

# Stubby Golems on the Fretboard

Stubby Golems on the Fretboard takes the protagonist into a reflective state, as he plays his beloved bass guitar, Mr. Fender, an instrument that has been his source of solace and connection throughout his difficult journey. As the familiar rhythms fill the air, memories of his time with Lark flood back—both the joyous moments they shared and the sorrowful reality of their separation. The sound of the bass, for the protagonist, is not just a distraction but a vessel that holds his emotions and nostalgia, transporting him to a time when things were simpler. Yet, these memories also bring pain, reminding him of what has been lost and the harshness of his current situation. In the isolation of captivity, the music becomes a bridge to the past, and through each note, he reconnects with the part of himself that is still hopeful, even in the face of adversity.

The tension increases when Werryck, his captor, enters the room with an unsettling tone, referring to Lark as a "guest" rather than a captive. This subtle mockery of the protagonist's longing for Lark catches him off guard, and he momentarily falters. Despite expressing his desire to see her, Werryck brushes off the request, claiming that Lark trusts him, a statement that deeply unsettles the protagonist, as it further isolates him from his memories of her. The conversation then turns toward the bass guitar, and Werryck suggests that the protagonist play it, offering him a way to channel his frustration and despair. Playing music, Werryck implies, may provide a way to find some relief from the heavy emotional burden he carries. Though the protagonist feels the weight of his confinement, he agrees, realizing that in the act of playing, he can at least escape momentarily from his grim surroundings, finding small comfort in the familiar strings of his instrument.

Days pass with the monotony of captivity, but the protagonist is eventually allowed to step out of his cell. Ivar, the steward of the ship, leads him to a more comfortable room, offering him small luxuries that he hasn't had access to in months. A hot shower, hearty food, and a glass of red wine provide temporary relief, reminding him of the comforts of life he once took for granted. When he returns to his cell, he finds it cleaned and organized, a surprising and somewhat unsettling change. This gesture raises suspicions about Werryck's intentions—was this an act of kindness, or was there something more behind it? The protagonist's confusion deepens, as he struggles to understand Werryck's shifting behavior, wondering whether it's a subtle manipulation or a genuine attempt to break through the walls of their tense relationship.

The protagonist's meeting with Werryck later in his quarters presents a stark contrast to the earlier interactions. Werryck's space is modest and cluttered, yet there's a certain personal touch that suggests a man who is not entirely detached from the world. Despite his disheveled appearance and ill health, Werryck insists that the protagonist play music for him, further emphasizing the complexity of their relationship. The protagonist's attempts to play fall short, leading Werryck to challenge him, pushing him to deliver a more impressive performance. The underlying tension between the two is palpable, as Werryck's erratic behavior hints at a deeper emotional struggle, while the protagonist tries to maintain a sense of control and dignity within this challenging dynamic. This encounter marks a pivotal moment where both characters test each other's limits, establishing a power struggle that will continue to define their interactions.

In a moment of defiance, the protagonist asks to see Sol, but Werryck deftly avoids the request, assuring the protagonist that Sol is safe, though keeping her out of reach. The protagonist, unwilling to be easily deterred, then asks for a book that once belonged to Lark, a small request that would allow him to feel connected to the past. Werryck's refusal is swift and resolute, reinforcing the emotional distance between them and signaling that the protagonist's desire for normalcy may never be fulfilled in this environment. However, the protagonist's persistence grows, and his strategic approach to the situation becomes more evident. He agrees to continue playing music, but not as a passive participant in his own confinement—he will not be reduced to a mere inmate. By using his music as a form of negotiation, he asserts his autonomy, determined to hold onto his dignity and refuse to let Werryck and the circumstances break him entirely. Through the music, he

remains tethered to a part of himself that refuses to be subdued.