

Chapter 6

The chapter opens with Theo Faron's rigid daily routine, which includes writing a journal, mandatory survival training, and teaching at the university. His life is structured yet devoid of passion, reflecting a society clinging to order amid decay. The Council of England mandates citizens to learn survival skills, and Theo chooses hospital work and house maintenance, though he finds little fulfillment in either. His evenings are spent in predictable rituals, like dining in Hall or attending Evensong at Magdalen Chapel, where he appreciates the choir but avoids the religious aspect. This routine underscores the emptiness of a world on the brink of collapse.

While walking to Evensong, Theo encounters a woman pushing a pram with an eerily lifelike doll, a remnant of a past craze where childless women treated dolls as substitutes for babies. The doll's exaggerated features—unnaturally blue eyes, porcelain skin, and adult-like hair—unsettle him, evoking both pity and disgust. The scene highlights society's desperation to mimic lost maternal joys, with some even staging pseudo-births and funerals for these dolls. Theo recalls debates over whether churches should sanction such rituals, illustrating the absurdity and tragedy of a world without children.

The encounter takes a violent turn when another woman suddenly snatches the doll and smashes it against a wall. The owner's visceral scream of grief mirrors the pain of real loss, exposing the fragility of her delusion. Theo watches as she collapses, futilely gathering the broken pieces, but he walks away, unwilling to engage. The bystanders' indifference reflects societal numbness to such outbursts, particularly among middle-aged women who grew up during the infertility crisis. The incident leaves Theo deeply disturbed, though he masks his discomfort.

The chapter closes with Theo arriving at Magdalen Chapel, where the choir's performance briefly distracts him. His thoughts drift to a past incident where a deer

wandered into the chapel, only to be violently driven out by the chaplain. This memory, like the doll's destruction, symbolizes a world that has lost its harmony and compassion. Theo's detachment from these events underscores his emotional isolation, mirroring the broader societal decay. The chapter paints a bleak portrait of humanity clinging to rituals and illusions in a dying world.

