

Breathe For Me

The last thing I see, is my brother's little face, eyes wide from disbelief and blurry from unshed tears, completely distorted by the scratched glass door of the hovercraft. Then it all suddenly fades out to nothingness and I open my eyes to the blackness of my room and the luminescent stars pasted across the ceiling over my bed. I heave, feeling like I there's no oxygen left in the room for me to breathe although I know I can breathe perfectly fine. I touch my face and note: at least this time I didn't cry.

It's been three weeks and six days and I've been having the exact same dream every night. And it's been exactly three weeks and six days since we were told the dreadful news that everyone expected but no one wanted to confront. That day when officer Xenon broadcasted her speech to our eyepieces everybody's nightmares were about to be turned into reality.

The moment the Com started we could all see her virtually in front of us in an aula, on a podium, ready to deliver a speech that she knew would unhinge most of us and completely destroy the rest of us. It wasn't like the people hadn't been noticing all the problems and new defects of the pod already. Our home, pod-3785, was in its last phase, the one they so ironically had given the pretty name of "Rebirth".

The pod being in this phase basically meant that it was dying, and by extension, that we were dying trapped inside it. Recently intricate defects in the headquarter's integrated circuits had been found. These lead to the malfunction of all the electronics that the entire pod and its very essence of life depended on. This showed up in sudden breaches like all electric circuits failing and the purification of water malfunctioning. But worst of all, was the slow but steady decrease of the level of air left to breathe inside our pod. Ever since the cracks in the walls of the pod showed up, we all knew which steps were coming. Our eyepieces started showing the present oxygen levels of the pod, how much oxygen one was expanding during the day, and how many more days the pod's inhabitants, or shall I say captives, could survive inside. Restrictions were placed and no excessive usage was permitted. Slowly people started getting sick and officer Xenon decided the time had come to set the date. When she spoke to us through our eyepieces, she radiated nothing but calm and ultimate power.

"Dear inhabitants of pod-3785, this will be a broadcast regarding the Rebirth phase of our pod. As you all know, our kind has gone through great hardship to establish the world we have the privilege of living in today. Our people have gone through the rebirth of 3784 pods before us and we are about to face the next one very soon. We shall consider it an honour.

Now, according to paragraph 74, section "Allowed Citizens" of the revised version of the core manual, following citizens are to prepare for the shift: parents with children under the age of six, all healthy citizens under the age of 25, citizens of five star rank within society and all Gifted citizens. Further information can be accessed through the core manual file and any queries can be casted to the ones in charge. The shift will take place in exactly four weeks."

As the broadcast ended, some people were rooted to the spot with pure horror in their eyes whereas the others who had been anticipating this shift merely continued with their interrupted work. This shift implied that only the indispensable were to be taken for the shift to the new pod, the rest would be left behind in a dysfunctional pod with a clock in their eyepiece counting down on their oxygen level and hence their time to stay alive. This shift also implied that families would be split. Kids would have to leave their parents behind to die, and parents with unqualified or sick children would have to leave their kids to die. The old would be left behind and anyone at the lower end of the societal structure wouldn't make it to the new pod either.

For me, it meant that I would make it from my family since I am Gifted, Gifted with the ability to breathe without oxygen. I was a requirement for the research department for the study of the special enzyme my body produced that kept me alive without the need for any oxygen at all. My mother and father who were of five star rank would also make it, but my little brother however, who had an eye defect hampering his vision, was not going to make it. I would have to leave him behind, and I had known this for quite a while. My little baby brother, who meant the world to me. They all called me Gifted, but I knew I was cursed.

On the final day, the day of the shift, I went to my morning practice as usual. I was a five star rank citizen thanks to my education and my position was within the police force. Today was gun practice. It felt good to feel the cold metal of the revolver again. It felt good to feel the recoil after firing. I was trying to focus but of course I couldn't keep my mind off the shift. My brother was genuinely happy for me but I couldn't think of him. All I thought of was how our ancestors destroyed old Earth with their toxins that lead to this inhumane way of life today. The people of old Earth only took from the planet and never gave back and finally produced a world so toxic and so inhabitable that the remaining living souls had to build protective pods and retreat in them to try to survive. How could they? How could they not see the disaster they were walking into? Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of piercing sirens in my earpiece. Something was catastrophically wrong.

Everybody got the Com that all selected citizens were to board the hovers at once. There had been a breach in the east centre of the pod and the levels of oxygen wouldn't last till planned shift time. The shift was happening now. There was no time to think. Everybody moved according to practice. People were rushing in every possible direction. They were shouting, screaming, and crying their heads off to leave their loved ones behind. I saw my parents board the nearest hovercraft, dad was driving that one and I was supposed to board it. It was pretty close. I looked in the crowd of people standing behind the guards who were blocking the path for the unqualified. I spotted my brother behind a guard and called out to him to say goodbye. The guard in front of him however wouldn't let him pass. I felt the cold of the revolver in my hand and for a moment I realised what I was thinking. "No" I told myself firmly. I don't have the right to do that. I turned around to board the hover but in the final second turned around and shot my stunner at the guard blocking my brother. The guard fell to the floor with a shrill screech and suddenly people were panicking and a huge commotion was created. In the swarm of people I found the arm of my brother and dragged him after me as I fought my way through them and towards the closing doors of the

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hovercraft. It was about to take off and I would not fail. As the doors of the hovercraft was closing I pushed my brother into the hover in the final second and the hover started to lift. In that final moment I saw only the face of my brother. He turned around to look at me through the scratched glass door of the hovercraft. His eyes wide from disbelief and blurry from unshed tears. I had no regrets. I looked at his face, my vision going blurry, I gave him a big warm smile and thought, "I want you to breathe all the oxygen I never will".