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about 2,750 words

REQUIEM IN THE KEY OF PROSE
By Jake Kerr

Future Tense

He will not live to know his son, and that will be a great tragedy. His son will know, however, of his great sacrifice. Perhaps that will be enough.

Personification

The methane gases--buried for so long under ocean water, polar ice shelves, and dormant volcanoes--burst forth in a symphony of quiet doom, starving the world of

oxygen. As it gasped for breath, the world scrambled to save itself.

Domes sprung up across the globe. Oxygen generators were cobbled together from whatever machinery was available. Sydney produced hundreds of automobile-sized oxygen machines, while its skyscrapers were plundered for a misshapen dome that was as effective as it was ugly. It survived. Paris did not. Tokyo survived until its nearly finished dome collapsed during a minor earthquake.

Hampton Roads survived by scavenging a good portion of the United States Navy--a massive turbine and propeller from an aircraft carrier, flat sheets of iron and steel from various ships, oxygen generating material from submarines. Hampton Roads' finished oxygen generator was a single massive unit that moved so much air that it was the only city remaining on Earth where you could feel a breeze.

Foreshadowing

From his perch on the podium, the mayor of Hampton Roads looked out at the huge crowd that had gathered for the ceremony. Every face looked grateful. They had survived.

He nodded his head, and the president of William And Mary College placed a small pane of thick glass into a slot near the ground to the mayor's left. The crowd cheered wildly when the old man stood up, a wide smile on his face. The dome was complete.

The mayor turned to the crowd and could see the anticipation on their faces. Air, sweet oxygenated air, without the noxious tinge of methane, would soon be washing over them. The mayor reached up, and with a flourish flipped a large ceremonial switch.

Nothing happened.

The mayor flipped the switch up and down a few times, but the great fan he expected to start remained still. One of the workmen ran up and dashed behind the stand the switch was on.

A minute later the man's smiling face peeked out. "Just a loose wire, Mayor." He winked. "You're good to go."

The worker ran off as the mayor turned back to the crowd. He shrugged, which generated a nervous laugh from the crowd, and then flipped the switch.

There was a hum, and then the fans turned and the wind blew.

Passive Voice

Violet was overwhelmed by Adam the first time they met. She was lost in his beautiful blue eyes, his impossibly black hair, and his smile. More than anything, it was his smile that took her breath away.

When he bumped into her at the cafeteria, she was annoyed until she caught his look. It was apologetic and mischievous and utterly charming. She had asked him several times since that day if he had meant to run into her, and his reply was always ambiguous.

She accepted that.

He was a force that she was just happy to have in her life. He loved her. She never doubted that. But they lived in two different worlds, and she had no choice but to be pulled into his. He had no interest in the specialized study demanded by academia.

He loved to tinker, to wander, to build. Meanwhile, she watched and observed and analyzed, and--more than anything else--followed in his wake. Somehow they made it work, and she was forever thankful for that.

Onomatopoeia

There was a screech, and then a whisper, and then near silence. The whoosh of the conditioned air out of the massive pipe at the edge of the dome was replaced by a hum. Everyone heard it.

And, then, the ringing claxon of alarms that had never been heard before.

Dramatic Irony

Lenny Spencer, the Hampton Roads Chief Engineer, closed his window, dampening the sound of the alarms, which continued to scream in the background. "So how many men do we have who can do the job?"

His deputy, an older man everyone called "Chief" from his work in the field overseeing the creation of the dome and oxygen generator, shrugged. "I figure five or six. Lots of folks know the electrical systems, and lots know the fan structure, but the only ones who know both are the guys who actually worked on hooking up the fan. The electrical engineers wouldn't get within fifty yards of the fan--too dangerous."

"Well, I don't need five or six. I need one. We have, what, four or five hours?" The deputy nodded. "Then find

someone and get him up there. It's a failure in the fan electrical system. It can't be that difficult to fix."

"No, it's not. We'll supply him with everything he needs and send him in." Chief lowered his head, but didn't get up.

"What?" Spencer asked, annoyance in his voice.

"He'll die, Lenny." Spencer didn't say anything, so Chief continued. "We've isolated the failure to the rotating part of the fan structure. The moment he fixes it, the blades will turn, and he'll be knocked off the structure. It's a long fall."

