

first do no harm

In the opening of the chapter, the protagonist reflects on the melancholic presence of their friend, Labrino, who knocks on their door one stormy spring night. Labrino has been in a troubled state for some time, often appearing at the back step without knocking, leading to uncomfortable surprises. This time he enters, showcasing his anxious demeanor as he brings up the Tashi Comet, set to pass Earth in thirteen months. Labrino expresses skepticism, relaying his belief that comets are harbingers of bad luck, recounting past disasters associated with celestial events, such as the Challenger explosion and the Chernobyl disaster.

Despite Labrino's dark perspective, the protagonist remains excited about the comet, having acquired a set of binoculars in preparation for the event. Labrino, however, seems haunted by his personal struggles, which include a fractured family and past trauma. He requests the protagonist to play music, leading to a moment of connection as the protagonist, Rainier, retrieves his bass guitar. Through music, Labrino finds solace, showing how simple melodies can uplift his spirits amidst the despair he feels about the world.

As Rainier plays, Labrino visibly relaxes, disappearing into the music that evokes happier memories. The atmosphere shifts when Lark, Rainier's companion, arrives with a burst of energy. Her presence invigorates both men; she engages Labrino in friendly banter and dance, effectively lifting his mood. The music transforms the space, allowing Labrino to forget his worries, even if just for a while. The chapter closes with wisdom shared between Rainier and Lark, highlighting the bonds of friendship and the comforting familiarity that sometimes exists within shared, simple moments, suggesting that friends can help each other navigate life's challenges.