

Kellan Had Drawn His Face

Kellan Had Drawn His Face, as the narrator awoke early to the sound of footsteps, hurried and purposeful, signaling the start of another grueling day aboard the ship. After being escorted up to the upper deck, the narrator was introduced to the paint crew, which gathered in a space that doubled as a commissary for the medical staff and other ship personnel. The crew, made up of five individuals, was informally led by Beezie, a tenacious woman who, despite her initial skepticism about newcomers, recognized that the task of scraping the walls was no one's idea of a pleasant job. Beezie's leadership, although unyielding, served as a necessary anchor for the team, which included Verlyn, a teen with alopecia; Didier, an older man marked by the passage of time and scars; and Harriet, a fierce, resolute woman whose philosophy was that everything one created would leave a lasting impact. This belief resonated with the narrator, creating a sense of purpose amidst the otherwise tedious work.

Though the crew spent most of their time scraping and painting, they were occasionally joined by Burke, a guard whose intimidating presence was softened by his genuine interest in the crew's lives. Despite his role as a figure of authority, Burke showed a surprising warmth by encouraging Verlyn to share an odd and amusing story about a dog transformation from his childhood. This bizarre tale, which temporarily diverted the crew's attention from their task, led to a momentary reprieve from the relentless work. However, Beezie, who was far more focused on completing their work, became increasingly irritated by these distractions. It was Burke who, in addition to being a guard, also introduced the narrator to Marcel, a janitor whose arrival brought a breath of fresh air to the crew. Marcel's presence had a calming effect on everyone, and his kindness became a cornerstone of the crew's emotional well-being, offering them a small but significant escape from the otherwise grim reality they faced.

As the narrator worked, the topic of "the twelve"—a group that had recently escaped—was raised among the crew. This discussion sparked interest and curiosity, especially from those working below deck. The air, thick with the fumes from cleaning solutions, began to stir a sense of unease, which was only heightened by the tension surrounding the survivors' escape. The shift in mood was abruptly altered when a young janitor entered, bringing with him a fresh breeze that seemed to clear the air. The crew, suddenly lighter in spirit, began to speculate about Marcel's background and whether he had any romantic ties to other crew members, particularly Tove, the cook. Marcel's quiet charm and the fact that he brought with him a tray of pastries further endeared him to the crew, allowing them to briefly forget the exhaustion and hardship they had been enduring. As they indulged in the sweet treats, the sense of camaraderie grew, and when the narrator mentioned a young girl named Sol, Marcel promised to keep an eye out for her, his words light yet filled with a subtle sense of understanding and kindness.

Later, the narrator was summoned to perform for Werryck, who had visibly improved in his physical health. Werryck's conversation, which began as a professional discussion about Sol's progress, soon became more personal. He spoke warmly of Sol thriving under her current care, offering a glimpse into the more compassionate side of the often-gruff Werryck. The conversation took a darker turn when the narrator expressed concerns about Tom Skint, a figure whose menacing presence had loomed large in their lives. Werryck reassured the narrator that Skint had already faced the consequences of his actions, but he also cautioned the narrator against seeking further retribution for past wrongs. On the ship, Werryck emphasized, power dynamics were crucial, and any attempt to seek revenge would be futile. Instead, he advised the narrator to focus on playing music, as expected of him, and not to be distracted by the complex web of interpersonal struggles and power plays. This interaction with Werryck served as a reminder of the shifting allegiances and the constant need for adaptability aboard the ship, urging the narrator to find a balance between the harsh realities of their environment and the fleeting moments of hope that occasionally arose.