

Hannah Muldery
One Day at a Time
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Fiction:YA Short Story

Sometimes, it's all just too much.

The ocean wind whipped my curls around, stung my eyes, and threatened to push me across the deck. But warmth radiated from my sea otter, Miki, who lay sleeping next to me under the clouded night sky. I swallowed. I'd never been this overwhelmed at home.

Home.

My throat tightened.

Would I ever see it again? I wanted off this ship and as far away from boot camp as possible. But I didn't have that option. Instead, my days were run for me, crammed with training, studying, drills, and the extra chores I'd been assigned after the little incident with Miki. Perhaps, under different circumstances, I could have handled the draft on its own. Or the training. Or the extra chores. I'd always been a hard worker. Helping Mum at the kelp factory as soon as I could walk. Collecting water on rainy days. Raising Miki and training her to hunt for sea urchins. But Mum had been by my side then, calming my fears and explaining each new task as it came.

My eyes began to tear up. Probably from the ocean wind.

So much had changed, I didn't know what to do. And during any rare quiet moments, a dark cloud loomed in the back of my mind, just out of reach. What if I didn't pass boot camp? What if I did? Even if I was lucky enough to be a medic, what would I see? Worst of all, if I failed...would I be sent to the dredges?

Like Mum had been.

I shivered in the cold, wrapping my arms around my knees. If only I could ask her for guidance.

Across the sky, the clouds began drifting apart. One by one the stars sparkled into sight. I stretched out on the cold deck and wrapped my arm around Miki. She stirred, readjusted, and rested her head across my lap. Soon she drifted off to sleep.

The curfew bell rang. I sighed. Just a few more seconds wouldn't hurt. Above my head, the Milky Way stretched across the sky, blending into the clouds along the edge of the horizon. The breeze teased bits of hair as I sat up. A shooting star streaked across the sky, pieces of it breaking off at the end.

I scooped Miki into my arms and made my way across the main deck, pausing at the stairway leading to the barracks below. As I glanced at the sky, Miki shifted and snuggled up against my neck.

"Thanks, Miki," I said, and hugged her. I gazed up at the stars one last time. "If you can hear me, thanks. I miss you, Mum." The stars twinkled. A reply, I liked to imagine.

I would get through this. One day at a time.