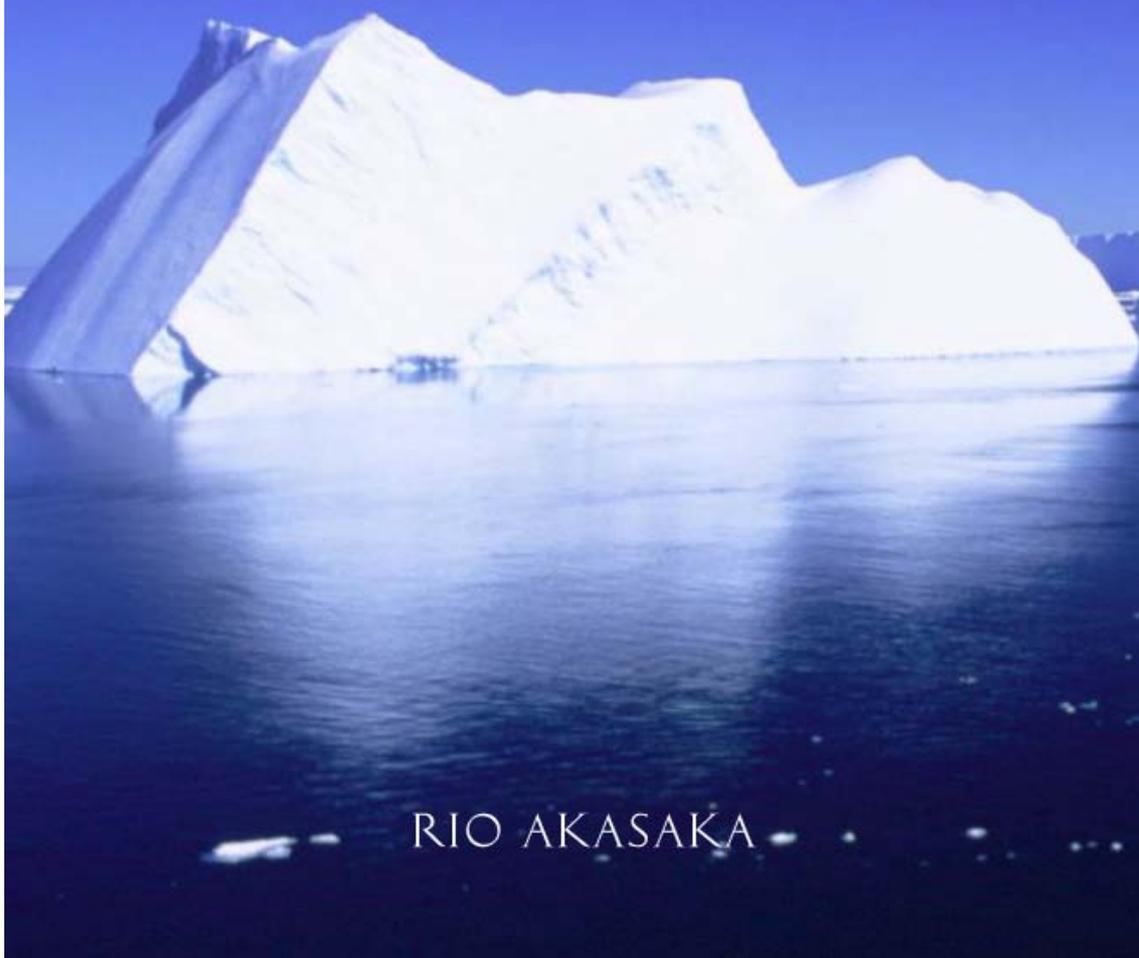


SILENT SYMBOLISM

A collection



RIO AKASAKA

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Dedicated to Stephanie and Happy Lee, to whom I owe so much of what has been evoked here. This collection is a culmination of the work produced online at my personal weblog and offline inspiration. It consists of poems, short stories, and longer ones that have been published in no particular order.

