

SYMBOLISM: DOOR

“He was standing outside his boss’ office, bewildered by his request. Alexander had asked to see him later but had left no commentary on how to initiate this task. Should he knock once and then announce his name?”

– Chapter 20: Easy Come, Easy Go

SPOILERS AHEAD!

EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOL

Throughout history and art, doors have held enormous symbolic meaning. From being the guardians of valued treasure to the roadblocks to one’s dream. Similarly, doors have always been seen as the demarcation between two realms, to the point where death in Judaism was called “a door to Sheol (underworld).”

Doors have also appeared throughout all forms of media from the Door to Light in the Kingdom Hearts franchise, to the door blocking entrance to the Mines of Moria to The Holy Door which sits at the entrance to Saint Peter’s Basilica and is opened around once every two decades.

Doors continued to have a play a large significance throughout *A Break in Rapport*, from the very first chapter **Agoraphobia** where Hua and Ethan both want to communicate with each other and instead settle for interacting with each other through their respective doors.

1) **“Through a crack in the door, she could see him scurrying about, gathering his clothes from the floor and hanging them in his wardrobe. It was a candid moment – a rare glimpses into his mind – uninterrupted by the outside world.”**

2) **“Suddenly, Ethan stopped beside a white door, leaned in and held his breath as he placed his ear beside the keyhole.”**

To the final chapter **Moonlit Confessions**, where Ethan’s interaction with a door suggests his metaphorical and spiritual transformation from a dreamy teenager to an adult who finally realising the importance of action. I will speak more about this symbolism act at the end of this article.

As can be assumed, many characters in this novel also struggle in their interactions with doors due to the inexplicit symbolic weight of doors. The most obvious of which is found at the end of the chapters **Only Shallow** and **Caesar**. In **Only Shallow**, Ethan and Jia’s family meal is interrupted by “[a] phantom from the past.” Likewise, it is only when the perspective is flipped in **Caesar**, does the audience see how difficult the supposedly simple act of knocking on the door is. Jun’s reluctance to approach, stand before and finally to knock on the door suggest the metaphysical terror infused in this common household item. In this situation, the door’s serves another purpose, as a divide between two people who have not yet reconciled.

*I years had been from home,
And now, before the door,
I dared not open,
Lest a face
I never saw before*

*Stare vacant into mine
And ask my business there.
My business, -just a life I left,
Was such still dwelling there?
- Emily Dickinson*

Another instance of the door having large symbolic value and foreshadowing the events to come happen in the chapter **Sisyphus**. After praying before the statues of Buddhist deities, Ethan decides to leave his grandma in the temple and visit his mother's tomb by himself. Yet, as he steps outside the sacred hall, he inextricably steals one more glance at Hua. **"Ethan drew his breath and readied himself to call out to her, to see her flash a smile in his direction, but in that moment, a sad truth dawned on him: she was already in the realm of the divine."**

In this sentence, the East Asian understanding of temple doors is evoked as all sacred doorways have an elevated wooden block that marks the divine from the ordinary. Here, Hua is already trapped in the sacred and separated from Ethan, foreshadowing the violent injury that befalls her in the next chapter.

With an understanding of the symbolic power of doors, it is no wonder that Ethan often finds himself lingering beside a door that he is unable to enter. Such hesitation reflects his Hamlet-esque inability to act and his preference to dream rather than have a direct impact on the world. **"It comforted him to know that while he could not pass beyond the door, at the very least, a part of his sincerity now lay at her tableside."** – Chapter 21 (Lost in Translation)

However, the fundamental reason I consider *A Break in Rapport* to be a triumphant novel despite the abundance of pain is because Ethan's final action in **Moonlit Confessions** is to knock on his father's door. Beyond the physical implications, that single actions serve to reconnect the realms of his traumatic past to his traumatised present through the open channel symbolised by an open door. Ethan is not only opening the potential of a relationship with Jun but reconnecting with a childhood that he had long buried away.

Ethan is opening his heart to forgiveness.

"Yet the feeling never left, and now he realized, as he stood on the precipice of adulthood, that he had been running ever since, too afraid to stop lest the trauma seep back into his thoughts." – Chapter 22: Moonlit Confessions

THEMES LINKED WITH THIS SYMBOL	
LONELINESS	✓
OVERTHINKING	×
FORGIVENESS	✓

CHAPTERS THAT FEATURE LONELINESS		
1	Agoraphobia	✓
2	Clockwork	×
3	Spring Blues	✓
4	Golden Wind	×
5	Etched in Stone	✓
6	Lightning in a Bottle	×
7	A Lazy Sunday	✓
8	Whisper	✓
9	Vertigo	✓
10	Sunset Rollercoaster	×
11	Only Shallow	✓
12	Caesar	✓
13	Asteroid Blues	✓
14	Loveless	×
15	Condemned	✓
16	Sisyphus	✓
17	An Ode to Heartbreak	✓
18	To Fall into Neptune	✓
19	Moxie	×
20	Easy Come, Easy Go	✓
21	Lost in Translation	✓
22	Moonlit Confessions	✓

ANALYSED QUOTE

I will analyse this quote through the symbol of the door.

“Ethan moved to the door, placed his fingers upon the metallic handle and felt the cold shiver of déjà vu along his spine. In this exact moment, it dawned on him that he had always known that this day would come, that her leg would give out and that he would be standing outside her ward with only a thin plastic door separating them. His hand slipped from the handle and he stumbled backwards. To enter the room and whisper his regrets into her ears would be a confirmation of reality, an acknowledgement of what had just transgressed, an acceptance that he had been robbed of the person he loved most.”

Chapter 19: To Fall into Neptune

Despite the constant fears and foreshadowing of Hua’s imminent sickness, it is only at the start of **To Fall into Neptune** where Ethan is finally confronted by his greatest fear. The metaphorical “cold shiver” from the “déjà vu,” reflects his sad realisation that sick and death are part of the human condition and no amount of dreaming and wishful thinking can avert Hua’s reality. Here, the door resembles its symbolic meaning of a barrier that separates two different realms. Hua sitting in the realm of the dead (or close to dead for more emotional readers) and Ethan standing firmly in the land of the living. Yet, it is Ethan’s inability to open this door that fundamentally highlights his childish innocence and unwillingness to put himself in situations that are confronting.

Even if it means forgoing the chance to say goodbye to his grandmother for a final time.

OTHER QUOTES SHOWING THE SYMBOL OF THE DOOR	
QUOTE	CHAPTER
“It looked like any other house—double storey with a red roof. Its only unusual characteristic was the odd brown brick that peppered the otherwise cream exterior. Ethan’s eyes followed the strong pillars, the oak-coloured door and the yellowing shrubs, and he soon sank into a stream of old memories.”	Spring Blues (3)
Hua sighed as she heard the slam of her grandson’s door reverberate throughout the house. Silence, which had been perching quietly above, descended like crows to pick at the last reserves of her strength.	Etched in Stone (5)
As if on cue, the silver doors before them swung open. Ethan’s eyes swept over its polished interior, but he took care to not step past the metallic threshold. “You’re right; I’m much too young to die in a silver coffin.”	Whisper (8)
“It was his father—there was no doubt—standing barely above his shoulders, waiting at his doorstep as if he were simply returning home from work and not a stranger whose absence had cast itself over every facet of Ethan’s life.”	Asteroid Blues (13)
“Grandma?” shouted Ethan as he dashed towards her bedroom. He tore open her door, finding only her bed and folded clothing to return his gaze.”	An Ode to Heartbreak (17)

IN CONCLUSION
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