

Chapter 9

Theo awakens on the morning of the Quietus with a sense of unease, knowing the day will involve witnessing a grim event. He typically distracts himself with small pleasures during unpleasant tasks, but today he opts for the quickest, duller route to his destination, the Suffolk coast. His journey is marked by efficiency, arriving at Blythburgh by early afternoon. The landscape, though familiar, feels altered, and memories of a past visit with his wife and infant daughter resurface, tinged with guilt and regret over his impatience and selfishness during that time.

Stopping at a pub for lunch, Theo finds it nearly deserted, a stark contrast to his earlier memories. The meal is meager, and the atmosphere is somber, reflecting the town's decline. As he continues to Southwold, he notices the deteriorating roads and the presence of Sojourners, laborers preparing for repairs, which puzzles him since the area isn't slated for future habitation. The town itself feels abandoned, with few residents remaining and businesses closed in observance of the Quietus, a day of solemn significance.

Theo reflects on Southwold's transformation over the years, noting its once-vibrant charm now faded. He encounters a nervous woman who explains the town's scheduled evacuation, as the government can no longer sustain it. Frustrated by the haste, Theo questions the leadership's decisions. He parks near the cliffs and walks toward the pier, observing the neglected promenade and crumbling beach huts, symbols of the town's decay. The sea, sluggish and gray, mirrors the oppressive mood of the day.

Approaching the pier, Theo sees preparations for the Quietus: flower-decked boats and a small group of figures, some in uniform, gathered near a makeshift jetty. The scene underscores the gravity of the event, though its full purpose remains unclear. The chapter closes with Theo's lingering sense of isolation and the weight of the task ahead, as he braces himself to confront the inevitable sorrow and futility of the

Quietus.

