

RETIREMENT

Story by

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RETIREMENT

CAST

FRANK

ROBIN

MELODY

MAN

TOM

Non-Speaking

GUARD 1

GUARD 2

FADE IN:

1. EXT. SPACE STATION (OPTICAL)

The space station is hanging in space, slowly rotating to create artificial gravity. It seems quite old; with many repairs and many small modifications.

2. INT. KITCHEN

The room is obviously inside the station, exposed pipes and wires with switches are visible. Yet the room is done with "homey" touches: wallpaper around the counters, a real wood veneer table, towels and doilies hang over various areas and a window over the sink looking out at a beautiful sunrise. MELODY is looking out the window at the scene while waiting for the microwave finishes the morning meal. FRANK is at the table, playing solitaire with well worn cards. Birds are twittering and a low breeze is blowing outside, but something is wrong. FRANK stops playing and checks his watch to make sure.

FRANK
Where's the cock crow?

MELODY
What?

FRANK
The cock crow. It's already half past six and I haven't heard him crow yet.

MELODY
I turned it off, dear, I thought maybe you were tired of it.

FRANK
(suspiciously stands and eyes the window)
Florida again?

FRANK flips a switch and the outside scene flickers and changes to a vista of amber waves of grain. A cock crows and FRANK smiles, satisfied.

FRANK
That's more like it.

He sits down and continues his solitaire game. The microwave finishes and MELODY brings the two trays to the table.

MELODY

Frank, we've been waking up with that rooster crowing for thirty five years. Why don't we do something different? It wouldn't hurt.

FRANK

Melody, we've been over this and over this. We can't afford to retire to Florida. We just don't have the money to settle there... not the way we want to. Besides, I thought you loved Iowa.

MELODY

I do. It's just... eat your breakfast before it gets cold.

FRANK begins to eat his breakfast, pausing every once in a while to put another card down on the table. MELODY eyes him and finally halts the pretense of calmness.

MELODY

How can you be so calm?

FRANK

I play cards. It relaxes me.

MELODY

Well, I'm scared.

FRANK

Of what? Retirement? We've known this day would come all our lives. It's what we've been planning for.

MELODY

I know that, but there's so much to plan for. Where are we going to retire --

FRANK

That's settled. Iowa.

MELODY

I know we've talked about retiring to Earth and living on a farm, but what if it's not like this? We don't know how old the recordings are --

FRANK

It doesn't matter. The scientists would have told us if it was different. They would have changed the scenes we get.

MELODY

I know, but still... we've been looking at that same field for so many years, I've memorized every stalk of corn and every sheaf of wheat.

FRANK

Well, the scientists are busy downlinking the weather data to Earth. They don't have time to waste to get new pictures or sounds --

MELODY

-- or messages --

FRANK

Or messages. This weather collection and control project is going to take a thousand years... it's bigger than any of us. It's bigger than all of us.

MELODY

That's still wrong. I mean we work hard all our lives. We're not scientists, but we keep the computers up and running, keep the air fresh and the gardens growing. We should be taken care of. We should have kept that... what did they call it? Social Security.

FRANK

That was a good idea when it was needed. But now, everyone has a job and earns good money until retirement. And it's not like we have a lot of things to spend it on up here. It's good to be able to plan ahead and control your own future.

MELODY

I suppose you're right.

The bell chimes. MELODY gets up and answers the door.
TOM and ROBIN are at the door.

TOM

So you finally made it.

FRANK

Yeah. So, come to say good bye to the
old man?

TOM

Yeah, and take your job.

ROBIN

Oh, Tom...

FRANK

(laughing)

That's okay. I don't need it anymore.
I'm retiring.

TOM

(looking out the window)

So, still planning to return to the land
and be a farmer?

MELODY

Well, he's not completely decided.

TOM

I don't blame you. I mean, it's
interesting...

ROBIN

But all that open space... it makes me
shiver.

TOM

Plus, how much of a market can there be
for miles and miles of crops when you
can feed a thousand people from a couple
of vats of chemicals?

TOM meant it as a joke, but it sets FRANK wondering.

MELODY

(changes the subject)

So, have you two decided where you're going to retire?

ROBIN

Hawaii.

MELODY

Hawaii? Isn't that expensive?

TOM

Well, we've been saving every dime we can. And that's where my brother and his wife went. We can stay at their place and save some money that way.

FRANK

How do you know if they're still there?

TOM

Well, where else would they be? My brother retired to Hawaii and my sister in law went a couple of years later when she hit retirement age. They both know we'll be coming in five or six years.

ROBIN

Five for him, six for me.

TOM

Hey, you should give him a call when you get down there. You liked Sam, maybe you all can get together... and you can let him know we're still here.

FRANK

Sure. I'll call him first thing.

TOM

Thanks. It would mean a lot to me. Tell him I'm still okay and I hope that he's well. I wish that we didn't have all that solar interference.

