

At the End of the Day

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Summary

A planet-side accident brings chaos and death to Keytal's sickbay.

The *Jemison's* sickbay was pure chaos. Every bio-bed was taken, and some patients had to double up. They had neither the space nor the staff to triage this many patients, yet survivors were still being beamed aboard with life-threatening injuries.

Keytal weaved between bio-beds and stretchers laid out on the floor to provide makeshift cots. They held a medical tricorder in one hand and a pouch of hypo-sprays in the other, moving from patient to patient with more efficiency than life had ever demanded from them.

Whatever had happened down on the planet's surface was unclear, but Keytal had no time to speculate. What happened wasn't important right now. What *was* important were the bodies laid before them. Many of the faces Keytal did not recognize— colonists from the planet below. But the vast majority of those bruised and bloodied were people Keytal recognized for their ship.

"Nurse Chen!" Keytal shouted over the noise of agonized patients. They ran across the room to where someone was seizing violently. Leaping over prone forms on the floor and dodging around beds, Keytal leaned over to pin the poor soul down to keep him from hurting himself— or the people packed around him like sardines.

Keytal— who was short even for an J'naii —battled with the seizing man, but struggled to hold him in place. Thankfully, Nurse Chen had heard their call, and he appeared at their side, taking over. As Nurse Chen held the man still, Keytal administered a hypospray, which put a stop to the man's seizing.

When they returned to the patient they were seeing to before rushing to the man's aid, Keytal found that she had died in the time she was left unattended. It was a face Keytal recognized, but didn't know the name of. They covered her face with a sheet, wishing they had the time to stand by the dead woman's side and mourn. But there was no time. There would be time for grieving later, but for now they had to focus on keeping those still living alive. Keytal moved on to the next patient, leaving the body to be taken away by volunteers, freeing the bed for the next bloodied survivor.

Face after familiar face were either treated and stabilized, or covered up and abandoned. Keytal faced more patients in one day than they had during a busy month, and had seen more deaths in this single afternoon than they had seen in their entire career. They had never seen so many cold faces. So many cold, lifeless, *familiar* faces.

Finally, when the last survivor was stabilized, and the last of the dead were covered in sheets and carried away, Keytal was able to stumble into their office, exhausted, and haunted by the faces of the dead and suffering. Closing the door, they finally had the time and space to cry and scream and grieve the way they had wanted to ever since the first person died under their care that day. They could finally let out all the pent up mourning tears they had been forced to hold back for hours.

But at the end of the day, no tears came.

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