Spencer closed his eyes and shook his head. "Well, that can't be helped." He sighed and then added, "Try to find someone without any family."

Chief nodded without enthusiasm. "I have someone in mind. Married, but he has no kids. Restless type. Moved from crew to crew, which pissed off everyone, but in the process he learned the structure and electrical grid as well as anyone."

Spencer nodded and then stood up. "Great. Get him up there ASAP." Chief stood up and walked alongside Spencer to the door. Spencer put his hand on his assistant's shoulder and squeezed. "And, Chief, don't let him know he's going to

die. We really can't afford to have him refuse, and, besides--it's a kindness."

Chief nodded and walked out the door. He had to get back to the young man waiting in his office.

First Person

I didn't want Adam to go, but I knew he would. We had hours of breathable air left, and the engineers had isolated the problem as mechanical and located within the fan structure. Adam said it would be easy to fix.

I don't know why they hadn't anticipated problems. Maybe they didn't have a choice--the loss of oxygen and atmosphere came so fast. It's a wonder we're even alive and have this dome above our head.

All I know is that no one knew the physical structure and all of the complex underlying mechanical, computer, and electrical systems as well as him. Of course they didn't. The computer guys knew nothing of the electrical systems. The Electrical guys knew nothing of the physical supporting structures. They were all masters of one thing, while Adam--foolish, dreamy, insatiable Adam--knew a little bit about everything. He told me that was important, and the pride in his voice broke my heart.

He stood in the living room of our apartment, leaned down, and kissed my forehead. He was smiling, and for the first time in our life together it didn't make me feel better. I held my right hand against my belly, and lightly grabbed his arm with my left.

"It sounds dangerous." He didn't reply but kissed me on the lips. I shook my head. "Please. Someone else can do this."

He took my hands in his and then kissed them. "No one else knows how everything works together like I do." He then placed my hands on my belly and covered them with his own. "Lives are depending on me, and I can't let them down."

Then he left. It wasn't until after that I remembered he never denied that it was dangerous.

Metaphor

There is such a thing as an antifuse. This device is used to maintain the ongoing flow of electricity when there is local failure. The antifuse works similarly to a fuse in that it is designed to be sacrificed for a specific goal. But while a fuse is sacrificed to stop electricity from

flowing, an antifuse is sacrificed to guarantee that the electricity does not stop.

Present Tense

Adam crawls along the smooth metal of the fan structure. There are no access tunnels, ladders, or entryways here. Everything was assembled with the goal of just getting the air blowing as soon as possible. The possibility that the fan itself--a simple mechanical machine with few moving parts--would fail was so disastrous a scenario that it couldn't even be contemplated. So Adam can do little more than use the suction cup anchors and hope they hold if he slips.

He painstakingly removes a panel and examines wires, connections, and plugs. He then replaces the panel and moves on. He doesn't stop to think. He doesn't consider that he is approaching the actual rotating blades. He focuses on finding what has stopped them from turning.

The fan looms over Adam's head. He is next to the massive casing that holds the blades, and it is only then that he realizes that he is on the rotating structure. He puts the thought out of his head and unscrews a panel directly attached to the base of the blades. He smiles and

shakes his head. A wire as thick as his thumb has come loose. It isn't even frayed or broken. All he has to do is re-attach it and tighten the screw.

It is then he realizes that once he attaches the wire, the fan will turn. He looks down at the precipitous drop. He looks back the way he came, the smooth metal that will rotate the moment he attaches the wire. The one simple wire.

Third Person Limited

The lead engineer is named Jamie King. He's a good guy, but he doesn't know what to say when Adam reports in.

"Did you get that, Mr. King?"

"I did, Adam." He answers even though he doesn't want to. He knows what the next question is going to be.

"So can you hold off on activating the fan until I get back? It took me about an hour to get this far, but that included me checking all the wiring. I bet I could get back to the support tower in about fifteen minutes."

He doesn't know how to answer, so he just speaks the truth. "I'm sorry, Adam. The entire system is designed to never stop. Even the failsafe systems are designed to keep

the turbines turning." He lets go of the button but then quickly presses it again. "I'm sorry."

