

Requiem

"We found the Capellans totally uninterested in medical aid or hospitals. They believe that only the strong should survive..."

"Culture and Customs of Capella IV", Doctor Leonard McCoy, Federation Medical Journal, 2145:8

When it happened, he reacted professionally. Of course. After two decades as a doctor, fear and shock threw reactions into automatic: reach for the medi-scanner, collect all pertinent data, arrive at an intelligent diagnosis within seconds: mortal wound or surface cut, shock or concussion. Most importantly: dead or alive?

You don't make exceptions for friends. Can't afford to. You stay calm, first of all, don't unduly alarm the others. They expect polished professionalism and you deliver the goods.

But when the funeral's over, then you are free to assess the personal damage. You have the time to poke gingerly for internal wounds.

Like always, they had been young. Half your age, and they get wiped out on their first medical survey expedition. And it's always the same odds. Among the hundreds of planets, you will probably die like they did: thousands of light years from home, with a kligat or similar weapon six inches deep in your lower chest.

And you're buried three feet under because the alien soil doesn't yield to much diggin', and so you remain. A promising young surgeon, post-humously decorated for "service above and beyond the call of duty."

And you bleed, dammit...you get hit and you lose blood to the ground, to be bleached later by an uncharted, unnamed sun. And you don't ask questions, because you're afraid of the answers. You don't want to know why you stay, why you still care, why you signed up for this job anyway.

You don't even ask yourself "why him and not me?" because you know the odds. Next time, foreign sands may cover your mortality.

So often it's lonely, but you keep pushing yourself. You keep moving and try not to remember those friends you left behind in shallow graves in alien cemeteries.

And someday, if you're still alive, if you've beaten the odds and still fight for your existence among the stars--- maybe you'll come back to those planets and try to look at them freshly, objectively. Perhaps then you'll be able to accept the fact that these people did not understand your mission...that because of your alienness, they resorted to instinctual behavior and killed three of your friends.

But if you do not successfully forget, then you seek out the god-forsaken graves blown flat by years of wind and inclement weather. And you sink to your knees in the dirt and wish futilely for a flower or any visible symbol to show that the nameless ones were remembered today.

