

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.

Skeletons Climbing Stairs in the Rain

Skeletons Climbing Stairs in the Rain, the scene in the Shambles is one of suffocating heaviness. The air, thick with the smell of hot tar and the constant, monotonous hum of bilge pumps, fills the space with a sense of perpetual discomfort. Rainy, immersed in this grim setting, feels the weight of looming dread, especially as he is summoned to carry out his duties. As he moves through the darkened corridors of the ship, the silence is broken only by the distant noises from below, reminding him of the impending crisis. Marcel, who operates the incinerator, approaches Rainy with unsettling news that only deepens his anxiety. He informs Rainy that the children, including Sol, are now part of a new program involving “trials” for compliance therapeutics, a procedure that Rainy knows all too well is dangerous. This news triggers a deep sense of dread in Rainy, especially when he recalls Kellan’s escape from a similar situation. The tension heightens, as the trials are said to be legal as long as a child’s guardian gives consent.

Rainy’s thoughts immediately turn to Sol’s guardian, Griff, and he begins to suspect that the agreement may have been made hastily or without full awareness of the program’s true nature. He soon learns that the trials are targeting minors who are considered noncompliant, with a rating system based on their behavior, making Sol’s fate even more uncertain. The fact that the program specifically targets children who are perceived as problematic only intensifies Rainy’s anxiety. As Rainy contemplates the gravity of the situation, his mind races with possibilities of how he might intervene. His only hope now lies in speaking with Werryck, the only one he believes might have the authority to prevent this from happening. However, Marcel’s skepticism about Werryck’s willingness to help adds to Rainy’s feelings of helplessness. He wonders if Werryck will be willing to risk anything for Sol’s sake or if, like others, he will choose to stay distant from the issue.

In an attempt to change the course of events, Rainy approaches Werryck, hoping to appeal to his past affections for Sol. Their conversation is fraught with tension as Rainy pleads with Werryck to take action. Unfortunately, Werryck dismisses Rainy's concerns with indifference, claiming that the medical decisions surrounding the trials are beyond his influence. He makes it clear that these matters belong to another realm, one that is detached from his own responsibilities. The coldness in Werryck's response shocks Rainy, who tries desperately to remind him of Sol's progress, hoping that Werryck might have some emotional connection to her. However, the more Rainy speaks, the more it becomes apparent that Werryck's stoic demeanor is impenetrable. Rainy's frustration builds as he realizes that his words seem to have little impact, and Werryck's unwillingness to help leaves him feeling defeated.

As Rainy walks away from the tense conversation, the weight of the situation continues to press down on him. Werryck excitedly tells him about the capture of twelve newcomers, found stumbling from an abandoned cabin. These newcomers, frail and broken, plead to return to the ship. As the newcomers are brought in, Rainy is immediately struck by the sight of their shattered spirits. Their appearance—gaunt, hollow, and ghostly—leaves a deep impression on him, and among them, he recognizes Kellan, whose once vibrant presence is now reduced to a shadow of its former self. The sight of Kellan, now frail and vulnerable, cuts through Rainy's heart, as it's a reminder of the cruelty of their environment.

Werryck, as always, remains detached, evaluating the situation through a cold, clinical lens. He speaks of the resources that have been spent on the newcomers' recovery, his tone devoid of empathy. Werryck implies that Kellan will face consequences for his actions, a remark that only deepens the sense of despair within Rainy. Despite the suffering and trauma these newcomers have endured, Werryck remains focused on the logistics and the cost of their recovery, highlighting a disturbing lack of compassion. As the chapter comes to a close, Rainy finds himself shivering—not just from the cold, but from the weight of his emotional turmoil. The situation feels increasingly hopeless as he contemplates the suffering of the newcomers, particularly Kellan. The chapter leaves Rainy pondering the fragility of life aboard the ship, wondering how much more

he can endure as the oppressive atmosphere continues to tighten around him. The sense of despair grows, leaving Rainy to question the humanity of those around him as they face the crushing weight of their circumstances.



