

The Mountain Rose Before Me

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The Mountain Rose Before Me

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Summary

The *fal-tor-pan* is an ancient and dangerous rite, unused for centuries. It is not done lightly. High Priestess T'Lar considers.

Notes

This fic was inspired by [Killabeez's](#) excellent vid [Dante's Prayer](#). Current link to the vid and the password can be found on [this spreadsheet](#).

Thank you to the [Vulcan Language Dictionary](#) for certain words, particularly for help in verifying my spelling of ashv'cezh, revenge-worse-than-death.

As always, my idea of Vulcan culture is *heavily* influenced by Diane Duane's Star Trek novels, particularly *Spock's World*, which you should read if you haven't already. (Also by various other Star Trek novels of the 1980s, including *The Vulcan Academy Murders*, *The IDIC Epidemic* and *Dwellers in the Crucible*.)

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

- Inspired by [Dante's Prayer](#) by killabeez

When T'Lar rose from her morning veneration to the gods of her ancestors, Madam T'Vas was standing just outside the shrine, head bowed respectfully. There were many shrines on Seleya, each to a different god or goddess, and each was venerated once a day; sometimes more, depending on the god and the season and what rituals there were to be performed. T'Lar took her rotation among the priestesses who performed such rites. Although it was not required for the High Priestess to do so, T'Lar found it a valuable practice both for herself and for the discipline of those who *were* required to do so.

Madam T'Vas, her aide, also took her place in the rotation, making her presence here unexpected as she should have been completing her own devotions. But, T'Lar recalled, on this morning T'Vas had been the priestess to worship at the shrine of Telflallchas, the two-faced god/dess of passion. In these post-Reformation days, such worship was abbreviated, though not even the corrupted High Command, in the days it had held sway in T'Lar's youth, could altogether command its cessation. T'Vas would have had time to finish and receive a message from an acolyte, and make her way here.

T'Lar extinguished the incense on the altar—*chavyssl*-scented, since this was the altar of Vach'tladl, whose crown and staff were made of the bush that grew *chavyssl* berries. The scent, as always, reminded her of the bread her mother had made on holidays when she was a girl. Tranquilly, she cleaned out the incense and replaced it, arranging all so that the altar would be ready for the next day's worship. When she was done, she bowed again and left, pausing in the gate to make an obeisance towards the top of the sacred mountain of Seleya on whose shoulders they stood. Once outside the pillars that marked the shrine's entrance, T'Vas took her normal place beside and slightly behind T'Lar.

Normally, T'Lar would have done a circuit of the shrines on this part of the mountain. It was not *quite* an inspection; her priestesses were all attentive to their duties, as were the monks of Gol who also worshipped here at times, and would do things properly with or without her attention. But it was still T'Lar's responsibility to see to the smooth running of all Seleya, and she took it seriously. Today, however, T'Vas's presence was an anomaly. If this could wait until after her circuit, T'Vas would not have been waiting for her *here* but back in her office in the main temple complex.

Besides this, T'Vas's mind felt ... unsettled. It would have taken an experienced priestess to sense it, her telepathy honed to its most precise by

decades of training and use, but it was so. Exposing her to the many priestesses and monks they would encounter on T'Lar's usual route would be needlessly unkind.

Once they had climbed the many stairs carved into the mountain's side to reach the main Temple, T'Lar nodded to her aide. "Speak," she said.

T'Vas bowed. "Sarek, of the House of Surak, child of Skon, begs an immediate audience with you, my Lady."

T'Lar blinked. "He is here?" The temple was open to visitors, of course, but the way up was treacherous and long and could only be done on foot. Seleya was sacred; it was not just any mountain, it was *the* mountain. A human had once asked her if Vulcans worshipped the mountain as a god; they did not, but Seleya was, in its own way, as holy as any god could be. The shrines and temples of the gods were here because it was holy, not the other way around. To make the trip easier through technological means would be to insult the mountain. Sarek must have started his journey in the middle of the night to be here now. It was not the time for any of the rituals which his clan held on the mountain, and if he had a special request he would normally have sent an intermediary. To come in person, at this time of the day and year ...

