

Chapter 26

After returning to Regalia, Gregor is treated for his injuries and recounts his harrowing journey to Solovet, including the spiders' arrival, Henry's betrayal, Tick's sacrifice, and his father's rescue. Exhausted, he visits Boots, who is recovering from damp fever, and his father, who appears healthier but carries the scars of his captivity. Solovet reassures Gregor that his father will heal, though not unchanged, mirroring Gregor's own transformation from the ordeal. The chapter highlights the emotional and physical toll of their experiences in the Underland.

Gregor learns from Mareth that his actions have fulfilled the prophecy by bringing "light" to the Underland—King Gorger's death has thrown the rats into disarray, granting Regalia a temporary advantage. Despite his fatigue, Gregor is celebrated as a hero, though he struggles to reconcile this role with the darkness he witnessed. After resting, he is abruptly summoned by Luxa to defend Ares, who faces banishment for his association with Henry, despite his innocence. The scene underscores the Underlanders' rigid laws and the tension between justice and loyalty.

In the arena, Gregor and Luxa plead Ares' case, arguing he was unaware of Henry's treachery and acted honorably by saving Gregor. The council debates his fate, torn between tradition and compassion, with some demanding punishment for breaking the bond. Gregor, recognizing Ares' worth, makes a bold decision to bond with him publicly, reciting the pledge with Luxa's help. This act challenges the council's judgment and offers Ares hope, though his fate remains uncertain.

The chapter culminates in Gregor's defiant gesture of trust, symbolizing his growth as a leader and his rejection of the Underland's harsh absolutes. By bonding with Ares, he not only saves the bat but also redefines the meaning of loyalty and redemption. The scene leaves the audience—and readers—pondering whether tradition will yield to mercy, setting the stage for further conflict and resolution in the story.