The Twelve

The Twelve are locked away in the Shambles, and the protagonist, still reeling from a prolonged illness, finds themselves deeply concerned for Kellan and the others. After enduring a long period of sickness, with Ivar providing much-needed care, the protagonist is finally able to return to the paint crew. However, the return only unveils the grim reality of the twelve prisoners, who are in desperate states of physical and mental decay. Seeing them in their cells, visibly broken and suffering, the protagonist is confronted with the harsh consequences of their escape. Kellan's reaction is particularly striking, as he greets the protagonist with a visible sense of guilt, which speaks to the deep camaraderie forged between them in the shared suffering of their ordeal. Kellan then recounts a painful journey that took him to what seemed like a safe haven, only for it to fall apart when he encountered betrayal from Tom Skint. This moment of personal reckoning marks a significant shift for Kellan, as his disillusionment with the world grows deeper, further compounding his internal struggle.

As a storm looms on the horizon, the already grim atmosphere turns even darker. Werryck, in a cruel display of power, enacts a punishment for the twelve by constructing a small, confining cage in which they are forced to remain. The tension becomes palpable as the crew, their attention drawn to the cage, helplessly watches the twelve being shackled in their misery. This moment serves as a disturbing reminder of the dehumanization that the prisoners are enduring, their suffering becoming nothing more than a spectacle for those in control. Among them, Kellan's emotional scars run deep, marked by the trauma inflicted by the compliance treatment. His outward loyalty to the captors is nothing but a painful mask, forced upon him by the cruelty of his environment. The protagonist, witnessing this twisted show of power, is left with a heavy heart, realizing how deeply the system has broken

the will of these men.

The chapter takes a philosophical turn as the protagonist engages in a conversation with Werryck, pleading for the humanity of the twelve despite Werryck's chillingly rational explanations. The discussion reveals a stark ideological divide, with Werryck defending the prisoners' suffering as something they brought upon themselves, based on the contracts that bound them to their fate. This rationalization serves as a shield for Werryck, as he dismisses the very idea of compassion, seeing the suffering as an inevitable consequence of the choices made. The protagonist, however, rejects this view, holding on to the belief that the twelve deserve more than to be treated as expendable, their lives reduced to mere contractual obligations. This exchange highlights the moral divide between the two, with the protagonist desperately clinging to an ethical standpoint rooted in empathy and compassion, while Werryck represents a colder, more utilitarian view of the world. The tension between them captures the broader conflict of power, control, and moral responsibility that runs throughout the story.

As night falls, the atmosphere grows even heavier with despair, settling over the protagonist and the twelve. The protagonist is forced to play music for Werryck, using the hymns as a means to navigate through the building tension. The music, filled with themes of loss and yearning, permeates the air, creating a poignant contrast to the surrounding darkness and suffering. The protagonist, absorbed in the haunting notes, finds solace in the act of playing, even though it is done under duress. In the stillness that follows, surrounded by the storm's fury, the protagonist reflects on the tragic fate of those on the raft, realizing the shared suffering that binds them all. This moment of introspection leads to a deep acknowledgment of the collective fate that awaits them, highlighting the inevitability of their situation. Despite the overwhelming despair, a glimmer of hope remains, as the protagonist, through their music, expresses a quiet defiance against the oppressive forces around them. The chapter concludes with the protagonist's realization that while they may be trapped in the storm, both literally and figuratively, their resilience remains intact. The act of playing music for those in the Shambles becomes a symbol of endurance, a reminder that even in the darkest

moments, the human spirit has the capacity to rise above adversity. This closing thought encapsulates the heart of the chapter: the power of hope and resilience in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.



The Day I Remembered The Future

The Day I Remembered The Future begins with an atmosphere charged with tension and uncertainty, as the protagonist is abruptly roused from sleep by the sound of hurried footsteps and clamor. These unsettling noises mark the beginning of a significant event that shifts the mood aboard the ship. The protagonist soon learns that, against all odds, some of the twelve individuals previously presumed dead are, in fact, still alive. This shocking revelation is delivered as Ivar, providing a simple morning rusk, highlights the harsh reality of the situation. The news of the survivors contradicts the earlier assumptions of inevitable death, injecting a new complexity into the dynamics aboard the ship. The mundane task of painting a hallway becomes an unexpectedly significant activity, providing a backdrop for the unfolding drama and offering a stark contrast to the life-changing revelations taking place.

