new language, isn't it?"

"I've always thought so," Shikusl said, "but on the other hand, it *does* mean that at least for the first generation our common tongue will be a second language for *everyone*, which does make things more equal. Though we'll have to see how that plays out."

"Will your people be keeping your own language?" T'Nor asked.

"Of course," Shikusl said. "Just ... don't spread that around, please? There's enough grumbling about us already."

"Okay," T'Nor said. "Though if you're hoping to be more accepted, wouldn't blending in be better?"

"If we gave up our language to please them, they'd only find some other reason," Shikusl said. "It's why we don't trust the Surakians, either. There is nothing we could ever do to be good enough or normal enough to be accepted as equals. They'll find *some* reason to keep us second-class citizens even in that brand-new utopia they're trying to build. At least the Rihannsu will be honest about their bigotry. And instead of a tiny minority, we'll be one of the larger groups. They may hate us, but we'll be able to protect ourselves, and have an actual say in things."

"Oh," T'Nor said.

"Anyway," Shikusl said, "I'm not changing my name—I might add a name, but I won't be getting rid of the one I already have—and if you want *my* opinion, you should only change your name if you feel like you're becoming someone different. If leaving Vulcan is your chance to make a fresh start and become someone new."

T'Nor thought about that. "No," she said, "I'm leaving Vulcan so I can stay truly myself."

"Well, then."

T'Nor was unsurprised, a few days later, to find herself called into her father's office. As she had expected, a document on fine vellum with elaborate seals lay on his desk, in stark contrast to the computer screens and keyboards that had been pushed off to the side to make room for it. Both of her parents were there, though neither was seated at the desk. They stood to one side, fingers touching.

"Your betrothed's Eldest Mother has agreed to the divorce," Mother said. "And, at Kir—I mean, at *Sepak's* request, they are not suing for any penalties or damages at your default."

"Oh, I'm glad," T'Nor said, with a sigh of relief. She'd felt guilty, that her clan would bear the cost and shame of her choices, but there was simply no way around it.

"He says it isn't 'logical,'" Father said. "Those Surakians have no sense and no business skills, I've always said; it's why the fad can't last *too* much longer. Once they've been cheated enough times, they'll see the error of their ways."

T'Nor hummed a noncommittal sound.

"The other thing," her father said, staring intently at her, "is that he specifies that if you decide to stay on Vulcan after all and un-Declare yourself, there will *still* be no penalties or damages."

"Really?" T'Nor said. "I told him it wasn't about *him*, and our betrothal had no bearing either way on my choice."

Her father's face fell, and T'Nor realized that he had been hoping that that clause meant that T'Nor's Declaration was only a ploy to get out of an undesired marriage.

"Perhaps he wanted to make sure you would always have the freedom to change your mind," Mother said.

"That sounds like him," T'Nor said.

Father rubbed a hand over his face. "The date for the dissolution of your bond has been set."

T'Nor stepped over to the desk and took in the details. "I will be there."

"So will we," her father said. "*He* may not wish to hold your defection against the clan, but he may not speak for his elders. I want to see what we can do to keep that alliance, if possible."

"Meanwhile, we must give thought to your marriage," Mother said. "There are surely eligible men of the right sort of family among the Seheik. I will begin making enquiries."

"Thank you, but no," T'Nor said, taking the opportunity and seizing it.

"What?" Mother said.

"T'Nor, don't be absurd, you must marry, and it's our responsibility to find you a good family to marry into," Father said.

"Is it?" T'Nor asked. "The clan will see no benefit from my marriage, nor any hurt. I won't be here. We aren't trying to recreate the same sort of clan structures that Vulcan has; we couldn't if we wanted to, unless we worked to create new clans out of wholly unrelated individuals. What I will need out of a spouse among the Rihannsu is very different from what I would need out of a spouse here on Vulcan. I think I know better what I will need along the journey, and I ask your permission to make my own choices."

It was not quite as fraught a statement as the one she had made, a year ago, when she Declared herself to them, but it was close; and even two years ago, she could not have imagined contradicting her parents this way to their faces.

Her parents looked at each other, and she wondered what was passing between them. But she had no fear that they would deny her, for if they tried to enforce their wishes she would simply leave. It was a heady freedom, to be able to say 'no' and have it respected. But if they wanted her to stay until the ships were ready, they *had* to respect it.

"I would like to advise you, at least," Mother said at last.

T'Nor smiled in relief. "I would be happy to have your advice, of course."

"There is another matter," Father said. "Now it is quite certain that you will be going—"

T'Nor bit down her irritation, for it had been quite certain for the last *year*. But at least he was finally accepting it.

"—we need to think about what you will be taking with you."

"My clothes and personal belongings, of course," T'Nor said.

