

# Chapter 26

In Chapter 26, Gregor witnesses Nerissa's seemingly mad laughter as she reveals a pivotal misinterpretation of the prophecy. Vikus joins her, and they realize the "baby" referenced in the prophecy was not Gregor's sister but the Bane, a young gnawer. Gregor's decision to spare the Bane's life—driven by his moral compass—fulfills the prophecy, as killing it would have destroyed his humanity. Nerissa and Vikus clarify that the Bane's survival prevents the gnawers from rallying for war, turning Gregor's act of mercy into a strategic victory for the Underland.

The chapter shifts as Nerissa, now composed, dismisses Gregor's trial, declaring him a savior of the Underland. She invites Gregor, Ares, Howard, and Andromeda to a private dinner, where they eat in solemn silence, united by shared grief. The meal is lavish, a contrast to their recent hardships, but their appetites are subdued by emotional exhaustion. Nerissa's acknowledgment of their collective loss creates a moment of quiet solidarity, emphasizing the toll of their journey.

After dinner, the group is sent to the hospital for much-needed medical care and baths. Gregor reflects on his physical injuries, a testament to the ordeal he endured. Howard arranges for them to stay together in his family's chambers, offering safety amid lingering uncertainty about their status in Regalia. The bats and Howard quickly fall asleep, but Gregor remains awake, haunted by thoughts of returning home to face life without Boots.

The chapter closes with Gregor's unresolved anxiety about the future. His mind races with the impending reality of his sister's absence and the emotional weight awaiting him in the Overland. The quiet camaraderie of his companions provides temporary solace, but the chapter underscores the lingering trauma and unanswered questions that follow their hard-won victory.