

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. Oxygen generators were cobbled together from whatever machinery was available. In Australia, 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

 Suggesting cutting the first bit, as it seems a little questionable scientifically to me, and I think it's unnecessary in any case. The only important factor is that for whatever reason, there's no air, and thus the domes are built.

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

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.

I think this paragraph would work better if it was more abstract rather than concrete as you have it here. Like "Some cities did X to survive, some did Y. Some survived, some did not." Maybe make it a bit shorter, like even just two brief sentences like I just mocked up there. Brief, to the point.

Hampton Roads, Virginia? Or...? Out of curiosity, why pick Hampton Roads? Just seems like kind of an awkward name. Is there nothing that would work just as well but maybe fit in thematically better somehow?

This section doesn't do much for me. I like the idea of a foreshadowing section, but this one reads a little dryly to me, and I think it's probably unnecessary given we've established that there's this big oxygen generating machine, and obviously machines break down sometimes, so we don't need any hint that a wire could go bad. I think it probably works better with the onomatopoeia being the first clear indication of trouble.

Maybe instead you'd want to foreshadow something from Adam's POV here, like him making a decision about making the sacrifice (more on that later), keeping it vague enough to keep from spoiling the whole plot, but with enough tidbits to intrigue.

If you do the foreshadowing from Adam in the previous section instead, then this section will probably flow better.

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

First Person

Not sure this section is necessary, but if you want to keep it in, I would suggest recasting it in a more narrative style, without dialogue—have it be the personal thoughts of Lenny, as he considers the choice he has to make. I think it would be most effective if you had him vaguely weighing one man vs. another, considering various factors, leaving the reader to ponder, and then only at the end of the section do you reveal that he's choosing a man to die.

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 himhe 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 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 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 remembered 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 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," he says, and then explains that 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 and says "I'm sorry," but knows it will be no consolation.

 I tweaked this a little here.

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 wanted 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. |

Fragment

[About Adam dying...]

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

Maybe recast this section from Adam's POV. I think it would be sort of the emotional climax of the story if seen from his POV.

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."

 This section might work better a little shorter, tighter.

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."

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

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

~~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.

END

In general, I think this draft has made some good progress, and I think there is a great story in here somewhere, but it still needs some work, I think.

I like the added detail--its cleared up the world quite a bit. However, I had a hard time believing this society that had gone to all this work just to breathe couldn't keep a man from falling off the edge of a platform..

Also, as there's not much going on the story, for the major emotional core of the story (a man's sacrifice) to be decided by some random mayor made me lose interest. (It's always more compelling if you can make the protagonist protag a bit more.)

I do think a sentence fragment with his death, making this Adam's choice, and also having him reveal what this sacrifice means to him could help a lot, both in terms of emotional weight and believability. Also possibly clearing up the "easily falls to his death and we can't rescue him" problem.