Meanwhile, Harriet's refusal to participate in the task of painting the corridor is not merely an act of rebellion but a symbolic rejection of the trivialities of routine in the face of something much greater. The situation becomes more emotionally charged as the crew hears about movement from the infamous raft, where the twelve had been stranded. Through Tove's binoculars, signs of life are spotted, sparking hope among the crew members. This flicker of life is a rare moment of optimism amid the grim environment they endure. The sighting of a pelican near the raft further reinforces this connection to the living world, symbolizing vitality and renewal in contrast to the surrounding atmosphere of hardship. The pelican's appearance represents the persistent will to survive, even in the harshest conditions, and provides a momentary respite from the overwhelming darkness.

Verlyn's courageous decision to venture beyond the confines of the ship, followed by Harriet and Didier, marks a pivotal moment. Burke, though reluctant, leads the group to a vantage point where they can observe the twelve as they begin to stir, signaling a

miraculous revival. The scene before them is filled with a mix of emotions—joy, awe, and a lingering sense of disbelief. The twelve slowly stretch their limbs, and the sounds of laughter and pain are interspersed, creating a poignant display of resilience and human spirit. Yet, not everyone shares in this moment of joy. Characters like Werryck and Skint remain distant, their skepticism preventing them from fully embracing the miracle of survival. Their detached reactions highlight a philosophical divide among the group, with some struggling to accept the possibility of hope in the face of overwhelming adversity.



As the day wears on, the protagonist is consumed by a flood of thoughts and reflections on the future. The possibilities, once distant and uncertain, begin to feel tangible again. However, this fleeting sense of hope clashes with the harsh realities of their existence aboard the ship. The oppressive routines, despite the moments of life and laughter, anchor the crew to a world that feels both suffocating and inescapable. The contrast between the newly sparked hope and the everyday struggles faced by the crew brings about a poignant realization. Despite the isolation, there remains a sense of anticipation, a longing for something more than the dreary existence they have been living. This brief moment of reflection on the future brings a sense of transformation, a shift in perspective. The mundane acts of survival and routine are infused with new meaning as the crew members are forced to confront their circumstances and the possibility of change, no matter how distant it may seem. In the face of adversity, a fragile but persistent hope begins to take root, suggesting that even in the darkest of times, there remains the potential for growth and transformation.

The Twelve, Again

The Twelve are deeply affected by the events unfolding around them, as Ivar urgently interrupts the protagonist's work to deliver distressing news: Werryck, suffering from a debilitating migraine, has specifically requested their presence. Werryck's quarters, overwhelmed with shadows and stifling heat, resemble an oppressive atmosphere, akin to "cheese sweating in a warm room." As the protagonist begins to play the bass guitar, a rare moment of calm washes over Werryck, who, despite his physical pain, shows an unexpected openness, a stark contrast to his usual agitation. The music seems to offer a brief reprieve from the constant tension, giving both Werryck and the situation itself a moment of relief.

As Werryck succumbs to sleep, his exhausted state highlights a significant shift in his character. Once a figure of power and control, he now appears weary and diminished, a symbol of the toll the constant strain has taken on him. The fragile calm is soon disrupted when Tom Skint arrives, announcing their departure from the ship. Despite his discomfort, Werryck musters the strength to rise, driven by a force that compels him to press forward. The crew, sensing the urgency, follows as they make their way through the ship's corridors, though Werryck stumbles, his determination evident despite his physical decline.

On deck, Skint's command for everyone to return to their quarters is met with apathy, as the crew remains largely unaware of the gravity of the situation. A heavy rain begins to pour, further amplifying the sense of unease and tension among the group. The appearance of Marcel, a figure seemingly in charge despite his janitorial role, adds another layer of complexity to the growing turmoil. Skint's attempts to impose order become increasingly ineffective as the crew begins to ignore his commands, vacating the ship at will. The escalating conflict reaches a boiling point when Skint attempts to assert control, but the atmosphere is charged with resistance, and the guards, under

pressure, begin to lose their grip on the situation.

As the confrontation intensifies, the guards disarm, and a chaotic standoff ensues, culminating in Skint firing his weapon, unintentionally injuring an innocent guard and seemingly wounding Marcel. This violent outburst ignites a desperate struggle among the crew, and in the chaos, Skint is thrown overboard after a tense encounter with the protagonist. This pivotal moment marks a dramatic shift in power dynamics, as the crew, fueled by adrenaline and desperation, rises against their former authority. The collapse of Skint's control signifies the beginning of a new chapter for the crew, one where they must navigate the uncertain waters ahead, free from the restraints of their previous leaders.

