

the twelve

In this chapter, the protagonist grapples with illness and concern for Kellan, who is among twelve prisoners isolated in the Shambles. After a prolonged period of sickness spent nudged by the care of Ivar, the protagonist finally returns to the paint crew, only to confront the grim reality of the twelve in their cells, visibly damaged and suffering. Kellan's initial expression of guilt upon seeing the protagonist reflects the camaraderie that has developed amid their misfortunes. He recounts a tragic journey leading him to an elusive refuge, filled with dashed hopes and the final realization of betrayal upon meeting Tom Skint.

The bleakness escalates as a storm approaches, prompting Werryck to devise a cruel punishment for the twelve, which manifests in the construction of a small cage they are forced into. There's a palpable tension as the crew, whose attention is drawn to the cage, witnesses the helplessness of the twelve as they are shackled in their misery on the water. The chapter captures the tragic innocence of Kellan as he grapples with the psychological scars from a compliance treatment imposed upon him, revealing a disturbing façade of loyalty enforced by his captors.

Furthermore, the protagonist engages in a haunting exchange with Werryck, pleading for the humanity of the twelve despite Werryck's rationalizations and the contracts binding them to their fate. The conversation captures a philosophical divide, driven by a stark dehumanization that pervades Werryck's argument, emphasizing that the twelve's suffering is entirely self-inflicted, a sentiment the protagonist desperately tries to combat.

As night falls, the weight of despair grows heavier. The protagonist is forced into playing music for Werryck, navigating tension through the hymns that speak of loss and yearning. In a moment of haunting stillness, surrounded by the storm, reflection evokes thoughts of those on the raft, culminating in an acknowledgment of their collective fates as the protagonist remains restless. The chapter closes with the protagonist's solemn realization: though isolated and trapped in the middle of the relentless storm, there's a lingering hope as they play for those in the Shambles, and in memory of those lost, igniting a sense of resilience amid despair.