

Chapter 28

The chapter opens with Theo waking in a bleak, misty woodland, disoriented after a brief sleep. Rolf returns from scouting and informs the group that the small copse offers little cover, suggesting a nearby ditch as a temporary burial site for Luke's body. Theo and Miriam carry Luke's stiffening corpse, while Julian follows, clutching his bloodstained coat and stole like relics. The landscape is described as a rolling countryside bathed in pale autumn light, with blackberry bushes tempting Theo amid the grim task ahead. The group's exhaustion and tension are palpable as they prepare to lay Luke to rest.

The shallow ditch proves an inadequate but practical grave, and Theo and Miriam struggle to position Luke's body with dignity. Julian insists on turning his face upward, a small act of reverence in their dire circumstances. They cover him with leaves and soil, though Rolf remains detached, refusing to participate. Julian mourns the lack of consecrated ground, but Miriam offers comforting words, asserting that any place holding a good man is sacred. Julian then requests a truncated Burial Service, and Theo reluctantly obliges, reading from Luke's prayer book while Rolf stands rigidly apart, his silence heavy with unspoken grief and anger.

Theo's recitation of the psalm and committal words lends a solemnity to the impromptu funeral, though his own thoughts occasionally stray to discomfiting imagery. Julian and Miriam scatter earth over the grave, their actions tender yet awkward. Rolf's abrupt shift to practical concerns—securing a car and resting—underscores his emotional detachment. The group briefly finds solace in foraging for blackberries, their sweetness a fleeting respite from hunger and despair. Theo marvels at Rolf's indifference to the fruit, hinting at the deeper strains within their fractured dynamic.

Exhausted, the group returns to the copse to sleep, huddling together for warmth and safety. Theo reflects on the softness of the leaf-covered ground, a small mercy in their harsh reality. The chapter closes with a sense of weary resignation, as the characters cling to fleeting moments of comfort amid loss and uncertainty. The burial of Luke serves as a poignant reminder of their vulnerability, while the natural world around them—both nurturing and indifferent—mirrors their fragile hope for survival.

