

GRAY

Gazing out of the window past the ruined trees and buildings, the young man let his mind wander through the forest of imagination as he so often did. He thought of everything from the last thing he had had to eat, to the possibility of life on Mars. People often whispered rumors of the young man's mental state, calling him a kook, or bonkers; but most often they just said he lived in his head. Nobody thought he heard, or perhaps they did and simply didn't care, but he always did. Whenever he heard someone whispering about his sanity, he would look at them, point to his head and politely say, "Why would I want to live anywhere but in here? There is peace in my head."

"Alfred," his sister called from the hallway, breaking his gaze and snapping him back to reality.

"Coming." Alfred stood up and grabbed his hand-me-down knapsack, which had so many holes it looked like mesh, and walked out the door. Alfred was short at five-foot-four inches, when he was standing as tall as he could, and appeared to be the same width; the young man was riddled with dense muscle. He had brown hair and eyes, grubby dirt colored skin, and was wearing tattered jeans with a button down flannel that was missing three of its buttons.

"Are you ready yet?" she said in an annoyed, almost urgent voice. "I don't want to be late for the meeting again. Today Beaman is going to talk, and they say he has some new, big idea." It was always exciting hearing Beaman speak, he had a sui generis way of moving and inspiring you; it was no surprise he was the voice of the rebellion.

"Alright, let's go. We'll get there on time." He followed as his sister walked out the front door in a hurry.

Angela was the complete opposite of Alfred. She was tall, slender, and beautiful with dirty blonde hair and ocean blue eyes that would drown you if you stared more than a moment. Angela, too, had on tattered jeans and a flannel, though hers was buttoned, but even through the oversized clothing you could see her sensual womanly figure. She was a light in the darkness that surrounded them every day.

Angela and Alfred walked to the meeting of the rebels together every Friday at dusk. Since the depression of 2033, no one walked any street alone. Even together, you were still far from safe. The guerillas were everywhere. Luckily, in their area of Old Boston, the Federal Governmental Re-education Committee (F.G.R.E.C) wasn't as prominent as it was in many other places. Alfred had heard that only about an hour away in New Hampshire, if there was any question as to a person's allegiance, the guerillas would simply beat them to death, or shoot them dead in the street. No questions, no trial, they just cut straight to the chase.

"Do you think things will ever get better Alfred?" the girl asked in an angelic voice.

"Maybe one day, in the future," he said wishing he could believe his own words.

"Tell me the story that Grandpa always told us, about the heart of the depression, the dark days."

"I'd rather not," Alfred said looking up at the sky. "And the days are still dark." The clouds never changed colors, never brightened or dimmed, the layer of pollution in the atmosphere had become so

thick it was forever gray. At first, after all the bombs went off, the F.G.R.E.C. would fly through regularly; huge planes equipped with giant fans would push the pollution to some other god-forsaken place. For a few hours you could see the sun, by the time Alfred was born, the giant planes were uncommon, to say the least, though he had seen a few. And he treasured those memories, of the archaic gold rays, punching holes through the gray wretchedness. Alfred's thoughts came back to his surroundings, and he wondered if he was becoming the same gray as the broken world around him.

"Please, Alfred, we still have another mile or so to the meeting. Pppllleeeaaassee," whined the girl, giving her brother large watery puppy dog eyes that Alfred was hopeless to resist.

"Fine," he sighed.

"Yay, thank you, Alfie," she said and planted a kiss on her brother's cheek.

"It was 2035, two years after the depression started, and things were only getting worse. On top of the stock market crashing, banks collapsing and general overall destruction of the American economy, the military constantly had to stop other countries from invading.

Grandpa was working with a reconstruction crew right after the start of the depression. He had always said, 'America's finally getting what's been coming to it. If we weren't such nosey bastards, we'd've been alright.' One day when Grandpa was working with his crew patching the burnt roof of someone's house, he said he saw something in the sky. It was only moments after that the Mexican Guerillas started landing under parachutes as far as the eye could see. They were surrounded so quickly not one of them had the opportunity to escape; the Guerillas drew their weapons and gave Grandpa the option of coming with them peacefully or dying on the roof. He opted to keep his life and was taken prisoner."

"Grandpa told me those were the worst days of his life," Angela interjected. "But that's all he would tell me about the prisons, nothing else."

"No, he never said anything about his time in the prison. It took him five years before he managed to escape; while he was in there the bombs had been dropped all over the country, millions died. Rodriguez overthrew the President and Congress and hung all the men and women who ran this country from the dome of the Capitol for the world to see; he 'suspended' the Constitution, and that's when the F.G.R.E.C. was formed. Each state was given to a General to run as he saw fit." Alfred paused. "I hate this place," he said with sheer, dark purple hatred on every word.

"Do you remember when Grandpa would say, 'I saw it, so did my friends, when we were in high school and the damn border patrol just started letting them in by the hundreds. When it came time they didn't have to invade the country, we had already let 'em walk right in through the front door.?' " asked Angela. A fond nostalgic smile flashed across her face as she remembered her grandfather. Alfred grunted a low chuckle, his face reflecting the same smile as his sister's.

"Yeah, he always told me they were working under the table with no taxes and not spending any money. People told him he was just a racist when he said how frightening it was to think of all the American money they controlled, and that one day they would take over the country. I wonder what those people would say to him now?"

“Probably not a hell of a lot, Alfie. The naive ones are always the first to go,” said Angela, acute pain lying heavy on her words. The smile had vanished from her face. They walked another moment in silence; the meeting place was just a little further now. Alfred was back in his head thinking of a place where the sun always shined, and the grass was as green as it was in a book he had once seen. He thought of Angela lying on that grass in the sun, his parents and grandfather, all long gone now, would be there too; singing, dancing, telling stories recounting their fondest memories, and just living life. The young man knew it would never be so, but he liked to imagine it was possible, somewhere maybe, in some other place, they all lived together in a dazzling world, happily ever after.

Abruptly he was brought back to reality by the sound of his sister screaming. They had turned the last corner to get to the meeting place and run straight into an F.G.R.E.C. guerilla. He was holding his sword with his gun at his side and a demented smile spread across his face. Alfred looked past him and saw only his horse, he was alone. In a flash the guerilla’s arm shot out, he had Angela by the hair, and she shrieked with terror. Alfred ran at the guerilla, launching himself at the man’s legs and knocking him to the ground.

“Run!” yelled Alfred to his sister. He could see the alleyway that housed the secret entrance to the rebel headquarters across the road. “Get to the door! Go now!” The rebels would protect her, if the guerilla killed Alfred and ran into the alley after Angela he was a dead man. It was booby-trapped a hundred different ways and one of the only completely safe places Alfred knew of.

Angela got up frantically and ran full speed across the street and into the alleyway. Alfred slammed his beefy fist into the man’s even beefier face two or three times before the guerilla grabbed him by the wrists, lifted him up to eye level and delivered a world rocking head-butt to the young man’s forehead. The guerilla threw Alfred over his shoulder and turned toward his horse. Alfred watched through a pain-filled haze as his sister reappeared at the edge of the alley. There were two men from the movement running toward him now, but it was too late. The guerilla had mounted his horse with Alfred and they were beginning to move. Alfred watched his screaming sister at the edge of the alley, tears running in a steady stream down her face, until she was out of sight. As despair consumed him, he gazed out past the ruined trees and buildings and let his mind wander to a better place, where he was happy, where there was no death, and where gray wasn’t even a color.

[The Bird Room](#)