

Chapter 14

The chapter opens with Theo navigating the eerily empty streets of Oxford, reflecting on how the once-bustling city has changed. His walk to the museum is marked by a sense of nostalgia and unease, as he recalls past visits and contrasts them with the present desolation. The museum, a symbol of Victorian grandeur and confidence, remains unchanged, yet its cold, silent halls amplify Theo's anxiety about his impending meeting with Julian. His focus on the intricate ironwork and carvings serves as a distraction, but the underlying tension remains palpable.

Inside the Pitt Rivers Museum, Theo immerses himself in the ethnological exhibits, drawn to artifacts like a whale-tooth necklace with a poignant history. The objects evoke memories of his grandfather and musings on the passage of time. The museum's cluttered displays and faded labels underscore a world frozen in the past, mirroring the stagnation of society. Theo's solitude is broken by Julian's arrival, their interaction devoid of warmth, as she immediately shifts the conversation to the political mission he undertook on her behalf.

Theo recounts his unsuccessful meeting with the Warden, detailing the Council's indifference to Julian's concerns about the Quietus, the treatment of Sojourners, and the brutal conditions on the Isle of Man Penal Colony. The Warden's priorities—maintaining order and preserving a facade of dignity—clash with Julian's moral outrage. Her idealism is met with Theo's skepticism, as he warns of the futility and danger of her plans. Their dialogue highlights the stark divide between pragmatic resignation and desperate activism.

Julian proposes a radical plan: a voluntary exile to the Isle of Man to enact change through solidarity and love. Theo dismisses her idealism as naive, foreseeing only suffering and failure. Their exchange ends on a tense note, with Julian's unwavering resolve contrasting sharply with Theo's cynicism. The chapter closes with Theo's silent

contempt, underscoring the bleak reality of a society teetering on collapse, where hope and despair are locked in a futile struggle.