T'Vas nodded. "He seeks two things. Sanctuary for a woman in need ..."

That was unusual, but well within the scope of the Temple's business. Yet from T'Vas' mind, there was something unacceptable about the woman. T'Lar almost frowned. It was not the Temple's place to judge the suitability of those who came to them for sanctuary. That prerogative belonged to the gods they served.

"...and also he seeks the *fal-tor-pan* for his son, Spock."

T'Lar blinked again. If her control were less excellent, she would have done a great deal more. The *fal-tor-pan* had not been used in centuries, at least. T'Lar knew how to do it, of course, as High Priestess; it was one of several unused rites that were imprinted into her mind so that in the very rare case they were ever needed again, they would not be lost. But the *fal-tor-pan* was the most dangerous of those imprinted rites, and also the oldest, the memory of it passed down from mind-to-mind until it was worn quite soft and thin, like an old desert cloak.

"When was the *fal-tor-pan* last requested?" T'Lar asked, knowing T'Vas would have looked it up once the request was made.

"Six centuries ago by T'Penna, daughter of Kiri-kin-thol. The request was denied. Two centuries before *that* it was requested by Lorian, son of Vok-keth, and failed, resulting in the death of both subjects and permanent impairment of High Priestess Heth'tlan. The last *successful* use of the *fal-tor-pan* was nine centuries ago by High Priestess Asil."

And there would be no details of *that* ceremony anywhere, T'Lar knew; there had been much disruption in that era, and records were scarce. Indeed, it was a great regret of their order that Asil, who had been one of their greatest, had left behind no *katra* to guide her spiritual descendants. "And before that?" T'Lar said.

"The last successful use of the *fal-tor-pan* before High Priestess Asil was High Priestess V'Charln, who performed it on Tolghav, son of Llast'l'k." T'Vas said the names slowly, but did not stumble over them, which T'Lar approved. Even millennia later, after naming patterns and language had long changed, respect should be shown to one's ancestors by saying their names properly. Even if they were barbarian pre-Reformation names.

"Where is Sarek now?" T'Lar asked. Before his request was answered, much research must be done into the ritual; T'Lar would need to spend many hours in meditation, calling forth the oldest memory-implants and seeking out the knowledge. And she would need many more hours consulting the *katras* of her foremothers, to glean any clearer memory they might have. Sarek, head of the House of Surak, could not be left to cool his heels all that time.

"He is in the Little Grove of Waters," T'Vas said.

T'Lar considered. It was likely to be a *very* long day. To do some of her work in a room as refreshing to the soul as the Little Grove of Waters would be most logical. She would meet him there, instead of summoning him to her office.

Sarek was in a light meditation trance when they entered the greenhouse, but he roused at the sound of the door opening. He bowed low, as a novice might, before even standing. In the corner sat a Human woman with curly hair, sleeping. She must be the one Sarek wished her to give sanctuary to, though why a *Human* would seek sanctuary on Vulcan, T'Lar would be most curious to find out. Though it did explain why Sarek had been brought here to wait; the high humidity in this greenhouse, though on the verge of unpleasant for a Vulcan, would be most welcome to a Human.

"Lieutenant, wake up," Sarek said as he rose. The trickling sound of water flowing through the ponds and around the plants gave a pleasing background noise.

The human woman woke with a start, snapping to awareness with commendable rapidity and rising to her feet gracefully. "My apologies, Ma'am," she said, bowing. "It's been a long few days."

"There is no offense where none is taken," T'Lar said. The journey to the top of Mount Seleya was difficult and taxing even for a Vulcan, used to their world's gravity and air pressure. To a Human, even with chemical assistance such as tri-ox, it would be grueling. In addition, she must have a reason for seeking sanctuary on an alien world, and that could not be a light or easy thing. T'Lar took a seat on the bench opposite Sarek and arranged her robes in the proper manner. T'Vas joined her, and at a gesture Sarek and the Human sat as well. T'Lar breathed in the rich, living smell of the plants that lived in this oasis. "Sarek, child of Skon, child of Solkar, you make a most perilous request. Speak your reasons."

