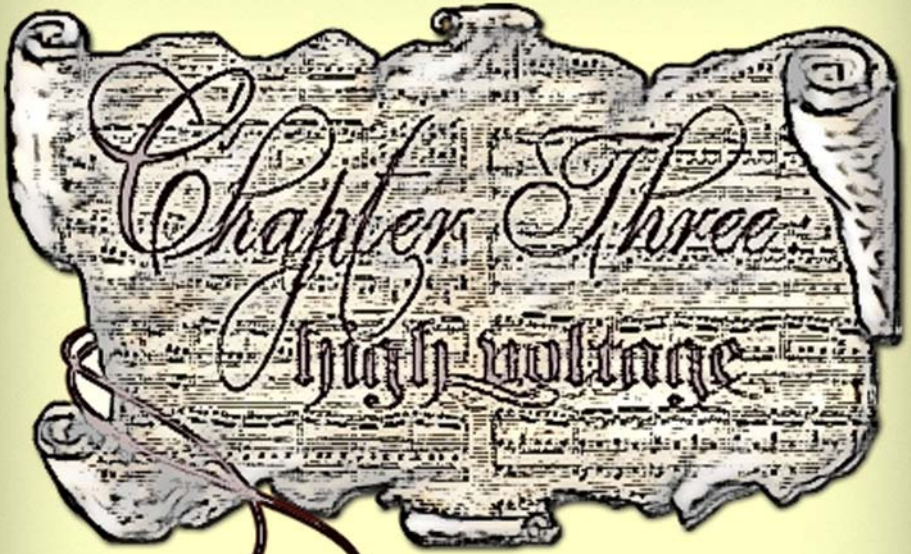




## Chapter iii: High Voltage

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“

could be your lover!” Azrock  
whispered in Pogo’s ear.

“Oh right!” mouthed Pogo,  
brightening with the thought of it but  
still not fully understanding. She  
looked at the picture of the toothpaste  
tube, the picture of the cloud around  
the writing and back to the writing.  
She still didn’t get it.

“I still don’t get it!” she said.

"It's an advert for toothpaste" he explained quietly. "The cloud around the words with the little puffs of cloud trailing down are supposed to show that the person below it is thinking 'I could be your lover'. The person reading the advert is then supposed to be concerned that their teeth are clean."

"Oh . . ." she mouthed, nodding as if now it was completely clear, and she thought it was until she followed the puffs of cloud down to see the very large 'past her prime' woman snoring on the seat opposite, a dribble escaping from her mouth every so often, only to be halted by a hairy red boil on her chin and then slurped up again.

Pogo looked quite distressed at the concept.

Azrock chuckled. "It's a sort of double ended advert. If you like the look of the person sitting below it then it puts the thought in your head and you get all self conscious - worrying if your teeth are clean. If you . . ." he quietened his voice a bit more and spoke closer to her ear ". . . if you don't like the look of the person below it then you have a moment of horror or comedy, which may be memorable and you will associate with the clever toothpaste advert that provided you with that moment."

Satisfied that she now understood she looked back up at the writing. She followed the alien shapes with her eyes, inspired by the meaning that these few simple shapes carried. "I wish I could write!" she said to herself.

The train stopped several times and all kinds of people got off and on. The advert crowned three or four different candidates but none of them made Pogo worry if her teeth were clean. As the train braked for another stop Azrock took a final swig from his hip flask, slipped it back into his cloak, nudged Pogo and stood up.

"This is our stop." He said, swinging his guitar around his shoulder and onto his back. "Stay close to me."

The doors opened and people flooded out onto the platform, bursting through the crowd waiting to board the train. The flow of people tried to carry them along and into a side tunnel but Aerock turned and fought his way against the flow, up the platform. Pogo followed.

The train pulled away and soon enough the last few straddlers wandered past and disappeared out the exit. Aerock and Pogo were left strolling up an almost deserted platform towards a dead end.

"Where are we going?" she enquired.

He didn't answer but slowed down as he neared the end. All that was there was a barrier with some kind of warning on it and beyond that just a wall. Aerock stood next the barrier and turned casually to survey the people on the platform.

"Ok, when I say, slip behind this barrier and sit on the edge of the platform."

Pogo had no idea why but felt no desire to doubt him. She had spent her entire life completely on her own and had only survived by trusting no-one but now, now that she had found someone to trust, she could actually feel excited about the surprises that he had in store for her.

"Ok go!" he said.

She darted round and sat on the platform, legs dangling over the tracks. He promptly followed and sat next her.