Whirlwind

Like the wind that sweeps through
I feel I see I touch I know you
The words that you speak like a song
Make each hour an hour too long
I may not be a conjuror of sorts
Or a prince of two king's courts
But know this: that it is true
That my heart has been unlocked by you
The the butterflies you feel
Jump about my soul, so very real
And I know that it is true
I am at my happiest when I see your smiles
For me your joy beguiles

Friday, October 22, 2004

Caught in Winter's Breath

Twas a day of the yesteryear
That I was caught in its jaws
In the breath of winter clear
Ensnared 'til the cold frost thaws

I stood there under the trees
Laid naked and threadbare
Like fingers reaching; no one sees
The jewel of heaven so rare

The wind swept in a hurry past
A veil that rustle the leaves below
As the hours fade so quick and fast
The darkness achingly slow...

Thursday, November 25, 2004

The Questions of a Silent Soul

The questions of a silent soul
would be enough to burn a giant hole
through the windy palaces of the frozen lands
and the hostile dunes of the sifting sands

They would seek the answers that no one would
disregarding the common should and could
the senseless syntax would not mind
for none shall hold that could not bind

The heart would answer, try as it might
to give the soul the endless sight
to help it understand wrong from right
giving daylight to the dismal night

The questions of a silent soul
would have no purpose and no goal
and yet it would falter not at all
to query everything big and small...

Saturday, March 20, 2004

The Wind

The unharried wind whispers in my ear
Let yourself see the unseen tear
The shadowed being hidden among
All the masses, a note within a song
Listen to the breath of the sigh
Of a troubled mind; low betwixt high
The wind bemoans the senseless part
Of emotions from one spirit and heart
Let yourself see all this loss and hear
Says the wind as it whippers in my ear

Thursday, May 30, 2004

The Morning Moon

A sea of oceans and a sea of dreams
Flowing through the endless streams
The trees that dance and those that sing
The flowers arranged in a tiny ring

Music heard from the edgy birds
One by one the buffalo herds
Heading north, to the frigid north
The tides of the east, the waves at low

Among these scenes that jump my mind
The heart is weak but it shall find
To seek the new, to feel the light
Bring the soul to a new new light
Wandering there somewhere faraway
Never in one place it should stay...

Tuesday, March 30, 2004

The Ring

He worked early in the mornings, when it was still dark and everyone was still asleep. With the grey truck and his two colleagues, he would set off around the city, stopping ever so often to pick up a garbage bin and to load its contents into the slimy, dark abyss of the back. He chose to drive, the rear-view mirror decorated with jingling trinkets and the peach-smelling cardboard tree that by now had faded into an aged and useless decoration. Ironic, he thought, since he couldn't see behind him except through the bluish video screen that sat at a comfortable angle on the dashboard. Without it, he would never know if his colleagues were finished loading the trash, or if there were any problems with the large plough that swept and crushed the trash that was thrown into it.

Throwing on his reflective coat and jumping into the truck, he threw the gears into reverse and drove out of the depot to fetch his colleagues at the corner of Franklin and 6th, where they would swing onto the metal supports and hold onto the banisters to be carried until they hopped off to collect the trash that sat silently on the curbs. The streets were empty, the rumbling of his truck echoing off the walls of the dark homes he passed. A few minutes later, he found them, standing on the street with their hands in their pockets, shivering in the cold breeze. With a quick shout of 'Hey', they hopped on and he swung around the corner for the first batches on the right side of the street.

Such was the routine. Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, he would drive his grey truck up and down the streets until the sun rose, and the sleepy-eyed men in their bathrobes picked up their newspaper from the front of their lawns, dogs yapping and eager to be walked after a restful night. Seeing the city wake up was something he enjoyed. Early morning runners would emerge onto the streets, dashing past dog-walking ladies in spandex. More people would be driving their cars, some of them irate at the slow moving garbage truck, honking, annoyed, while he would

deliberately slow down and turn the volume of the radio up. He also had a favourite radio program that ran early in the morning, which played the songs he liked and became a substitute for the newspaper that he couldn't read at the breakfast table. Now that he didn't have anyone to go home to, it didn't really matter if he missed breakfast. Brunch was a perfect meal, anyways.

A few miles onwards, he saw the lights of a police car and was half inclined to drive over to see what had happened. Curiosity always got the best of him, but he knew that the boss would never allow him to be late for any of his rounds. After all, the boss was a hawk at the punch-card machines. Maybe I might've been better as a journalist, he mused.

