

Chapter 12

The chapter opens with Theo entering the Foreign and Commonwealth building, now the residence and office of Xan, the Warden of England. He is greeted by familiar Grenadiers and led to a meeting room where he finds the full Council assembled, seated opposite a single empty chair meant for him. The setup is clearly designed to unsettle him, and Theo reacts with a mix of surprise and anger. Xan wears the Coronation Ring, a symbolic gesture meant to assert his authority, which Theo critiques as unnecessary. The tension is palpable as Theo confronts the Council, questioning the legitimacy of their power.

Theo directly challenges the Council's practices, particularly the "Quietus," a state-sanctioned euthanasia program for the elderly. He recounts witnessing a violent and chaotic event at Southwold, where elderly individuals were forcibly dragged onto boats and shackled, with one woman brutally clubbed to death. Felicia dismisses the incident as mismanagement, but Theo argues that such brutality undermines the claim that the Quietus is voluntary. The Council's defensive responses reveal their detachment from the suffering they oversee, with Harriet and Woolvington offering cold justifications for the program.

The discussion shifts to the Man Penal Colony, another controversial initiative. Theo accuses the Council of neglecting the colony, leading to starvation, murder, and lawlessness. Xan's pointed question—"how do you know?"—hints at suspicion and potential danger for Theo. Felicia defends the colony's establishment, emphasizing the resettlement of its original inhabitants and the provision of basic resources. Theo's rebuttal highlights the lack of governance and policing, drawing parallels to historical penal colonies. The exchange underscores the Council's authoritarian control and their disregard for human dignity.

The chapter concludes with Theo's growing realization of the Council's moral decay and his own precarious position. His confrontational tone and the Council's dismissive reactions emphasize the widening gap between those in power and the oppressed. The dialogue exposes the hypocrisy of the Council's rhetoric, as they justify brutal policies under the guise of order and necessity. Theo's defiance marks a turning point, setting the stage for further conflict in a dystopian world where power is maintained through fear and manipulation.

