

# Chapter 13

The chapter opens with Theo meeting Xan, the Warden of England, who insists on walking with him in the park. Xan wears an outdated but cherished coat, sparking a memory of their past conversations about fashion and permanence. Their dialogue quickly turns tense as Xan warns Theo about the dangers of his recent associations, implying he can no longer fully protect him. Theo challenges Xan's authority, questioning why he clings to power, to which Xan responds with a mix of pragmatism and cynicism, admitting he initially enjoyed the power but now stays out of duty and to avoid boredom.

Xan reflects on the despair of a world without children, mocking religious beliefs about the end times while acknowledging the profound grief of childlessness. He presses Theo to reveal who has influenced his recent actions, but Theo deflects, claiming his insights come from ordinary people. Xan dismisses this, accusing Theo of being a poor emissary for dissent, and threatens to shut down Oxford's adult education school if it becomes a hub of rebellion. Their exchange reveals Xan's authoritarian stance and Theo's growing disillusionment with the regime.

As they walk, Theo confronts Xan about the ethics of state-mandated sperm testing and the promotion of pornography centers. Xan defends these policies as necessary for maintaining order and hope in a sterile world, arguing that even flawed methods are justified if they might restore fertility. Theo challenges the morality of these measures, but Xan remains unmoved, prioritizing control and societal stability over individual rights. Their debate underscores the dystopian reality of a society desperate for survival at any cost.

The chapter closes with Theo and Xan discussing Woolcombe, a place symbolic of the era's stagnation, where the elderly linger without purpose. Xan expresses disdain for the futility of prolonging life without meaning, while Theo probes into Xan's fractured

family history. Their conversation, alternating between personal and political, highlights the deep divisions between them—Xan’s cold pragmatism contrasting with Theo’s moral questioning. The chapter leaves their conflict unresolved, setting the stage for further tension.