Sarek again bowed low. "My son Spock has suffered a variety of unique and troubling things in recent weeks. The situation is such that it has never to my knowledge occurred before and likely never will again. To tell you all that you will need to know in this case, I must break my vows as Ambassador by revealing state secrets of the Federation. I bring with me Commander Nyota Uhura, one of Spock's colleagues, who has been involved in all these things and requires sanctuary for her efforts on behalf of my son."

T'Lar acknowledged this with a nod.

"Two months ago my son was killed in action aboard the *USS Enterprise*," Sarek continued. "An enemy had stolen a highly-classified experimental device known as 'Genesis,' which could terraform an entire planet in a matter of days, but destroy the existing planet in the process. The device had been activated, and *Enterprise* would be caught in the blast wave and destroyed if she could not escape. Spock sacrificed himself to perform emergency repairs to the warp core, dying of radiation poisoning within a very few minutes. Before his death, he gave his katra to a colleague. His body was ejected into space, in the Human custom."

"Was it an act of disrespect to our ways that they did not bring his body back?" T'Lar asked. "Or was it simple ignorance?"

"We didn't know," Commander Uhura said. "I'm so, so sorry. We would never have gone against Spock's wishes."

"The ignorance in this is ... troubling," T'Lar said.

"It has been corrected," Sarek said, "and Starfleet is now aware of the importance of bringing Vulcan bodies back to their home soil if at all possible."

And Sarek would be in a position to ensure that awareness led to a change of policies. "Good."

"It is there that things took a very strange turn," Sarek said. "The Genesis effect was still active when Spock's body was ejected. The coffin landed safely on the surface of the new Genesis planet, and the regeneration of the Genesis effect worked on the body. He was regenerated as a child and grew to physical maturity in a matter of days, alone. When his crewmates returned against orders to retrieve his body, they found his body alive."

"And his katra?" T'Lar asked. She began to see why Sarek had made this request.

"Final separation of Spock's Katra from his physical remains occurred shortly after his death, as normal," Sarek said. "It was not regenerated with his body. The katra still resides within Doctor Leonard McCoy, Spock's colleague. The body lives, but with no memories and no katra. In time, if given sufficient training and life, it might become a new person, a second Spock, with a new katra. But this is not certain; it might remain forever an empty husk."

"Thus your request for a *fal-tor-pan*," T'Lar said.

"Yes," Sarek said.

"It may not even be possible," T'Lar said. "The last successful attempt for which we have records was before the time of Surak. Even *if* we can learn enough to perform it, the circumstances are much different than it was designed for. This is not a case of an enemy stealing a katra and severing the link between katra and body as an act of *ashv'cezh*. Nor is it a case of a body that died and was brought back using normal medical means, only slightly too late to prevent the severing of the link to the katra. Spock's regenerated body may be different enough that it will no longer serve as a suitable home for the katra. In that case, the best we could do would be to place the katra in the body as we would if we were to transfer it to any Vulcan to carry—as a ghost resident, rather than the body's primary soul. I believe that it would be better in that scenario to take the katra to the Hall of the Ancestors instead, and nurture the body in the hope that it might generate a katra of its own."

Sarek bowed. "If that is your wisdom, Lady, I will heed it. But I wish the attempt for a full re-fusion to be made first."

"We shall see," T'Lar said, neutrally. The decision could not be made, in any case, until she knew what the chances of success would be. She knew her telepathic dexterity to be slightly greater than the average even for a High Priestess, but it would be folly and arrogance to believe herself too much above her predecessors.

"Your consideration is generous," Sarek said. "Whatever your decision, I ask for sanctuary for Commander Uhura and her shipmates who will bring Spock's body back. They disobeyed orders to go back to the Genesis planet and retrieve Spock."

"Very well," T'Lar said, "T'Vas will make the arrangements. I will inform you of my decision."

