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The Eddo

by Juliet Robinson

‘Another day, another dollar.’ Steve grins as the clock hands we have been intently watching limp onto the twelve-hour. It’s one of those old utilitarian clocks that everyone is familiar with from their childhood class rooms. Not that there are any classrooms these days.

All around HQ people start moving, as second shift staffers arrive, and freedom beckons. I unstrap myself and push free from my chair, the lower gravity gifts my movements with grace I wouldn’t have enjoyed on Earth. I reach for the bracing bar above my workstation and pull on it, stretching, enjoying the satisfying popping sensation as my spine straightens.

‘Bar?’ Steve asks.

I frown and consider this. We normally saunter along to one or other of the ship rec bars after shift. Lets face it there is little else to do. Tonight, I find that my mood isn’t one for company, or drinking just to forget. My stomach is still recovering from yesterday’s post shift soya beer and kebabs. I just want to go home.

‘Not tonight,’ I apologise.

Steve shrugs, ‘No worries, see ya Alea.’

We part, heading for different exits. I hurry along, my feet skipping over the worn rubber coated deck. It was once smooth, black and tar like, but not anymore. Now its pitted and worn, the black has lost its gloss. Like so many other things.

I know the Eddo like the back of my hand, but I still distractedly follow the coloured deck markings that lead me to my quarters. Lines of flowing colour, like veins in a body. Green, to the access ladders, then blue until I pass the non-commissioned staff's canteen, where I pick up the yellow, blue dashed trail till I reach my hatch.

As I enter my small and private haven, the dimmed safety lights flare on. They cast a flickering red glow, which is kinder than the stark overheads. I can pretend it is the quivering of a fire. I press my ID cert into the coder and at once a voice fills the air.

'I miss you Mummy!'

'I miss you to baby, so much. How was your day?' I ask as I hang my crumpled uniform coat in the locker by the door.

'I drew this picture at school today. It's you! It's you and the Eddo. You're floating next to her.'

My stomach tightens and I close my eyes.

'It's beautiful. You got all the details right, look at all the lights shinning from her hull. And the stars, wow! So colourful, blues, purples and all those greens.'

'The greens are my favourite bit, they are infrared!'

He has it half right, he is keen to show off his knowledge and I smile at the pride in his voice.

'And look Mummy, I painted some new stars, we saw them today at the observatory. Everyone was excited to see them. They are new! They were on the news this evening; Daddy didn't want me to watch it though.'

A leaden, nauseated grief floods my chest, I open my eyes and turn round. My room is small with dark grey curving walls. It's basically a cylinder, and I am only able to stand properly at its centre. My bunk is embedded in the wall, like a niche in a mortuary, grey worn blankets its only softening feature. It is a stark, utilitarian space, not a home. Not somewhere a child has ever lived and there on the wall screen plays the video of my son, the last message he ever sent. He waves goodbye not knowing it was a final farewell. Then the video repeats and like well-practiced actor I move through my lines again. I love acting. It is so much more real than life. I don't want the life I have to be real, it isn't real, none of us are truly living anymore, just surviving.