Final Goodbye

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Saying goodbye to a friend.

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Final Goodbye Andy, the junior engineer of the galactic mining ship Gantry, stepped into the engine room and sensed there was something wrong, but he couldn't place what it was. He shrugged and continued into the bowels of the mining ship to find his boss, Kerrick. Andy gave a huge yawn. He couldn't understand why he felt so tired. He'd had two hours sleep and should feel revived and wide-awake. Maybe he'd caught a sickness from their overnight stop on space station 8. That would account for the strange ache in his chest and left shoulder. 'Kerrick,' called Andy, rubbing his right shoulder. When the old engineer didn't answer, he called out again. 'Kerrick, you old fool, where are you?' The clatter of metal on metal drew Andy's attention to his left. He moved farther into the bowels of the ship until he found Kerrick standing over one of the power couplings. 'Is that there thing still playin' up?' asked Andy. 'I dunno know why they's keep using these older models,' Kerrick muttered, retrieving the sonic wrench he'd dropped. His hands were twisted with arthritis and Andy watched the old man rub his knuckles before returning to what he was doing. 'I had the damnedest dream,' said Andy, leaning against the wall. 'That there power couplin' you're workin' on overloaded and blew. You were trapped down here, but I come and got you out even when the others said you were a goner. I found you trapped under a girder. You kept yellin' at me to get out.' Andy frowned and scratched at his cheek with one hand. 'It seemed so real,' he mused. 'Can't remember what happened after that, must've woken up.' 'These damn things blow up ships all the time,' grumbled Kerrick. 'How many peoples have to die before they's spend the money on upgrades?' Andy looked away from the tears glistening in Kerrick's eyes, embarrassed at his partners strange show of emotion. Andy moved to the closest monitor to run a diagnostic on the engines, giving Kerrick time to pull himself together. He reached out to start and his right hand stilled above the large, red button he was about to press. His eyes dropped to the label underneath it. Emergency engine shutdown. Andy jerked his hand away as if burnt. 'I must be tired,' he mumbled. He searched the right side of the console, but he wasn't to find the switch he needed. Looking to his left, he saw it. 'That's not right,' he frowned, 'It's always been on

the right. I know it has.' He stepped away from the console. 'What the hell's goin' on?' The pain in Andy's shoulder and chest intensified and he slumped against the wall behind him. 'I think I better go see the medic,' he gasped. 'I've got this here awful pain in my chest.' Andy turned around to find Kerrick gone. 'For crying out loud,' he growled, rubbing at his chest and shoulder. 'What's that there old fool playin' at.' The rule in the engine room was; you always told your partner where you were going in case of an accident. Andy was beginning to worry the old man was losing his mind. 'KERRICK!' he yelled. 'WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?' The only sound was the constant hum of engines. Unable to stand the pain any more, Andy returned to his quarters to contact the medic. When reached to door of his quarters, and the pain began to subside. From the doorway, he saw Kerrick sitting on the end of his bunk. 'What are you doing in my quarters? And why didn't you tell me you were leavin' the engine room?' 'It ain't fair, boy,' said Kerrick. 'What's not?' 'It should have been me, not you.' Puzzled, Andy went and sat on the bunk next to Kerrick. 'What should've been you?' Kerrick stared at the wall opposite him. 'I'm old, and I've lived a good life, but you had so much ahead of you.' 'Had? You make it sound like my life is over.' Kerrick hung his head. 'I told them it was the old power couplings that blew. Still they's used them in the refit.' He buried his face in his hands. 'Why didn't you get out when I told you to Andy?' he asked, his voice muffled by his hands. Andy wondered what Kerrick was going on about. 'You got me out from under that girder and pushed me toward the door. When I got there I found you wasn't with me.' 'Kerrick you old fool, that's the dream I was tellin' you about.' Kerrick looked up, tears streamed down his face. 'There was another explosion, and that's when you got it.' Andy's chest grew more painful again. He grasped his shirt and it was warm and sticky. He looked down and found his shirt soaked with blood and a gaping hole in his chest. 'Kerrick, what's happening?' Each breath crackled in his lungs, and it became harder and harder to breathe. 'I held you in my arms as you died,' said Kerrick, looking down at his hands. 'They came and dragged me out of there before I could say goodbye.' 'Died? No…no I'm here next to you.' ### Kerrick pushed himself to his feet and moved to the open door. It was his first day back on the job since the accident, and the first time he'd set foot in Andy's room since coming on board. Turning, Kerrick gazed around the empty room. He gripped the door handle so tight it dug into the palm of his hand, and his twisted knuckles turned white. 'Even after three months I still miss you, boy.' He smiled sadly. 'Sometimes, if I listen hard enough, I think I can hear you yelling at me.' Kerrick signed. He turned the lights off, pulled the door closed, and walked away.