

Chapter 7

The chapter opens with the narrator receiving an urgent summons from Jasper Palmer-Smith, his former history professor and mentor. Jasper, a notoriously selective and demanding Oxford don, had a habit of favoring one male student each year, valuing intelligence, looks, and wit. The narrator reflects on their relationship, noting Jasper's disdain for children and women, as well as his manipulative charm. Despite his unpopularity, Jasper's favoritism was accepted without resentment, as it was seen as his own eccentricity. The narrator recalls how Jasper's approval motivated him to excel academically, though their bond remained largely intellectual.

Jasper is depicted as a stereotypical Oxford scholar, with a sharp mind and a disdain for modernity. He harbors a cynical worldview, particularly regarding humanity's inevitable decline due to universal infertility, a phenomenon he views with detached amusement. He finds solace in the absence of future generations, seeing it as a reprieve from the noise and chaos of youth. Jasper's survivalist tendencies are evident in his meticulously prepared country home, stocked with supplies to withstand societal collapse. His recent obsession with security, however, hints at growing paranoia.

The narrator visits Jasper's home, noting the stark decline in his mentor's appearance and demeanor. Jasper, once composed and authoritative, now seems aged and anxious, with a gleam of paranoia in his eyes. The house, once immaculate, shows signs of neglect, and Jasper's reliance on alcohol has increased. His wife, Hilda, appears even more withdrawn, barely acknowledging the narrator. The scene underscores the toll of time and isolation on Jasper, whose once-sharp mind now seems clouded by fear and decay.

The chapter paints a bleak portrait of a man confronting mortality and societal collapse. Jasper's intellectual arrogance and survivalist preparations contrast with his physical and mental decline, symbolizing the fragility of human control in the face of

inevitable change. The narrator's observations reveal the irony of Jasper's earlier confidence, as even his carefully curated world begins to unravel. The chapter sets the stage for deeper exploration of themes like aging, power, and the human response to existential threats.