He turned onto Bradford. The posh people's place, he thought, as his truck ran slowly past the white sprawling mansions. The garbage here consisted mostly of Gucci bags and Styrofoam, remnants of newly opened technological gadget boxes. Boring people, mostly. He stopped frequently here, the result of the lazy men and women who refused to stash their garbage in one convenient pile at the corner of the block, and instead wanted a private trash lot right in front of their homes, so that they wouldn't need to walk several hundred meters to place garbage while unpleasant odours might accidentally waft onto the person, thus requiring another lengthy shower and another half-an-hour makeup job.

Ah, boy do I love this city.

It was while he was waiting for his men to load the trash on Williams that he noticed it on his screen.

"Wait!" he shouted, knowing perfectly well his colleagues wouldn't have heard him. He swung open the door, nearly lost his footing, and jumped down. "Stop, stop!" he yelled, as he ran to prevent them from pressing the bright red button that set the plough in motion.

But it was already too late.

Hurriedly, he pulled the black lever below the panels and stopped the plough.

"What the..." interjected one person.

"A ring! I saw a ring!"

But they would never believe him. Even as he took a glove and began to sift through what hadn't been swept back, his heart sank, knowing that it would be an impossible task to find an object as small as a ring amidst all the vegetable peelings, old socks, tissues, broken and abandoned toys and old newspapers. Their attempts to show that they believed what he said was true were scant, as they rummaged offhandedly through the garbage. After a few minutes, he gave up, dejected.

Sighing, he jumped back onto the front and began driving. He was positive he had seen the ring, a glitter that was unlike aluminium cans, a piece of round metal with a small unrecognisable jewel. Unmistakeable for anything other than a ring. Now he knew that the ring would be wasted forever, melted among the other useless trash that would as though a princess ended up living in the slums. A wife would be devastated, a potential bride lost. He knew his boss wouldn't allow for a full check of the truck, for his words would be "who are we to decide what should or should not be thrown away? All the time spent to search for the damn ring is money wasted and could be put to better use."

What a way to start the week, he thought, as he almost sped by a collection point had it not been for the frantic waving of his colleague's hand under the rear-view camera. He tried to comfort himself by assuring himself that nothing could have realistically been done, but then again the thought that the truck he now drove contained a priceless ring instilled further irreplaceable guilt.

The next morning, he woke up later than usual, knowing that it was his day off. He picked up the newspaper strewn on his lawn, and was about to decide whether he should have scrambled or poached eggs for breakfast when an article caught his eye:

"Thieves Steal Jewels at 1st Regal. One Remains Missing."

So that probably what the police were after, he concluded.

The phone rang inside. He rushed to pick it up, hesitated, then decided to answer.

"Hello?"

"Michael? It's me, Brit." It was unexpected that his ex-wife should call, perhaps even more so this early in the morning.

"Hey. I thought we were on no-talking terms." He realised his spite, and hastily added, "Sorry to hear your store was broken into, though."

"Yeah... but there's something I've got to show you... could you come over at around 10?" she replied.

He was puzzled and confused.

He might not have been so puzzled if he had found the ring the day before, for he would have found his name engraved on its inside, alongside Brittany Palmer's name.

Sunday, February 13, 2005

The Elevator

"Delightful stuff", she said without emotion, savouring the melting chocolate in her mouth. Reaching over the low table, she picked another piece from the box that lay open before her, the chocolate nestled among the golden wrapping like brown jewels. She shifted her eyes to the window, seeing the city skyline becoming darker by the minute.

He sat across from her, quiet and drunk. He was always drunk, especially in the evenings. She had fallen in love with him for his looks; he had returned the favor by falling into an endless binge.

"Do you want to go to Marty's tomorrow night?", he said. The smell of alcohol was evident.

Without taking her eyes off the sight outside her window, she replied absent-mindedly,

"Perhaps"

So much for a conversation.

"If you don't feel up to a conversation, I'll leave" he said, reading her mind.

