

Creeping Dread

By

Shawn Carter

Kerry pushed her way through the crowded hallway. She held Rebeccas's hand with an iron grip. Her little legs struggled to keep up with Kerry's stride. It didn't help that her sister was dragging her stuffed animal on the crowd either. Under normal circumstances, She would have found it adorable, but right now it was a hindrance. "Kerry, slow down!" Rebecca whined as Kerry pushed aside a woman little rougher than she intended.

"Hey!?" the woman yelled. Her hand covered some of her head. Kerry couldn't tell if the woman was in serious pain or being melodramatic. She saw no reason to find out and pressed on her way. "You apologize!" the woman continued. Of course, Kerry had to push the one woman with an attitude. There was no time for this. The shelter Kerry was sprinting towards had limited space. The last thing she desired was for her and Rebecca to be out in the cold. So this woman's attitude was not helping matters.

"Look, lady," Kerry replied as she pivoted her head. It came out meaner than Kerry intended, but she didn't care enough to apologize. "I'm exhausted. You're exhausted. Everyone on this god damn forsaken ship is exhausted. So let me and my sister go to our room and sleep!" Kerry didn't realize she was yelling until she noticed the many people looking at her. She didn't mean to yell, it just came out.

"I...I understand. I do," the woman's sudden sympathy annoyed Kerry even more. What made her feel the need to use that tone with her? Like she was some sort of child!? This entire situation was silly and she wished to sleep.

"That's great to hear and I do appreciate it," now Kerry was rambling and making a fool of herself. Which wasn't helping an already helpless situation. "Well I'll be on my way," there wasn't a way to get out of this situation without being awkward. So Kerry went with awkwardness and hoped it didn't end. She didn't bother seeing the woman's reaction or wait to see if they would respond. It didn't much matter to Kerry. She wanted to sleep and for this trip to end.

--

The shelter, if one could it that, was crowded. It was hard to believe that at one point this room had been a training and rec room for soldiers. If you looked close enough you could see outlines of the shelves that had lined the walls. The mats still took up most of the space and still had the tap that kept the tears together. The only thing missing was the gym smell and obnoxious pop music. Cots were everywhere and some were tucked into very creative places. "Looks like no space was wasted," Kerry whispered as she waited in line. When Kerry and her sister arrived, the line wasn't long. It had a handful of people, moving at a brisk pace and manageable. As Kerry and

Rebecca inched closer to the registration desk, the line of people grew. By the time they were next, the line of refugees had reached the end of the hallway.

"State your name and the planet you're from," the woman asked in a deadpan fashion as Kerry made her way to the table. Kerry wasn't one to judge on appearances, hell she didn't look like a prom queen herself. But she could tell this woman had been sitting at that desk for a few hours too long. Her hair was a series of knots, she had bags under eyes that looked like they could hold water. Kerry didn't envy her thankless job. This woman had to, without a shadow of a doubt, deal with a lot of self-important people. So Kerry made sure to make her life as simple as possible. Which, at the moment, Kerry was failing at.

"Right. My name is Kerry and this here is," Kerry brought her sister her side. "Rebecca," Rebecca waved and smiled at the woman. The casual indifference this woman had taken Kerry back. "Nice to meet you, what's your name?" Rebecca flashed a toothy smile as she extended her hand. The woman gave a look that could snuff out any sense of joy and optimism from anybody. Rebecca didn't even flinch and continued to smile. Kerry admired her little sister's naivety and blissful ignorance. Her little sister didn't need to know the state of the galaxy and how cruel life can be. "Rachel," Rachel took and shook Rebecca's hand. Kerry could have sworn she saw the woman even crack a smile. A part of Rebecca's glow did infect Sally after all. "What planet are you two from?" Sally asked with a bit more life than last time.

"Menia," it was the first Kerry allowed herself to say her homeworld aloud. She had pushed away from the terrible and horrifying events that took place there. Or she had thought at least.

"It's terrible what happened there. Those damn shadows didn't do a single thing and left you to die," Sally answered as she flicked through a few papers and grabbed a stamp. She wasn't wrong. Kerry didn't know how everything had gone tits up. She was to busy running through the chaos with her sister to take notice. "Yeah what are they good for anyway?"

"I'll tell you when I find out," Rachel stamped and handed the papers to Kerry and waved at Rebecca.

"Your bunk placements are on those papers. give them to the room attendant when you enter."

--

Finding their quarters wasn't hard. Everything was labeled well and easy to read. It was navigating through the crowds of refugees that made the task difficult. Only families and large groups were given priority over the limited rooms. If you were by yourself, you were delegated to the hallway and made to fend for yourself. It was unfortunate, but Kerry understood. There were too many people to house and there had to be priorities. The door to Kerry's and Rebecca's quarters was closed. Not knowing

what to do, Kerry knocked. A second later the door swung open and revealed a young-looking woman. She stood about the same height as Kerry and had long brunette hair that was tied into a knot. What caught Kerry's attention was the bump the woman had. To her credit, she didn't bother hiding it and took pride in it. "You must be Kerry!" the woman yelled as she extended her hand and had a smile that lit up the room. "My name is Sally!" Kerry, unsure what to do with Sally's cheerfulness, took and shook her hand.

"I'm Rebecca!" Rebecca yelled. The entire exchange caused Kerry's eyes to narrow, but she also cracked a slight grin. To see such happiness in these grim times was a rarity.

"It's my pleasure to meet the two of you! Please come and settle in," Sally motioned to the empty cots on the side of the room. The quarters themselves weren't that crowded. A father watched over his two children play over by the wall. Kerry could see how relaxed he was. His clothes were wrinkled and had some rips and tears, but his children looked well kept. It was a comforting sight to behold and Kerry took it all in with a smile. "Once you all are settled in feel free to explore," Sally said as she stepped out the door.

"Where are you going?" Rebecca asked with her stuffed animal close to her face.

"I'm headed to the infirmary," Sally placed her hand on her belly. "I want the new doctor to examine this developing little bundle of joy. I haven't had my child looked at since I escaped," a single tear slid down Sally's cheek. Kerry imagined the tear was for someone else and not her child. She had thought about asking, but decided against it. If Sally wished to talk about her life before the war she would at her own pace.

"I heard one of the guards say a shadow was on board. You think that's who the new doctor was who they were referring to?" The father asked as he stood up from his cot. "Perhaps.

I couldn't say," Sally shrugged.

"My sister and I met her an hour or so ago," Kerry chimed in as she unloaded hers and Rebecca's suitcase. "She was very pretty and nice. She cheered me up," Rebecca said.

"That's a first. I've heard they are aloof and couldn't give less of a damn about us common folk," the father said in a bitter tone as he looked towards Rebecca and his kids. "Excuse my language my dears," Rebecca and his kids shrugged and continued on with playing. Kerry wanted to agree with the man. Her interaction with Veronica said either wise. The brief time Kerry interacted with her, she seemed to be genuine and caring. It was an act to gain her trust since she was near Rebecca. There was no way for Kerry to know, so she put the thought aside.

“Anyway, I’m off to see this good doctor and I’ll report my findings to the rest of the class when I get back,” Sally said through a cheerful smile. Kerry would have grit her teeth and bare Sally’s optimism for the time being. She looked towards Rebecca who was laughing, smiling, and playing with her new friends. It was a joy seeing her being happy and smiling for the first time. Kerry had decided she would bear it for the time being.