FRANK

What solar interference?

TOM

You know, it cut off the communication channels while we've been studying sunspots.

FRANK

Sunspots? I thought we were trying to control the weather.

TOM

That's not what I heard, but then who really knows except the scientists and they're too busy to tell anyone else.
(changes subject)
Oh! That reminds me! We got you a going away present.

They hand him a bundle wrapped in aluminum foil. FRANK eyes it and shakes it a couple of times while TOM and ROBIN are bursting from the suspense. He opens it up and he smiles.

FRANK

(pulls out a small hand trowel)
Oh, you should have.

TOM

Got it from the dispenser at the labs where they still experiment with soil growing. Figured you'd probably need it.

FRANK

Sure it will be great at making sand castles in Florida.

It slowly dawns on MELODY what FRANK just said. She jumps up and gives him a big hug.

MELODY

Do you really mean it? We can go to Florida?

FRANK

Yes. I'll miss the rooster, but I'll miss you more. I'll be waiting for you on the beach when you hit retirement age.

The door chimes again. Two GUARDS walk in.

FRANK
I guess it's time to go.

TOM
Good luck with your retirement. Say
hello to my brother.

FRANK
Take care of Melody, will you?

ROBIN
Of course.

One of the GUARDS motions him to come with. FRANK
shakes hands with TOM and kisses ROBIN on the cheek
then turns to MELODY.

FRANK
Good bye, dear.

MELODY
I'll see you in one year, eight months -

FRANK
(finishes)
and fifteen days.

They kiss quickly. Then FRANK goes with the GUARDS.

3. INT. CORRIDOR

The corridors are dark and there are a lot of metallic
groans and creaks mixed in with the echoing steps of
FRANK and the GUARDS. An extra loud groan makes FRANK
flinch.

FRANK
I thought they had that fixed.

The GUARDS make no comment. They keep walking. FRANK
walks with them, but tries to make small talk.

FRANK

So, retirement. I suppose you both see it all the time, but I'll tell you I'm a little nervous.

(pauses)

I'm on my way to Florida. I think the Atlantic side would be best. I hear the surf is nicer there. My wife watched all those travel documentaries probably a hundred times a piece. I only wish I had paid more attention...

The GUARDS stop at a door and point for him to go in. FRANK swallows hard and opens the door and steps inside.

4. INT. WAITING ROOM (OPTICAL)

Inside is a small waiting room with a long closed panel. A man is in there waiting for him.

MAN

Frank Longyear?

FRANK

That's right. I'm retiring today.
Going to Florida.

MAN

Yes, of course. Here.
(handing him a small vial of liquid)
Drink this.

FRANK

(drinks and hands the vial back to the
MAN)
So, do I wait here for the spacecraft?

MAN

(hedging)
Not exactly. Things are a little more complicated than you were led to believe.

FRANK

What do you mean? I'm retiring. I'm going to Florida.

MAN

I'm sorry. That's not possible.

FRANK

But I've saved! My wife saved! All our
lives for this!

MAN

Please, Mr. Longyear, let me explain.

The GUARDS move in, prepared to hold FRANK if
necessary. The MAN waves them back.

FRANK

We trusted you. We trusted all of you.

MAN

I understand your anger, Mr. Longyear.
And believe me, if there was any way for
us to get you back to Earth, we would do
it... spare no expense. But it can't be
done at the present time.

MAN presses a button and the big panel begins to slide
away. The harsh light of the sun cuts up the room with
sharp shadows. FRANK looks shocked at the view. Earth
is visible, the continents are visible, but something
is wrong. The water is black and the ground is a
sickly brown. There are few clouds and they look gray.

MAN

It is unfair. They spent everything
down there and left us to pay for it
all. Pay for it with our lives, the
lives of our wives and husbands and all
of our children yet unborn.

FRANK

(feeling a little dizzy)
But... my retirement. I worked all my
life for this... this lie.

MAN

No. Not a lie. Just not the whole
truth. That's what we live with. The
horrible secret we cannot reveal to
anyone. Can you imagine what it would
be like if everyone knew?

He closes the panel by pressing a button. The MAN then ushers FRANK into an adjoining area.

5. INT. COLD STORAGE (OPTICAL)

The room seems endless, row upon row of frozen tubes full of people. FRANK stumbles against one and looks in.

FRANK

Sam...

(dawns on him)

What was in that drink you gave me?

The MAN ushers him on to an empty tube.

MAN

I wish we had enough resources to let everyone live out their lives to the fullest, but we don't. But I promise, you will be revived someday -- you and your wife and all of your loved ones.

We'll get you to Earth someday.

The tube closes up and vapor swirls in. FRANK leans back in the tube and slowly turns pale then bluish as the freezing process is completed. At his side, still in his frozen hand is the frost covered hand trowel. And on the blue skin of his face, a single tear has frozen completely like a small icicle.

FADE OUT.