

Chapter 21

The chapter opens with the protagonist preparing a solitary dinner in his quiet, empty house, going through the motions mechanically. His routine is interrupted by an urgent knock at the door, revealing Miriam, a member of a clandestine group. She informs him that Gascoigne, another member, has been captured by the State Security Police (SSP), putting the entire group at risk. Julian, their leader, urgently needs his help to escape before Gascoigne reveals their identities under interrogation. Despite the gravity of the situation, the protagonist remains calm, as if he had anticipated this moment.

Miriam explains that the group is hiding in a chapel near Swinbrook and needs his car to flee. She urges him to leave immediately, emphasizing the danger of delay. The protagonist quickly gathers essentials, including his diary, though he doesn't fully understand why he takes it. The urgency is palpable; the SSP could arrive at any moment. Though he is a former adviser to the Council and cousin to Xan, the nation's absolute ruler, he knows his status won't protect Julian or the others from immediate arrest. His priority is reaching them before the SSP does.

As they leave the house, the protagonist notices the quiet, rain-dampened street, briefly distracted by the sound of Mozart drifting from a nearby window. The music evokes a fleeting nostalgia for his past, contrasting sharply with the perilous present. He and Miriam move swiftly and silently to his garage, where they depart in his Rover. Driving carefully to avoid suspicion, they head out of the city. The protagonist questions Miriam about Gascoigne's capture, learning he was ambushed while attempting to sabotage a Quietus event—a state-sanctioned mass euthanasia program.

Miriam reveals Gascoigne acted without authorization, and his failure to check in alerted the group to his capture. Luke, another member, risked visiting Gascoigne's

lodgings, confirming the SSP's involvement. The protagonist critiques their lack of caution but acknowledges their actions are driven by necessity. As the chapter ends, he presses Miriam for more information about the group, realizing he knows little about their lives or plans. The urgency of their mission underscores the oppressive reality of their world, where even small acts of defiance carry deadly consequences.

