

REQUIEM IN THE KEY OF PROSE
By Jake Kerr

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.

Personification

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

Domes sprung up across the globe, built in desperation from whatever was available. Glass and steel were ripped from buildings and vehicles and repurposed. Massive oxygen generation arrays were cobbled together from parts found in cars, hospitals, and air conditioning units. Some cities survived. Most did not.

Norfolk, Virginia, survived by scavenging a good portion of its naval shipyard--a massive turbine and propeller from an aircraft carrier, flat sheets of iron and steel from various ships, oxygen-generating material from submarines. Norfolk's 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

Adam couldn't afford to be late for class again. Offering apologies as he went, he shoved his way past the line of students and grabbed a granola bar. Turning to head to the cafeteria register, he ran straight into a girl, sending her tray of food crashing to the floor. His first thought was to apologize and then let her deal with the mess, but one glance changed everything. Her angry pout, her short disheveled hair, the tilt of her hips--everything about her stopped him in his tracks.

He dragged his attention away from her and looked at the clock on the wall over the exit. He had to go or he could pretty much give up any hope of passing the class and thus graduating. But as he glanced back at her, thoughts of

his future fell by the wayside. She just stood there and looked at him, waiting.

He smiled and then shrugged. "Accidents happen," was all he said before he grabbed her tray, knelt down, and started to help her clean up the mess. She crossed her arms and watched him do all the work.

He did most of the talking, but she didn't seem to mind. He lifted a piece of lettuce off her blouse, and his heart leapt as she finally smiled at him. She said her name was Violet, and he replied by saying he would be joining her for lunch. She didn't say yes, but he didn't care, because she didn't say no either.

The class he couldn't afford to miss had ended by the time their lunch was over. Adam had given up his entire future for her. As he walked to his dorm from the cafeteria, all he could think about was how glad he was that he did.

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 skipped classes, argued with professors, and eventually left school. He just 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.

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 he did. 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 they called on him. No one else--him! 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 don't go; 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 realized he never denied that it was dangerous.

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 flowing 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 can tell it was assembled in a hurry--the welds are ragged; the wires are spliced in odd locations, and he has to use shears to cut through hastily closed and soldered access panels that the engineers hoped would never have to be opened.

He 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, a slippery bridge of smooth metal that will rotate the moment he attaches the wire.

Interior Monologue

I can make it. I just have to be quick and careful. The fan will turn, but it will start slow, right? So I'll have time to get across. Violet will be waiting for me at home, and she'll be so angry but so proud, and the baby will kick like crazy, and that will make her wince and laugh all at the same time.

Of course it is starting to turn as I tighten the screw. The flow of electricity has been restored. Okay, that makes things more difficult, but I can still make it.

Every time we pass a log, I'll show my son how I kept my balance. He'll try it and fall and then laugh and be impressed at how I did not.

Do I need to put the panel back on? No. I need to get the hell out of here. Damn, this fan moves fast, but I can do it. All I need to do is keep my balance.

Violet is waiting. Our son is waiting. They need me. So here I go. It's all about focus and control. I've never been good at that, but I will now. I can't let them down.

Fragment

A slight breeze. Distant cheers. A fall.

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. 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."

Violet peered at him. 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."

"It doesn't matter if I am." 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, didn't think he was worthy of her. It was absurd. "I don't need you to be anything more than who you are." She sat up, and he stared into her face. "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."

She leaned over and kissed him. "You couldn't."

Simile

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. It's like someone stabbed you in the heart and then thanked you for it because it helped others. 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.

That's what it's like being married to a hero.

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.

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