In the midst of this chaotic liberation, Werryck, despite his agonizing condition, plays a crucial role in helping free the imprisoned crew members. His actions, despite his weakened state, serve as a reminder of the resilience and determination that remains within the crew. Amid the growing unrest, Hazel, another key figure among the crew, takes on a leadership role, attempting to rally everyone as they face the uncertainty of abandoning the ship and heading toward the cruiser in the stormy night. This chapter masterfully balances moments of crisis and solidarity, as the crew faces an uncertain future, but with a glimmer of hope amid the chaos. The tension between despair and hope provides a powerful backdrop to the narrative, illustrating the complexity of their struggle for freedom and survival.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist's emotional turmoil as they part from familiar faces, reflecting on the upheaval that has just transpired. As they process the dramatic changes in their lives, the protagonist is filled with a sense of loss, but also an emerging sense of liberation. The air is thick with desperation, yet there's a bittersweet undertone of hope as they step away from their former lives, now left behind in the turbulent wake of their fight for survival. This final scene encapsulates the themes of transformation, freedom, and the difficult choices faced in moments of crisis, leaving readers with a profound sense of both resolution and uncertainty.

A bold round face and a curving tail

A bold round face and a curving tail marked the ship "Flower" as it sailed away from a past filled with danger and uncertainty. The characters onboard sought a new beginning, hoping to leave behind the threats that haunted them. As they navigated around the eastern tip of the island, the ship's massive silhouette loomed against the darkening sky, suggesting a history deeply tied to the landscape. With the mainsail damaged, the crew relied on the jib and Burke's unexpectedly skilled hand at the wheel, revealing his surprising competence in sailing. Despite the calm facade, tension simmered within the group, particularly as they reflected on the captors they had left behind, knowing that the danger of being recaptured still loomed over them like a shadow. Each day brought a mixture of exhaustion, uncertainty, and the constant reminder of their tenuous escape.

The days stretched on with the group enduring rain, hunger, and fatigue as they pushed forward. Finally, they reached the quiet safety of the harbor in Jolie, where they could begin anew. The Girard household welcomed them with warmth and hospitality, offering a temporary respite from the hardships they had endured. Even though the physical and emotional toll of their escape was evident, the bonds between the group members started to solidify as they found comfort in the safe haven. Despite the lingering anxieties of their past, the haven provided the space for healing and growth. As they slowly adapted to their new lives, they were also confronted with the challenges of leaving behind the traumatic events they had just experienced.

However, their new life was not without its difficulties. After ten days, Burke, feeling the weight of his past and uncertain future, chose to leave, causing mixed emotions within the group. Sol, in particular, seemed disconnected from him, perhaps seeing in him reminders of the darker aspects of their journey. Meanwhile, the narrator secured work with a local welding shop, marking a step toward integrating into the community.

and solidifying their place in this new environment. Life continued to move forward, though the echoes of their past and the impact of their recent escape were never far from their minds. Each character grappled with the challenge of adjusting to the new reality, and the narrative began to explore their personal growth in the face of this transformation.

Parallel to this journey was Sol's own process of adapting to life outside captivity. Her emotional response to the ship was complicated, as it symbolized both safety and fear—comfort and uncertainty. She recalled a woman who had offered meals but lacked conversation, leaving Sol with a deep fear of losing herself to the expectations and promises of others. This fear of losing her identity was a recurring theme in Sol's life, highlighting her struggle with recognition in a world that seemed indifferent to her past. Her internal conflict mirrored the larger emotional struggle of navigating life after trauma, as she sought a sense of stability in a world that demanded conformity and change. The emotional toll of this adjustment was heavy, and Sol's journey reflected a wider quest for personal redemption.

As spring emerged, Sol found solace in the act of gardening. She began planting seeds around the town, symbolizing her resilience and her desire to reclaim some semblance of normalcy. The act of nurturing life in the soil became a metaphor for her own emotional healing, as she worked to grow something new and beautiful in a place that had once been foreign and hostile. Meanwhile, news began to filter in about their former captors, carried through the gossip of the excitable *Mosquito*. These updates revealed a miraculous escape but also brought unsettling news from their past, introducing distant faces that seemed familiar yet were now untouchable.

