

Mr. Smith, whom the other villagers identify as the most politically engaged member of the village, then begins to discuss national politics, emphasizing the importance of each citizen, regardless of their class or status, having informed opinions on political matters. When asked if he was involved in politics, Stevens offers an outright lie, claiming that, before the war, he had been involved in global affairs and had worked behind the scenes to influence international politics.

Stevens, as he has done throughout the novel, justifies and excuses his actions, this time by claiming that it would have been too difficult to correct the villagers' impression of him once the conversation got underway. Further, he claims that he was particularly bothered and distracted by Mr. Smith's claims about the political importance of working-class people. He muses that there "is, after all, a real limit to how much ordinary people can learn and know, and to demand that each and every one of them contribute 'strong opinions' to the great debates of the nation cannot, surely, be wise."⁵¹

In defense of this opinion, Stevens recalls an evening where Lord Darlington's guests invited him into the drawing room and quizzed him about obscure, complex political questions. Stevens didn't know the answers, but more to the point he was aware that "it was clearly expected that I be baffled by the question."⁵² Stevens interprets this moment not as what it really was—a deliberate effort to humiliate him on the basis of his class and profession—but as logical evidence for his belief that "ordinary people" should not try to be involved in the "great affairs" of the world.⁵³

Day Four: Afternoon: Little Compton, Cornwall

After his difficult night at the Taylors' home, Stevens accepts an early morning ride back to his Ford with Dr. Carlisle, the village's local doctor who had arrived at the very end of the previous evening's activity. During the drive Dr. Carlisle asks Stevens if, in fact, he is a "manservant of some sort," and Stevens expresses relief upon hearing that Dr. Carlisle wasn't fooled.⁵⁴ Stevens apologizes for deceiving everyone and expresses his amusement at the intensity of Mr. Smith's political feelings, including his beliefs about the nature of dignity. Stevens reflects on some ambiguous reactions from Dr. Carlisle during their drive, including an "edge" to his voice when discussing Stevens' reaction to the villagers, as well as something



British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (right) with German foreign affairs minister Joachim von Ribbentrop at the Munich Summit in 1938.

bordering on "disgust" when discussing the villagers' political attitudes.⁵⁵

Stevens does not dwell on these reactions, as his mind turns back to Miss Kenton after being dropped off at his Ford. As he drives to Little Compton in Cornwall, where he is to meet Miss Kenton, he thinks back to an earlier incident he had previously reflected on: the moment that he stood outside of Miss Kenton's door and was keenly aware that she was crying within her room. He now admits that he might have been mistaken about when this event actually occurred. Rather than following the news of the death of Miss Kenton's aunt, Stevens now recalls that the moment actually took place on an eventful night toward the end of Miss Kenton's time at Darlington Hall. Stevens was quite busy. The British Prime Minister, the British Foreign Secretary, and Ambassador von Ribbentrop arrived at Darlington Hall for a secret, unofficial meeting. Unexpectedly, Mr. Cardinal, the son of Lord Darlington's friend Sir David Cardinal who was also Lord Darlington's godson, arrived at the home, apparently needing a last-minute place to stay for the evening. As Stevens was preparing the house for all these guests, Miss Kenton reminds him that she had requested the evening off, and she further informs him that she is taking the evening off to go visit her acquaintance who intends to propose marriage to her.

Stevens, apparently overwhelmed by his responsibilities, gives no reaction to Miss Kenton's news and is even somewhat dismissive when, later that evening, Miss Kenton presses him about whether he even cares about what had happened during her evening: "I do not