

## **The Tragedy at the Plant** by Nathan Furtado

I guess you could say it was because I was never very bright, or because I was always so helplessly naive and overconfident, but either way it's my fault for what happened. It was so simple, but I had to ruin it, as usual. Oh, I forgot to introduce myself, my name is Dillon Alden, and I'm currently dead. Yeah, it was a shock to me too. One moment you're here, the next; gone. Anyway, I want to tell you my story, so hopefully you'll never make the same mistake that I had made that day in the Autumn of 1987. But first, you'll need a little context.

I had mediocre results at school in my youth and never reached too far. After an unfulfilling time at university, I found myself a job at a power plant somewhere in Missouri in my late teenage years, a job that required minimal skills for a decent enough wage. I lived in a simple house with my older and significantly more successful brother, Randall, who ran a bricklaying company. Things seemed to be going well for about 7 years, until 1977, when Randall's company was duped by a pyramid selling scheme and had to file for bankruptcy. To make matters worse, our father had passed away unexpectedly that same year due to a rare lung disease. I offered Randall a position at the plant, flicking buttons and sitting in chairs. He reluctantly accepted, and we ended up working at that dead-end job for over a decade. Now 35 years old, I realised I'd wasted my life and now wanted to spend the rest of my days in peace, sticking to what I had been good at since high school.

But I just had to try to be a hero, didn't I?

It was a normal day at work, a Tuesday, if I remember it correctly.

Randall and I sat down in our old industrial grade seats and chatted about the drama of the news over a bottle of brandy as we did every day. I sat back in my chair and asked, "Did you catch the tennis? Chang beat McNamee. I think he's the youngest guy ever to win it."

"Cool," replied Randall nonchalantly. He had the blues lately because he'd been thinking about why his life was so miserable. I had learnt to ignore that fact a long time ago. I gazed over the endless rows of machines forever working busily. The dated mechanical arms carried and shoved huge vats of hazardous chemicals about. Old computing systems sparked and whizzed from the hard labour. The chaos within organisation was beautiful yet terrifying, like looking into an incinerator. My eyes appreciated the synchronicity of the system, when I noticed unique movement in a crane arm some hundred meters away. Something was very wrong.

I burst open the control room door and haphazardly rushed down the stairs. I skidded to a halt. One of the arms was sparking violently. I worriedly looked over the circuitry board, which was starting to overheat and cough up more sparks. I panicked and tried using the rod to hit the machine, but the circuit only got worse. It was sparking violently and steaming up. Before I could step back, the machine suddenly burst into flames and sent me hurtling backwards.

The fire had scalded my arm, chest and neck, and the pain was unbearable. I screamed out for help, for Randall, for anybody, but no one came. I was alone. My view was becoming hazy and I was close to losing consciousness. 'So this is how it ends' I thought to myself. I dragged myself to the circuit board in a last desperate attempt at redemption. I grabbed a large handle and pulled it all the way down. I heard a loud crack and when I looked up, a giant vat of chemicals was falling towards me. All my memories gushed back to me in a dizzying flash as

the emptiness and longing all became clear. My school years, the plant, Randall, my father, it all flooded back to me like a dam that had been shattered open.

Then, all my senses were instantly extinguished in a single moment, the best, and last, moment of my life. The longest second of my life. I look back on this moment. It's the only one I want to think about. It was so bewildering and awe inspiring, the danger and beauty of the concept of it all. Never can I place what it was all for, what all that pain suffering built up to, why it was so crucial yet seemed so insignificant. But somehow, through it all, I realise now. Now I know exactly who I am, and what I'm here for. And you will too someday.