

stubby golems on the fretboard

In this chapter, the protagonist reflects on his relationship with music, particularly with his beloved bass guitar, Mr. Fender. As he plays, he recalls memories associated with his music—both joyful and melancholic, including moments with Lark and the struggles of past gigs. Memories of Lark's last birthday flood back, highlighting joyful times that contrast with the pain of their current separation due to his captivity.

Werryck, his captor, enters and discusses the situation with a hint of sarcasm about Lark, whom he refers to as a guest rather than a captive. The protagonist expresses his desire to see her, but Werryck dismisses this, claiming that Lark trusts him, an observation that momentarily unsettles Werryck. The conversation shifts towards the bass guitar, and Werryck urges the protagonist to play it, suggesting that music could serve a purpose amidst his despair.

The protagonist obeys, realizing that confinement has diminished his spirit. As he plays, he finds a small measure of comfort, noting how the act of playing provides a reprieve from his grim surroundings. Werryck continues to appear daily, tracking the protagonist's progress with his music and the state of his captives, Sol and Griff.

Eventually, the protagonist is allowed to step out of his cell, guided by the ship's steward, Ivar. Their journey leads him to a well-maintained room with amenities he's long been denied. After a shower and a meal of hearty food and red wine, he returns to his cell to find it cleaned and organized. This change breeds confusion about Werryck's intentions.

When he finally meets Werryck in his quarters, he is taken aback by the modesty of the space, cluttered yet personal. Werryck, though appearing disheveled and unwell, insists that the protagonist play for him. The protagonist's initial attempts at music don't impress Werryck, who challenges him to deliver better performances. Their conversation hints at tension, with Werryck displaying erratic behavior suggesting inner turmoil.

In a moment of defiance, the protagonist asks to see Sol, but Werryck steers the discussion away, emphasizing Sol's safety but keeping her at a distance. The protagonist cleverly asks for a book belonging to Lark, but Werryck refuses, indicating a connection to their past. The chapter concludes with the protagonist reluctantly agreeing to continue playing while trying to negotiate his circumstances, determined not to be an ordinary inmate.