"It's alright"

She remembered the days gone by. The trip to the beach. The letters. The flowers. Always a kiss. Now it was placid, dead. He had even forgotten her birthday the week before. No sign of remembering it, even now. Why are guys able to forget what they want to forget so easily?, she wondered. She even suspected that the faint foreign perfume was not as innocent as the crowded bus ride that he had mentioned. She was going to break the ice and tell him what it was she had on her mind, that she didn't want to continue this lame

relationship, that she was better off without him, that she didn't want his drunken presence in her apartment, when he abruptly stood up. She lost her train of thought. He wiped off the crumbs off his pants, scattering them over the carpet like small animals.

"I gotta head home. I'll take a shower and meet you at the bar at 7, kay?" He smiled slightly.

"Sure", she responded, getting up. Never, she wanted to say. "Thanks for coming." Her fake smile.

She stood at a distance, arms crossed, as he took his leather coat from the hanger in the entrance, fitted his shoes, and opened the multitude of locks that decorated the white frame of the door. Ever since the burglar had broken in, how long ago was it?, she had been paranoid about keeping her door locked. It was only because of him that she refrained from pushing a large wooden wardrobe against the door each night.

"See ya later", he said, looking at her as she stood, shoulder against the wall of her apartment door. He pushed the up and the down elevator button. He would joke that doing that would get both elevators, saving time. Except that there was only one elevator. She preferred to roll her eyes each time he shared the joke. After a small pause, the elevator door opened, and he kept his blue eyes on her as he stepped into the elevator shaft.

She cocked her head slightly to the right, and after a while, smiled to herself and said to the elevator doors that were beginning to close,

"See ya."

Tuesday, January 04, 2005

The Old Man

He sat there, dazed, eyes unseeing, heart unfeeling, back towards the rows of trains that waited patiently. The rows of baggages were spread before him, waiting to be picked up by fidgety porters with creased uniforms and gray gloves, waiting to be delivered to the anxious men and women whose properties were safely enclosed inside. Sitting on the wooden bench with his shoulder slightly hunched against the frigid wind that swept through the station, he dug his hands deeper into the thin layers of his coat.

"Is this going too, sir?"

The words punctuated the murmur of the people that walked silently past, and the man looked up slightly and shook his head. The porter turned and picked up another bag, hurriedly shoving it onto the others stacked high upon a cart. The man continued to sit there, motionless.

Behind, a train began its departure, ever so slowly, inching its way out into the gray sky with increasing rapidity. The rattle and the roar that accompanied it receded gently, as the last passengers walked slowly away from the platform and towards the large black panels that fluttered yellow letters.

He straightened up, and fished into his coat pocket, bringing out a crumpled ticket, which he scrutinised for a few moments before putting it back. His hunched figure didn't seem much out of place, as people cloaked in furs and down trudged past him, hardly noticing.

After a few moments another train slid into the platform, accompanied with the flip-flip of the letters. Somewhere distant a bell rang, and the sudden blare of horns permeated the thick walls, combined with a barrage of expletives that went unanswered. The wind picked up, and a white plastic bag sailed past, eventually

fastening itself against a post box. The man's eyes followed its movement, and, uninterested, focused elsewhere.

Standing up, the man walked calmly towards the train that had just arrived, carrying along a weathered bag and stepping gingerly among the other cases that were still stacked around him. His movement was slow, his actions deliberate, his feet calm.

Walking down the platform a small distance, he stepped on the metal steps of the train and gripped the bannister, pulling his figure through the already open door. It was considerably warmer inside, the warmth accompanied by a faint odour of smoke that mingled with the smell of leather. A few people had already taken their positions by the window, while others shuffled along the aisles inspecting the seat numbers.

He took a cushioned seat and sat down, his arm gently resting upon the seat. There he remained for a few moments, apparently pensive, a glow returning to his ashen face. It wasn't long before he heard

"Excuse me"

It was a gentleman, a coat and journal in each hand.

The old man opened his eyes, looked up, and gently hopped off the train. When the 5 o'clock train departed a few minutes later, it chugged along slowly, leaving the solitary soul behind.