Some hours later, T'Lar sat on her balcony, and considered. It was a great honor to have a room on the side of the Hall facing the top of the mountain; the High Priestesses chamber was no larger or richer than that of any priestess, but she was one of the few who could see the top of Seleya when she went out and looked up. She looked up, now, for she needed wisdom.

Her research had made things much clearer. It was the considered opinion of the kattras of the High Priestesses that had preceded and followed High Priestess Heth'tlan that the damage that priestess had sustained in her attempt at the *fal-tor-pan* resulted mostly from her own ineptitude. That is to say, Heth'tlan had been chosen mostly for political reasons and not because she was well-suited to the post, and her mental dexterity was not what one would wish for in a High Priestess. Nor was her devotion to the gods. The re-fusion had been attempted as a favor to one of her political allies, and no one but the ally (and presumably Heth'tlan) had been much surprised at its failure. Even in the case of a drastic failure, T'Lar should be able to protect her own mind and katra.

The danger to Spock and the holder of his katra, however, was still significant. And more so than they would have been if the situation had been a case of katra theft-severance, or medical resuscitation. Or had the holder of the katra been Vulcan.

If she failed, Spock's katra might be lost forever, and his body might be damaged so that all chance of a new katra were destroyed. In that case, killing the husk would be the kindest solution. And T'Lar had never melded with a Human before; the act of removing the katra from its holder might damage a mind not suited to holding it in the first place. And with most of her attention on the refusion as it must be if there was any chance of it working, she would have little care to spare for the katra's holder.

She had thought of transferring the katra into a priest or monk and completing the *fal-tor-pan* from there. But each living mind a katra was

held in changed that katra in subtle ways. The more transfers a katra had, the less the chance of it fitting back into its original body. The story of Thelvl'ran was a cautionary tale she would be wise to heed. No, if *fal-tor-pan* was to be attempted, it must be from the mind of the current katra-holder to Spock's mind.

It was dangerous to both, but the danger to T'Lar would be small. Risking two lives for one was not logical, but logic was not her task. She was a priestess of Seleya, not Gol. If they, knowing the danger, wished to proceed, she would do it.

When the ritual was over, T'Lar was carried in her chair away from the ceremonial grounds. The chair was a prerogative of the High Priestess for just such occasions as this. The *fal-tor-pan* had been taxing in the extreme, and she had not the strength to walk far. Her body was worn, and required much rest.

But her soul still danced within her. It had been ... an exhilaration beyond anything in her experience. She had expected to feel the divine with her in the ritual; there was always some of that in any touch of a katra. It was why they were kept by priestesses, not healers. That touch of the numinous, of the *more* beyond the souls of any mortal creature, was a great gift at any time.

This ... had been more than a touch. This had been an *embrace*, and T'Lar's heart still pounded at it.

Her body longed for its bed. But T'Lar had long privileged the needs of the soul over the needs of the body. She would have been a poor priestess indeed if she did not.

"Take me to the temple of Kalchatra," she told her attendants. Kalchatra, one of the primary deities they worshipped, neither male nor female nor neuter but all at once together. Kalchatra, the guardian of the soul, who had guided and guarded her that night. The priestesses of Seleya served all the gods whose shrines were given a place on the mountain's slopes, but from tonight ever after would T'Lar be Kalchatra's.

When they arrived at the temple, she directed her attendants to put down her chair, light the candles and the incense, fill the water basin before the altar, and leave.

While they did so, the choir master and seven of his best singers arrived. He bowed low before her, lower than he had ever done before. "Honored One, may we praise the Divine One with hymns this night as you give thanks?"

"You may," T'Lar said.

When the temple was ready, she walked within on unsteady feet, almost falling instead of kneeling when she reached the altar. She kissed the statue with her fingers, then dipped them in the basin of the water of life. Outside the temple, a drumbeat began, with small bells and gongs, and the chorus sang.

T'Lar lay herself down on the floor before the altar, rooting herself in the mountain beneath her, and opened herself up to the Divine One.

End Notes

I'm also on [dreamwidth](#) and [tumblr](#).

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