

# Forty-Two Years

Forty-Two Years had passed since Werryck last experienced the restfulness of sleep, a fact the protagonist learned during a series of late-night conversations. Werryck revealed that his choice to forgo sleep was motivated by an insatiable desire for revenge and control, a decision that had cost him his peace. This unsettling admission forced the protagonist to reflect on Lark's beliefs regarding redemption, specifically for those who had wronged her—like Large Beef, a man who once attempted to firebomb her shop. The revelation stirred a mix of emotions in the protagonist, who, feeling overwhelmed by Werryck's complexity, decided to play a familiar bass line to ease the tension. In that moment, the protagonist could only wonder about the deep burdens Werryck carried, while trying to offer comfort through music, hoping to calm the troubled soul before him.

As the conversation continued, Werryck shared a poignant memory, recalling a vivid dream of driving a car off a mountain, a desperate yearning for dreams that had been denied to him. This surreal recollection symbolized Werryck's inner longing for a reprieve from his relentless reality, a reprieve that sleep once provided. The protagonist, reflecting on the crucial role sleep plays in one's life, felt a deep sadness for Werryck's plight, realizing how much he had lost in pursuit of vengeance. The contrast between Werryck's tragic sacrifice and the protagonist's own untroubled rest only deepened their sense of empathy, highlighting the fragility of the human spirit. The revelation of Werryck's sacrifice also left the protagonist contemplating the weight of decisions made in the name of power, and the price that must be paid when personal peace is willingly traded for something much darker.

The following workday took the protagonist and their crew to the dark, damp, and foreboding confines of the ship's Shambles, a detention area beneath the waterline. The crew was tasked with the grim job of sealing corroded steel hulls using hot tar, a job that would require both physical endurance and mental fortitude. As they entered the Shambles, the oppressive darkness swallowed them, broken only by faint glimmers of light that revealed the decay surrounding them. The air was thick with an eerie stillness, broken only by the signs of inmates serving their harsh sentences. This environment, where time seemed to stand still, mirrored the sense of hopelessness that often overwhelmed the crew. Yet, amid the bleakness, there was a sense of duty, as if the work itself was a kind of redemption, albeit a grim one.

During their time in the Shambles, the protagonist met Marcel, a fellow worker, who introduced him to Maggie, a woman confined in a nearby cell. Maggie, who had been hearing music through the plumbing—music that turned out to be the protagonist's—shared a heartfelt exchange with him. Her appreciation for the music they played offered a glimpse into the unexpected bonds that can form even in the harshest of circumstances. Maggie's words conveyed a longing for connection, reminding the protagonist that even in the most oppressive places, the human spirit can find ways to reach out and touch others. This small, intimate connection amidst the despair of the Shambles served as a brief moment of solace for both of them, providing a sense of warmth in an otherwise cold, isolated environment.

As the workday came to a close, the protagonist received a slip of paper from Ivar with a single name written on it—"Sol." The name carried an air of mystery, hinting at deeper narratives and emotions that were yet to be uncovered. The revelation of this name brought a rare moment of levity, as the protagonist's amusement temporarily lifted the weight of the monotonous life aboard the ship. It was a fleeting but vital moment of hope, reminding the protagonist that even amidst the isolation, new stories and connections could still emerge. Later that evening, Werryck, now visibly more vulnerable and human, succumbed to sleep while the protagonist played soothing music for him. This quiet, intimate moment marked a subtle shift in their relationship, revealing the fragility of the man who had once seemed so formidable. The chapter closed with a sense of connection and vulnerability, highlighting the evolving emotional landscape within the harsh environment, and suggesting that even in the darkest places, moments of tenderness could still exist.