Friday, October 01, 2004

Waiting

He waited. It had been 18 long and interminable years he had spent within the enclave he had come to call home. The room in the Penitentiary was gray, humid and squalid, the walls undecorated except for the lone poster that hung on the wall. There was no lightbulb. The endless hours he had he spent reading, mostly the trashy novels that could be found within the very walls that housed several hundred other inmates like him. He had nearly pulled off an escape 5 years ago, like the men who managed to get out of Alcatraz in the yellowed books he read. Except he had fallen off the ledge on the wrong foot, and he could only hobble so far before they came with their blinding searchlights. Had he not tried, he would have been a free man 3 years ago, but he tried not to think of that, because it annoyed him.

Tomorrow, all this would be left behind, and he would be able to say hello to his daughter, who grew up not knowing what her father was like, save for the few photographs he sent in reply to the letters that trickled few and far between. Sandy. If only her mother knew how much it would mean to him to be able to start life anew, to be able to put the past behind and look forward to a new beginning.

He tossed and turned. The coarse blanket did little to keep him warm, but it was better than to have it taken away like what had happened to Bailey, who had attempted suicide. He would be able to see Bailey too, because he had gotten out a few years back and now apparently had an honest job at some shoe factory. To be able to see him face to face, shake his hand, and slap each other on the back as the buddies they became in the lonely hours of the night, that was something he would definitely set about doing as soon as he got some new crisp and ironed shirts and a nice blue pair of jeans, the ones with the two buttons on the back pocket.

His eyes could not close, and it wasn't because of the dimmed yet bright light that streamed through the bars and into his room. It

wasn't because of the distant blaring of the radio, punctuated from time to time with loud barrages of 'Keep it down' and 'Go to sleep you deaf fool'. It was the thought that in a few hours he would be able to soar, tasting the meaning of liberty like a tiger out its cage. Eventually, his body could take it no longer and he fell into a deep snore.

Never before had he cherished the morning sun as he did on that day. When 10 o'clock came, he peered anxiously towards the warden's desk, but it was empty. At 11 o'clock, barely able to contain his joy that he was a free man within the confines of a jail, he danced a jig and playfully tugged at the bars, singing a free man's song. At 12, no longer sane, he kicked at the steel and durable bars, his shoes making a distinct drumming rhythm. Only when the bars clattered to the floor and a piercing siren shattered the hall did he realise what he had done. For years earlier, as he now remembered it, he had planned another escape through these very bars, but had ditched it when his daughter had written to him to plead not to. But the warden wouldn't believe that, would he.

Wednesday, October 27, 2004

Eclipse of Souls

For a brief glimpse of time all stood still. The sun, never present, almost seemed to squeeze through the dismal heavens as it had never done before. The tropical birds were silent, the overflowing ageless trees ceased their constant whispering, and the wind ended its bewitching howl, one that usually spread shivers throughout the land. It was eerie, and for a moment the clouds seem to frown at the absurdity of the scene. It was a gray world, locked in the mundane shade that was reminiscent of the past, of the monochrome and the glass plates. It was then that the soul stirred. It was then that it realised that its dominion wasn't here, but at the long gone past. But then again, it was already too late.

The effigy towered endlessly into the blue-grey sky, and with the occasional glint from the ever-dissapearing sun, it almost appeared majestic. The reason it didn't appear majestic was simply because many didn't like having a statue blot out the sun on the land where the sun never or rarely showed its face. The tower of metal spread its fatherly hands out towards the city, as though it were a protector, a guardian, ensuring that no harm would befall the city, and while the birds cautiously wavered around, drifting aimlessly, it began to snow. The flakes seemed to drift slowly down from the hands of the statue, and the grey skies dimmed as the people below shuffled home, bundled in oversized coats and billowing scarves.

Jace woke up to the blaring of "Our Comrade Is Mighty" by the kid next door on his trumpets. It seemed the kid had just recently joined the Youth society, and they spent the days hiking, camping, and most annoyingly, learning to play the trumpets. So much for a good night's sleep, thought Jace. In his younger days he had been called Jason, but somehow or another the name faded into history, just as Abraham sounded out of place back then. Now most names were four lettered anyways, saving space in the historical archives that now occupied the space of a building as big as what was once known as the Library of Congress. Not that it mattered, really.

He hurriedly ate his breakfast, almost reaching for the cell-phone and the radio until he realised he no longer had them...