"Yes," Father said, "but what of the clan? You will be far from us, but still *of us*, and as my daughter you have a right to a share of the clan's wealth."

"Really?" T'Nor blurted out. Most clans had decided that joining the Rihannsu movement severed such rights by repudiating them. It was meant both to discourage people from leaving and punish them for doing so. And preserve the clan's wealth on Vulcan, at the expense of those who were to leave.

"Oh, T'Nor," Mother said, voice thick with emotion. "You are, and always will be, our beloved daughter."

"Yes," Father said. He handed her a tablet computer. "Space and mass will be at a premium in space, of course; but computer files are easy. You will have all our proprietary information and processes, and all the history of how we have used them for our clan's growth—I only ask that you keep them private, and use them with your own best judgment, rather than handing them over to others who may not value them or use them wisely."

"When you come to your new home, I would think that the artificial womb technology and the flash-training inputs will be very useful to grow your population," Mother said. "I know you'll have sensitives who can imprint knowledge in peoples' minds, and flash-training is less flexible, but it's always good to have alternatives that don't depend on a sensitive feeling ... cooperative."

"Oh, *thank* you," T'Nor said, feeling overwhelmed; the technology of artificial wombs was one of the clan's most closely guarded secrets. It was *that* breakthrough which had allowed the family which founded the clan to grow quickly enough, and quietly enough, to conquer their early rivals and establish themselves as a local power. Accordingly, only a few within the family had access to the computers on which the information on how to create the artificial wombs was stored; outside the clan, even the existence of such technology was only a rumor. T'Nor had not thought she would be able to take it with her, but Mother was right: it *would* be useful.

"In more tangible means," Father said, "I know you've always loved the festival dishes adorned with scenes from the tales of Pani, and I think you should have them."

"I ... I am honored," T'Nor said. *That* was a thornier matter. It was true that T'Nor had loved the gorgeous porcelain, and her favorite book as a child had been one with stories of Pani. She had assumed she would leave it behind, as unsuitable for a Rihannsu, but perhaps Shikusl had the right of it: she wasn't leaving so that she could change who she was, but rather so that she could be most truly who she was.

And she couldn't refuse the festival dishes without hurting her parents, and she was hurting them quite enough just by leaving. "Thank you," she said, feeling tears well up inside her. "Thank you."

Epilogue

When the Declared left, T'Nor went with them, on the same ship as her dear friend Shikusl; and though the journey was long and filled with hardship and grief, both women lived to reach their new homeworlds. In the lottery that divided up ch'Rihan and ch'Havran for settlement, T'Nor went with her friend and the people who had become her family in decades spent together in space, and settled on the eastern continent of ch'Havran. They settled there with all the other clans and houses and ethnic groups whom the rest of the Rihannsu did not care for. There was some grumbling, at first, about being assigned to land that was less fertile and more difficult than any other continent of the Two Worlds. This mostly subsided when they realized that, resource-poor as they were, they were mostly left to their own devices and were in little danger of cross-planet raids, unlike those who lived on ch'Rihan.

T'Nor's festival porcelain, dedicated to Pani, was adapted for worship of the Elements and what local spirits they found in their new home. It was a treasure of the house that T'Nor founded, and people came from all over the Two Worlds to see it (for it was the finest example of Vulcan pottery the Rihannsu had), but it had no more value or consequence than any other beautiful item.

The proprietary information she was given—fertility treatments, artificial wombs, flash-training to teach technical skills quickly—was another matter entirely. Some of it found its way into Vriha T'Rehu's hands; several of the scientists and researchers she hired to build her population base and grow her an army came from the East Continent.

It is said, by those who take the ch'Rihan view, that when the people of ch'Havran doubled their population in order to grow an army of their own, they did so by "natural" means. (After all, they think the nations of the East Continent of ch'Havran are barbaric and backwards, poor and savage.) By "natural" they mean without technological assistance, without outside help, and thus by merely encouraging their women to be pregnant as often as possible. The people of ch'Rihan have forgotten where T'Rehu's experts came from in the first place, and assume that those of the East Continent must always be rustic in their poverty, with no skill or technology they have not imported.

But this is not the case. They imported no fertility specialists from ch'Rihan, or even from the West Continent of ch'Havran. Such a move might have alerted T'Rehu, it is true, but the truth is simpler than that.

They had no need of importing experts. They had their own.

And, to this day, the reproductive medicine on the East Continent of ch'Havran is some of the best in the Two Worlds, although this is little known outside its borders.

They prefer it that way.

End Notes

The Fall of the City is a reference from sixbeforelunch's story "Let'thieri"

The Surak quote is from Chapter Vulcan: Six of *Spock's World* by Diane Duane (page 249 of the hardback).

Rebloggable on [tumblr](#).

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!