The chapter culminates in the appearance of Harriet, a figure from the past who brings news about the ship and its occupants, including both loss and survival. Her arrival marks a turning point, as it forces the characters to confront the bittersweet nature of survival—both the losses and the gains. Through their interaction, the narrative delves deeper into themes of survival, hope, and the enduring power of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable hardship. The arrival of the comet serves as a symbol of

unforeseen futures, offering a moment of reflection on how far the characters have come and the unpredictable path that lies ahead. This moment encapsulates the resilience needed to rebuild lives and find meaning in the wake of trauma, setting the stage for the ongoing journey of hope and survival.



Perihelion

Perihelion marked a pivotal moment in the story, where the characters grappled with profound personal loss while seeking new horizons. Sol, devastated by the recent death of Papa Griff, found herself emotionally shaken but chose to conceal her sorrow from others. Her grief was channeled into a vehement hatred of the lake, the very body of water that had claimed the lives of her two uncles and now, tragically, Griff. This intense animosity became a symbol of the unresolved grief that haunted her, making the lake feel like an unyielding enemy. In contrast, Girard, Sol's companion, mourned in silence, not voicing his sorrow but clearly affected by the loss in his own way. Meanwhile, Evelyn, who was also struggling with the weight of grief, took refuge in the kitchen, perhaps trying to distance herself from the emotional storm that surrounded them. An hour later, the group ventured into the northern forest, carrying with them a picnic basket. They stumbled upon a peaceful clearing surrounded by tall, fragrant cedars, a calm sanctuary that provided a moment of solace. In the center of this tranquil place, they discovered stone markers that resembled obelisks, each one standing as a silent tribute to the lost members of their community. Evelyn explained that the land had been set aside as a burial site by a local landowner, who had wished to honor the unclaimed body of her late husband by burying him here, away from any formal cemetery.

Though Sol was steadfast in her hatred for the lake, the group opted to picnic beneath the shade of the cedars, hoping that the peaceful surroundings would provide some form of emotional respite. The narrator, however, was drawn to a different kind of journey. Feeling a deep pull toward the unknown, he chose to sail to the Slate Islands during perihelion, the time when the Tashi comet would make its spectacular appearance. While Jolie was hosting a vibrant local festival filled with music and festivities, the narrator longed for something more. He believed that the journey out to

sea would offer him the opportunity to encounter something meaningful, something that went beyond the temporary pleasures of a festival. Evelyn and Girard, ever supportive, provided him with supplies from their extensive library, equipping him for the journey. Upon reaching the Slate Islands, he was greeted by wildlife that evoked cherished memories, sparking feelings of nostalgia for a time when life felt simpler and more carefree. As night fell, however, the clouds obscured the comet, and the narrator found himself caught in the stillness of the island. Rather than engaging in his usual activities of reading or making music, he decided to simply embrace the quiet and enjoy the ambiance of the island. The peaceful solitude of the night provided a sense of calm, and the absence of the comet did little to detract from the beauty of the moment.

The following day, the narrator ventured out to explore the beach, noticing wildlife tracks scattered across the sand, yet the island itself seemed deserted. A storm began to roll in, bringing heavy rainfall and a deep sense of isolation. As the rain intensified, the narrator retreated into the shelter of his small quarters, resigned to a quiet evening indoors. He made a simple stew and enjoyed the last jar of preserves from his supplies, savoring the simplicity of the meal. As he settled down to rest, he was swept away into a dreamlike vision of his friends, their faces changing with the passage of time, showing them a decade into the future. This vision stirred both nostalgia and hope within him, awakening a desire for the connections he once had and the future that lay ahead. The storm continued through the night, but by dawn, the rain ceased, leaving behind a sense of renewal and a desire to return home. As he made his way back toward Jolie, he learned of the changes that had taken place in the community. The arrival of Rachel, a new bassist, brought a fresh energy to the local music scene. Her unique sound filled the air with a sense of melancholy and wonder, and the narrator found himself captivated by her performance. This new vibrancy stood in stark contrast to his own simpler approach to music, and it sparked a new appreciation for the beauty of change and growth. As the Tashi comet reappeared overhead, the narrator made his way toward the lively gathering at Jolie, reflecting on how often he had overlooked the beauty that surrounded him. The events of the past few days had

offered him new insights into life, loss, and the unrecognized moments of beauty that could transform even the simplest of journeys.

