

Last Drink Bird Head

by Stina Leicht

It was an awesome responsibility, keeping the particles moving from one space to the next – one sub-microscopic sip at a time. She and her kind operated unnoticed by the humans buzzing around in their spaceship with their air of self-importance, but that was the job. Tick-tock. The steady rhythm. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. The precise placement of each particle in the stale fog that was the ship's air was all. Catch-release. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Machines could not replicate wind or weather onboard a ship. Thus, matter particles were spurred into natural circulation by her will. The knowledge of her place in the order of things was gratifying, and she would have been content but for the knowledge that she was the last.

A foolish human had brought a cat onboard at the last port.

Her mate, Blue, had been killed three days ago. It had saddened her beyond measure but now that she was alone she could not stop to mourn him. No one else could take up her duty. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. She had begged Blue to hide in the air duct with her, but he'd insisted it would only bring the cat upon them both. This way, he reasoned, she could keep the precious rhythm while he acted as decoy. It had worked for three weeks. The high-pitched tinkling crack of his screams would live in her mind to the end of her days – which, by the look of things, wouldn't be much longer.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

She'd been a mere chick at the factory in China when she had met Blue. Her freshly-glued feathers had been fluffy, not ragged as they were now. They'd volunteered together for the space mission. Blue had told her that they would have a kitchen surface of their own one day, and for a time they'd shared a small table in the mess. It hadn't been much, but they'd been happy.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Tick-tock. The smell came first -- the sharp stench of urine that clung to cats like perfume. Then she spied the twitching ears beyond the vent screen. She couldn't move. She couldn't pause even to save herself. She debated doing so anyway, but it

would only doom her as well as her human charges.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

A paw batted the screen, and the feline stretched into the vent space. She muttered a blessing for the ship's passengers in futile hope that they might reach port before the ship fell apart. It wasn't likely.

The cat eased closer.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. She found she was angry at being the last. Why couldn't another have been to blame for all the deaths? Fear pulsed through her glass body. Would it be painful, dying? Would she live on in another form?

The cat's bulk blotted out the light.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.