There is no response, which Jamie is thankful for. He doesn't really know Adam--he is some lower level guy that mucks around with the builders and tech guys, but he seems like a nice fellow. It's a shame that he's going to most likely fall to his death as the fan turns, but certainly he knows that he is saving everyone. Jamie hopes that provides some solace to the poor guy.

"Mr. King." He sounds unsteady, Jamie thinks. His first thought is that Adam won't connect the wire.

"You can call me Jamie, Adam."

"Jamie, can you get a message to my wife for me." The personal enormity of what Adam is doing suddenly strikes Jamie. He didn't know that he was married. All he considered was that the fan had to turn.

"Sure, Adam. Anything."

"Please tell her that I never meant for it to happen like this. I want so very much to be at her side when our boy is born." There is a pause and then Adam continues.

"Tell her that I'm doing this for them. Can you tell her that, Jamie?"

"Sure thing, Adam. I will tell her." Jamie gets the words out even though his chest is tight.

Adam doesn't say anything else, and Jamie hears enormous gears lock into place and all the gauges on his screen turn green, glorious green.

Jamie wipes away a tear. He believes it is due to relief and happiness, but there is a part of him that is profoundly sad.

Run-on

Adam didn't call no one called and now there is a police car escorting another car that has pulled in front of their apartment and Violet knows that something is wrong but she doesn't want to believe it but then they come in and they are talking but she can't hear more than that Adam is dead and he has saved them all and she should be proud but don't they know that she is already proud without him having to kill himself and she holds her hand against her stomach and she cries and cries and cries and then they leave and it is just her and their baby and an emptiness that she knows will never go away.

Flashback

Adam was holding her hand as they both lay on their backs on the grass, looking up at the distorted moon shining through the dome. She squeezed his hand, and he rolled over and leaned on his elbow. "You know, you really should find another guy."

Violet laughed. He was handsome and popular and funny and practically everything else that she dreamed about in a boyfriend. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I'll never amount to anything. You're in all the advanced programs. Everyone knows that you're in line for something special when you graduate. Hell, I can't even hold a job." He fell back onto the grass. "I'd just ride your coattails."

He didn't sound wistful or apologetic. Violet peered at him. More than anything, he looked thoughtful as he peered up into space. She punched him lightly on the arm. "You know you're a genius. I don't know anyone smarter than you."

"Whatever. I get bored easily." He turned to her with a serious look on his face. "I'm a realist. I'll never be Chief Engineer or anything else important. I don't have the discipline for it, and--" He took a deep breath. "You deserve more than that."

She couldn't believe that Adam Traynor, one of the most popular guys in the entire school, was doubting he was worthy of her. It was absurd. "Look, silly. I don't need you to be anything more than who you are." She sat up, and he did, too. They sat facing each other, hand in hand. "You are the sweetest, handsomest, smartest, most amazing man I've ever met. That should be enough for anyone."

"I just don't want to let you down."

"You won't." She leaned over and kissed him. "Trust me. You could never let me down."

Simile

At lunch one day, a friend of Violet's asked her what it was like to have a hero for a husband, one who sacrificed himself to save everyone. What could she say? That it's like having a headache all the time, knowing that the pain will never go away and all you can hope to do is ignore it for short stretches of time. That it's like someone stabbed you in the heart and then thanked you for it because it helped others. She looked at her friend, and tears slid down her cheeks. "It's like someone showing you the most wonderful and amazing gift for your child, and then taking it away before your child ever receives it."

Her friend may have walked away or she may have not.
Violet didn't notice as she was sobbing into her hands.

Past Tense

As he slipped the wedding ring on Violet's finger,
Adam leaned forward and whispered in her ear, "You won't
regret this."

Present Perfect Tense

She has never regretted it.

Second Person

That's right. Close your eyes, my darling. Now is the
time for sleep. Someday I'll tell you about your father,
and you will be proud that you share his name. You will
know how kind and generous and funny and wonderful and
brave he was. And while I know that will fill you with
pride and love, I know it will also hurt, because he is not
here for you. But he wanted to be, my darling, he wanted to
be. So close your eyes. Sleep. And breathe.

Kerr - Requiem 16

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