"What now?" she asked, clearly thrilled.

"Now we wait. For the next train!"

Pogo looked at the grimy tiles that arched up over her head and back behind her. "How far under the ground are we?"

Azrock shrugged. "Must be quite far. This tunnel goes off under the river Thames." he said, nodding in the direction of the tunnel that their feet were dangling in front of.

Pogo watched the dirty drips meandering down the tiles and imagined the raging torrent above the tunnel, slowly but unwaveringly grinding away at the concrete until, starting with just a tiny hole, the river would explode through the tiles and drown the lot of them.

A deep rumble approached and a noticeable cold wind chilled their faces.

"Get ready!" Azrock said, grabbing her arm, not noticing that it was busy finger-painting an original piece of Pogo artwork in the grime on the tiles. ". . . and keep your feet in!"

"Get ready for what?" She asked, but he didn't hear as the rumble grew into a thunder.

The train screeched to a halt just the other side of the barrier they were hiding behind. She couldn't see it but she could feel its presence; it's breath on her feet. She listened to its doors break open and hundreds of indistinguishable voices and footsteps mingle around busily. She looked up, waiting for someone to peer over the top of the barrier and see them but no one did.

The people filtered away and the train cranked its doors shut again. The growl of the engines geared up into a roar and Azrock braced, gripping her tight on the arm. The train lurched forward and shot past their feet, blowing her back. Carriage after carriage thundered across their view until finally no more followed and the noise shrank to a faint rumble as quickly as it had grown.

"Ok go!" Aerock dropped down beside the track and pulled her with him, catching her as she landed. He grabbed her hand and marched her off into the tunnel.

"Why . . . so . . . fast?" she stuttered, trying to concentrate on her footings in the pitch black as Aerock mercilessly dragged her along.

"We haven't got long . . ." he answered ". . . before the next train!"

She stopped trying to talk and made a determined effort to speed up. Gusty howls would come and go, carrying with them faint screams of mechanical friction. Deep sounding clinks and clonks would echo past them along the tracks, reminders of the multitude of engineering activities pounding away in the distant tunnels, deep below the city. Drips would fall all around her, splashing on her arms or legs unexpectedly as she passed. Occasionally a spark fizzed at her from somewhere in the track, briefly lighting up the tunnel to reveal every threatening silhouette along its sides before plunging them all back into darkness again to continue lurking undetected.

"Oh yeah! - don't go on the tracks" Aerock said between strides. ". . . the voltage would kill you. Burn you up in a flash. Leave just a little pile of ashes!"

One of the windy howls refused to go away and a rattling noise on the track got disturbingly more frantic. The howl turned to a growl and the breeze behind them became a gale. A dim glow creeped up around them and startled the light shy tunnel.

Pogo panicked. She could hear the train rapidly approaching from behind and could feel it's headlights burning brighter and brighter into her back. Now that they could see where they were putting their feet they both broke into a sprint.





They made it around a bend where the blinding lights revealed a fork in the tunnel. The claustrophobia amplified the deafening roar behind them and she could swear the train was inches from her heels. A few strides into the left hand fork of the tunnel and Aerock slowed right down and stopped, crouching over with his hands on his knees, panting. She did the same as the train flew past them, plunging into the other tunnel. She could see all the passengers in its belly, happily absorbing subliminal instructions to buy toothpaste or whatever else, blissfully unaware of her and Aerock.

"That was a close one!" Aerock said once his lungs allowed him.

The train was now no more than a faint whisper.

"You do that all the time?" Pogo asked in amazement.

"No" Aerock grinned to himself in the darkness. "As I said - that was a close one! You usually get two or three minutes."

They gathered their wits and set off down the tunnel again. But it wasn't long before Aerock stopped and clawed around blindly for something on the tunnel wall. He seemed to find it and clicked a few flashing sparks from it. A flame popped up and Aerock adjusted the lantern to give a soft bluey glow.

"Ok - we go down here now." Aerock pointed to a hole in the tunnel wall. "I'll go first". He clambered through and then waited for Pogo, holding the lantern out.

Pogo followed onto some kind of rusty balcony. He led her down a steel ladder and along a damp, dingy tunnel, down another ladder and along another tunnel. The mechanical echoes of the trains became a distant memory. The organic shaped stalactites, dripping and glistening as they passed, seemed to come to life as the moving lantern played tricks with their shadows.

