

Chapter 19

The narrator encounters a woman in the market, whom he had previously met at the Pitt Rivers Museum. Struck by her radiant presence as she selects fruit, he is overwhelmed by an irrational, almost childish urge to shower her with flowers, a feeling he finds both unsettling and unfamiliar. Despite his internal struggle, he follows her through the crowded market, wrestling with the absurdity of his actions and the realization that he knows little about her, except that she is married and indifferent to him. Their brief interaction is marked by his awkward attempts to engage her, revealing his growing emotional turmoil.

As they walk together, the narrator warns the woman that the SSP (a security force) is investigating her group, urging her to cease her activities or flee for her safety. She responds with detached practicality, acknowledging the risk but showing no intention of stopping. Her tired expression hints at the toll her secretive work has taken. Despite her dismissive attitude, the narrator impulsively offers his help, promising to be there if she ever needs him, though he knows nothing about her life or how to find her. Their parting is final, leaving him with a sense of unresolved longing.

Reflecting later, the narrator confronts his own emotional emptiness, admitting he has never experienced love. At fifty, he views this lack as a permanent void, likening it to a tone-deaf man's inability to appreciate music. Resigned to the bleakness of his world, he decides to escape, planning a solitary journey across Europe while it is still possible. He resolves to leave behind his memories of the woman, the oppressive regime, and the decaying city, though his promise to her lingers as a fragile, unfulfilled commitment.

The chapter closes with the narrator's determination to sever ties with his past, including tearing the journal entry documenting his feelings. He rationalizes his actions as necessary for self-preservation, doubting the woman will ever seek his help. The

transition to "Book Two—Alpha" suggests a shift in time and perspective, leaving the narrator's fate and the woman's story unresolved as the narrative moves forward.