He opened the door to a blast of frigid air mixed with snow, immediately dashing his faint hopes that the weather today would be better than the yesterday. The wind swept endlessly into his room, so without any further hesitation, he stepped out and headed north, his booted feet crunching the fresh-fallen snow that painted the streets.

His job was handsomely titled "State Foreign Records Officer", but with so many others at the same job, it somewhat lessened the excitement one would usually have by holding the name. Luckily he worked in a well-furnished, warm 5-story 12-acre marble building just ten minutes from home, and it was a welcome respite when he stepped into the large, heated lobby where so many people mingled about in their olive-green and red uniforms. Once at his desk on the third floor, Jace set about reading the piles of documents, magazines and books that lay piled upon his desk, scattered about as though some careless janitor had just picked them up from a trashbin. The first that he took into his hand was a cheap romance novel with an equally cheap drawing of two lovers embraced on the cover with a backdrop of some mountain range, entitled "Love and Esmeralda"...

"Love and Esmeralda" was even more cheap than he had originally thought, and Jace flipped through it, crossing out the imperialist terms and ripping out obscene pages. It was his work, after all, as "State Foreign Records Officer", and he worked like a machine throughout the morning, eventually stripping the book to its barest plot. What he really was supposed to do he never understood, nor did he ask, but it had something to do with censoring imperialist ideals. The Comrade secretly loves these books, surmised Jace with half a grin, although he knew that if the 'Thought Police' were existent in this forlorn nation, he knew that he would have been

arrested and summarily shot there and then. So much for thinking, mused Jace.

Looking up from his desk he observed the other men working dilligently over books and magazines that were sent in by weekly shipments from around the world. They were all intent, all seriously poring over the books under the yellow hue of the lamps that stood beside them on their desk, books whose material they would never divulge, whose content would never see the light of day after it passed the massive shredder that hummed on the floor beneath them. The only sound that could be heard was the occasional rip of a piece of paper and the sound of black felt pens running over the ink of the neatly printed books. He hadn't much time to look around before suspicious glance from another man quickly forced Jace to resume his work.

After "Love and Esmeralda" had undergone its diet, Jace knew that the book would be sent to the massive Press Center just minutes away on foot, where thousands of other men like him would type up what remained of the story, attach a similar cover, print two or three copies, and send them off the the Great National Library, where it would then join the shelves of the other books that had been edited in the very same way.

At midday, when the ancient brown bell at the middle of the room rang the arrival of lunch, Jace stood up along with the other 200 or so men, and their footsteps thundered and reverberated across the shiny wooden floor as everyone headed to the mess for food. Jace wasn't too hungry, partly because he knew that today was Tuesday, and that on Tuesdays there was never anything good to be served. But he had to appear interested, or else some other guy would report to the superior that some ungrateful soul had refused to eat lunch. In this world, one never knew who was a friend and who was not. Survival of the fittest, simply put.

As he passed the rows upon rows of identical metallic grey desks

and pale yellow Formica lamps, he happened to notice the book of another fellow colleague, a man whose name he didn't and would never come to know. It was the Encyclopaedia Britannica, with its gilded lettering on the navy blue cover, and having visited the Great National Library countless times, he knew that it was a reliable source of information about whatever one wanted to know. But one thing he knew and no one outside the building knew was that the Encyclopaedia currently available in the Library was not the real copy, and the one before his eyes was. The Comrade didn't like too knowledgeable people, and thus Jace's present job and the Press Center served the very purpose of purging whatever was seen as harmful if revealed to the public. He moved closer to the desk, and was about to open the cover with the fingertips, when suddenly without warning, a surly voice from behind said,

"Can I help you, comrade?"

Fearful that any confrontation would result in a ugly situation, Jace backed off without even a glance at the man whose book he had been intently looking upon. No doubt the man had noticed his curiosity. With an awkward glance he shuffled into the lunch line, and was soon lost amidst the crowd jostling for bread and soup. A cold sweat broke out on his face, and he took care not to look anywhere except into his brown chicken soup in the grimy grey bowl. He knew that privacy was a big matter for people nowadays, especially when every move was somehow or another monitored by another person. Jace was one of the lucky men who actually had a bit of privacy, and just like the man he had intruded upon, it was to Jace a closely guarded matter. Never oughta step out of my bounderies, he thought.