Eventually the tunnel widened until suddenly opening out into a huge cavern. It must have been two storeys high and they were half way up one side of it. Aerock led her down some very wide and irregular steps. She couldn't work out if they were manmade and extremely worn or natural and just a lucky find. In fact, as she looked around the vast cavern, that question became even more puzzling. In parts the cavern had elements of brickwork and tiles, curved like the cross-section of the train tunnels, but in others it was organically eroded with rocky pillars and deep caves. Sculpted over thousands of years by what could only be the random but flawlessly artistic hand of nature.

She would have definitely asked Aerock about this apparent mystery had she not been completely distracted by what



was actually in the cavern. It was an endless array of ugly, alien looking technology. Big towers of equipment, littered with dials, buttons and knobs. Massive greasy pistons connected to a family of oversized cogs and gears, in turn connected to an indescribable copper contraption with large bolts around its edge, a set of leather and brass bellows hanging from it and endless pipes of all shapes and sizes diving in and out of it. Along one side of the cavern there was a row of what looked like oversized light bulbs, increasing in size, each one standing on a scary looking globule of coiled wires and metal tubes. On the other side was a large glass plate, suspended above a huge metal bowl with some hidden but extremely well ventilated machinery underneath it. A pair of transparent cylindrical tanks stood side by side, half filled with a green liquid, each one braced by a collar of intricate electronics towards the top. The insanity went on and on, all of it interconnected with thick coiling cables and zig-zagging pipework.

Aerock reached the floor of the cavern and lead Pogo through the towering machinery, his lantern revealing more and more of it as he passed. She looked up to see a system of pulleys and ropes webbing the ceiling. Groups of shiny metal cylinders strapped together with endless circles of wire were suspended above their heads. All around her were levers, buttons, switches, knobs, pedals and every other imaginable control. She got some comfort from the countless musical associations that she clocked as she looked around. Three layers of piano keys on one strange looking machine gave her a slight hint as to how it might be used, and a set of horn shapes on the ends of one line of pipes looked distinctly like they might be distant cousins of the humble trumpet. Another object looked suspiciously like a harp in disguise, except its strings were metal and had electrical circuitry wrapping itself

around them. A wall had what were clearly guitars hanging on it but none like any she'd seen before. Some were wooden, some were metal, some had multiple necks, others had too many strings. Some were covered in dials, knobs and levers and others were plain with just large, hollow bodies.

In the flickering blue glow of his lantern the shadows from the equipment danced around playfully, but the equipment itself looked ancient and extinct; like forgotten relics of an undiscovered civilisation.

"Does this stuff actually work?" Pogo asked, still trying to take it all in.

"Of course it does! Power it up - over there." He held the lantern out and pointed to the wall behind her.

Hundreds of cables snaked around her feet from every direction and made their way towards the wall. She followed them and looked behind a large tower of speaker cabinets to see a heavy collection of adaptor cubes hanging limply from a single socket on the wall. Beneath it was a sea of multiple extension sockets, all jostling for space. She looked back at Azrock.

"Are you serious?" she asked in disbelief. "All this . . . stuff is powered from a single wall socket?"

"It's all there is" he shrugged. "Come on, flick the switch - we've got music to make!"

She looked back at the aching tumour of power adaptor upon power adaptor upon power adaptor. She then looked at the tiny innocent switch beside the great-great-grandparent of them all, which was clinging to the wall for dear life despite hanging half out.

"I'm not touching that!" she declared.

Azrock huffed and pushed past her, reaching down and flicking the switch.

The whole cavern jolted into life. Lights flickered on and hums of every imaginable frequency spluttered into action as overly ambitious capacitors charged themselves to inadvisable voltages.

The stack of adaptor cubes fizzled and sparked as Aerock grabbed a fire extinguisher from the wall and bathed the whole mess in a thick blanket of foam. He hung the extinguisher back up.

Pogo looked at him in astonishment, demanding an explanation.

"You know - just in case!" he told her.



## Song Details -

Click [I'll Wait Here](#) to play song.





## Till Wait Here

Pogo would sing this song to herself, before she met Azrock, when she felt lonely and wished to indulge in hopeful fantasy. In this form the verses would be different every time, improvised to describe different ways in which her fantasy soul-mate and her should recognise or find each other. Originally it had a very simple accompaniment (there was no other kind on her two string toy guitar).

In its current recorded form it shows a very first attempt to marry their contradictory musical ideas. Being an early creation it probably suffers from Azrock being a touch ambitious with how many different styles a single song should feature, but it remains in its full length glory regardless to warn off those who don't have time for a complete musical story.

