

Chapter 24: Part Two - 12. Sold Souls

The chapter "Sold Souls" plunges Thomas Covenant into a nightmarish, timeless void where he experiences multiple overlapping dimensions of suffering. On one plane, he exists on a frozen, featureless plain, his body and mind suspended in agony without the relief of time or change. On another, he endures the torment of countless hornets burrowing into his flesh, their pain eternal and inescapable. Simultaneously, he merges with Joan, experiencing her madness, rage, and fractured memories as his own, while the Raver turiya Herem manipulates their suffering like a cruel puppeteer. Covenant's consciousness fractures under the weight of these layered torments, blurring the lines between his identity and Joan's.

Amid the chaos, Covenant clings to fragmented awareness of his purpose: he entered this temporal maelstrom to reach Joan, believing she is the key to his survival and the Land's salvation. Though he is lost in the caesure's turmoil, Joan's presence anchors him to the present, as her heartbeat tethers her to life. Yet, his resolve is eroded by her madness and the Raver's taunts, which mock his helplessness and the futility of his sacrifice. Covenant's grip on the krill, a weapon of potential power, is rendered meaningless as he drowns in Joan's deranged psyche and the Raver's malevolent games.

The chapter delves into Joan's tragic backstory, revealing how her idyllic life with Covenant—marked by love, horses, and creative fulfillment—was shattered by his leprosy. Her revulsion and sense of betrayal festered into all-consuming rage, which the Raver exploits to deepen her and Covenant's suffering. These memories, sharp as knives, strip away Covenant's sanity, leaving him as broken as Joan. The Raver revels in their shared despair, emphasizing how Covenant's love has become a source of endless torment, a commodity traded for misery.

Ultimately, the chapter portrays Covenant's descent into existential despair, where even his fleeting hope of reuniting with Linden Avery and saving the Land seems lost. The Creator's absence looms over the narrative, suggesting a universe abandoned to its doom. Covenant's struggle becomes a microcosm of futility, as he is consumed by Joan's pain, the Raver's cruelty, and the relentless cold of a timeless void. The chapter ends on a note of unresolved anguish, with Covenant's fate hanging in the balance, his humanity eroded by forces beyond his control.