After lunch in the noisy messhall, Jace, with a few hours to spare before another batch of books to diet, decided that going to the library was the most productive thing he could do. Either that or go home and watch another episode of a cheesy soap opera about guns and chivalry, which he hardly took a liking for. The Great National

Library was located mere minutes from his workplace at the State Information Ministry, and before long, his gloved hands grasped the brass door handles of the massive building.

Books were lined from wall to wall in bookcases some 10 feet high, and wooden ladders scaled the shelves along tiny silver rails for facilitated retrieval of books at the top. The walls were decorated with portraits in gilded frames, and the floor, with lush red carpeting, ensured a quiet place for lecture. At the far end of the room were bookshelves on trolleys so that all the books could be properly indexed and placed, and behind those were the marble stairs leading to the second floor, where the archives were kept. Large floor to ceiling windows showed the snowy landscape that stretched behind, and blood-red curtains decorated its edges. A small heater pattered quietly at the corner of the room as though afraid to break the silence. In the middle of the library hung a pearl-like chandelier strung from the ceiling that seemed to vanish in its height, a cord snaking around the golden chain. Despite having visited there several times before, it never ceased to amaze him of the magnitude of the place.

Dwarfed by the shelves, Jace headed toward the reference area, intent upon finding the book upon which his mind had been contemplating since lunch. Tracing the leather-bound books with his fingertips, he finally found what he was looking for and heaved it upon the nearest desk, a dull thud that echoed across the room as he did so: "A History of the Past- an Encyclopaedia Companion." Under "History of the 20-21st century" this was what he read:

"The 20th century, now referred to as the Post-Industrial or the Great Wars era, was by far the most chaotic and most violent time period in history that man has ever known. It consisted of the First World War (also known as the Great War, see GREAT WAR), the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq Wars, among other similar but smaller political conflicts. The First World War was a result of imperialist

nations fruitlessly attempting to prove their might; the Second World War, a result of a dictator with a primitive and naive aim to conquer the world for a single race (see HITLER). Imperialist America attempted to justify the other three wars, and not to much avail. Despite some technological advances that significantly altered man's way of life (see LIGHT, CAR, MEDECINE), many others led to the destruction of society. It could be thus said that history repeated its mistakes during that century. The 21st century was similar in many ways. This book attempts to shed light on the destructive and disastrous age in history that failed to repeat itself in the latter part of the 21st century, due to certain circumstances we will discover in the second chapter of this book."

"In the 20th century, the majority of the people living in the world were poor, lacked proper sanitation and medical facilities, and therefore had to resort to blaming other nations for their plight. With lack of proper political leadership, even these attempts at getting a better lifestyle were futile..."

For an hour he sat there, furiously entranced in the flurry of words that sped from the pages and into his ever-questioning mind. His whole surroundings melted into obscurity, so much so that he failed to notice that by the time he had read enough, it was long past the time he was supposed to be back at work. There were too many questions, too many unanswered queries, and it all bewildered him. He knew that what the history books said were not accurate, but to what extent he failed to notice.

For what he vaguely recalled of what now became the distant past, he remembered the days when people were happy, unbound to their duties as Comrades in an all too uncomfortably equal world. He remembered the smell of the brightly coloured trees in the air of spring, now reduced to mere gray ashes in a forlorn and hostile territory. There were the birds too, with their songs reverberating in the clear blue sky as children played joyfully on swings that hung beneath the branches. It was when the wind was a welcome feeling

rustling the leaves as the trees waved in a dance, when the sun scorched the dry earth and the heat was almost unbearable. For now the clouds obscured the rays of the sun, and winter never seemed to end.

He hated himself for reminiscing.

He hated himself for having evoked the memories of which he had blocked out so effectively that he hadn't realised until now how much he had missed. Every moment that passed was now a reminder of how different life was before.

He did realise, however, that what the tides of time had effaced from the ink in the books, there was bound to be locked somewhere in the minds of the people around him, in the souls of those who lived the past, and the hearts of those who were determined never to let those memories go. And he didn't have to wait for long to find the person he needed.