

Same But Different

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1202) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1202>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Expanded Universes (General)
Relationship:	Keytal & Sha'Rel
Character:	Sha'Rel , Keytal
Additional Tags:	Weekly Challenge: Empathy , Implied/Referenced Transphobia , Implied/Referenced Ableism , Ficlet
Language:	English
Collections:	Weekly Writing Challenges
Stats:	Published: 2023-11-30 Words: 692 Chapters: 1/1

Same But Different

by [spacedogfromspace](#)

Summary

Sha'Rel and Keytal talk about why they left their homeworlds.

Sha'Rel was in sickbay for a routine physical. Sickbay was quiet, with no other patients needing Doctor Keytal's attention.

"You know, you're my favourite patient," Keytal said as they were wrapping up the examination. "You are just *amazing*."

Sha'Rel tensed, eyeing the doctor with suspicion. "Oh? Why is that?" she asked coldly.

Keytal blinked in surprise, unsure what they had said to offend her. "Because you're always in perfect physical health and you never complain about having your regular physicals done. And you take hypos like a champ. You should see the guys who come in here whining about it like children. And they never take good care of themselves like you do."

Sha'Rel relaxed. "Oh, I see. I'm glad I make a good patient."

"Yes, you make my job much easier," Keytal said as they packed away a tricorder. They looked at Sha'Rel curiously. "What did you think I meant?"

"Hm?"

"When I said you were my favourite patient, you seemed offended. What did you think I meant?"

"It's nothing," Sha'Rel said, but Keytal gave her an unconvinced look, so she relented. "I thought you were talking about my wheelchair. Like I was your favourite because I'm in good health and can do all these things *despite* not being able to walk. Like I'm a feel-good story and not a person."

"You've had people treat you so before," Keytal guessed.

Sha'Rel nodded. "On my homeworld, many were of the opinion that this impairment made me weak, and that because of it my life was not worth living. I left my home to seek out somewhere more accepting of me, so I joined Starfleet. But a lot of people... all they saw was my chair. They were always amazed when I could do the same things they could. Treating me like some circus act."

Keytal nodded in understanding. "Lots of people try to be inclusive and understanding, but they always struggle understanding experiences outside of their own."

Sha'Rel raised an eyebrow. "You sound like you know something about that, too."

Keytal nodded. "I left my planet for similar reasons you did," they said.

"You were different and they wouldn't accept you?"

Keytal shook their head. "No, not me. But I had a sister they wouldn't accept."

Sha'Rel frowned. "A sister? How can J'naii have sisters if you're an androgynous species?"

Keytal smiled. "Ah. The best kept secret of the J'naii. Though their society doesn't recognize them, there is a population of gendered people

among my species. People who identify as male, female, or something else. Anything but the pure genderlessness my species is known for."

"What do you mean they don't recognize them?"

"Long ago, most J'naii were gendered. It's widely believed in my culture that our androgyny was an evolutionary progression. Gender is a waste of time and energy to them. It complicates life, you see. So they see the gendered as degenerate, or sick and in need of a cure. Gendered people live lives in secret, or they would be captured and 'cured.' It was not pleasant."

"So you left because your sister wasn't accepted for being a girl?"

"Yes," Keytal nodded. "But gender acceptance is strange, out here, also. Just in a different way. As someone who isn't gendered, I have trouble relating to species of which the majority of the population is gendered. And they don't understand me. It can be very odd not being among people who understand a complete lack of gender. It's hard to understand what is so different from your own experiences."

Sha'Rel nodded. "I think I get what you're saying," she said. "So, where is your sister now? Did she find acceptance out here?"

Keytal shook her head. "She died on J'naii," they said. "I left because I couldn't stand to see anyone else meet her fate."

"Oh," Sha'Rel said. "I'm so sorry."

"It's in the past," Keytal said. "All there is to do is move forward. Perhaps one day I will think of a way to convince my people that diversity in all things is a gift."

Sha'Rel smiled softly. "I think you're proof of that."

Keytal's eyes crinkled. "So are you."

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