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Final Assignment  
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"Hello darkness, my old friend  
I've come to talk to you again"  
---Simon & Garfunkel

"How you doin'?"  
---Joey Tribbiani

## The Subway

76%

doo-beoop

(doo-beoop)

75%

Randy stood awkwardly, one hand in the pocket of his autumn jacket, the other near his head of sandy blond hair. This hand grasped the bar, anchoring Randy firmly to the subway. And as he stands, slightly stooped, the train begins to move. Randy feels the strain pass through his wrist, arm, then shoulder, but he keeps his balance.

Across from him is Deke. His short, stocky frame stands firm. He doesn't need to hold any rail; instead as Deke sways, the car moves with him.

"Whose dumb idea was this anyways?" Deke griped.

"The movie?" Randy replied, "Rach's remember? She likes biopics, ever since seeing Rhapsody. Guess she's just trying to introduce you to some culture."

"That's *culture*?" Deke scoffed, "sequins and leather?"

"You'll see. The Academy loves those movies. Taron is getting an Oscar no doubt. You didn't enjoy yourself? Thought I caught you humming along."

But Deke was not paying attention. It was difficult to keep him interested, and *Rocketman* no exception. For Deke to like a movie, it required two things: fast cars and tight

skirts. It was the latter which distracted him now. His hazel eyes were focused, displaying a keen interest. Randy had seen that look from his friend before; on the rink, skates laced up, stick on the ice. The intense gaze of a player attempting to score.

Randy followed Deke's eyes to find the focus of his attention. *Cute*, he thought, two gals, around his age, dressed for the club, a blonde and brunette. They looked fantastic and they knew it, high heels and fashionable dresses which must have been fucking freezing as winter drew closer. Randy had noticed them earlier, but he was always too shy to approach (chicken-shit scared---as his brothers would tease). Besides, he always rationalized, I have to focus on my studies, have to graduate, find a job, get an apartment, always *have to* etcetera. Eventually, he hoped, he would run out of *have tos*, at which point he could probably start living his life.

Deke, on the other hand, Deke could approach anyone. Friendly and courageous, or maybe too thick to answer the question which always stopped Randy: why not? Rooming together in college, Deke's charisma had created Randy's social life and introduced him to the bustling city. Deke had created their circle of friends, and Randy had introduced them to reefer. Smoking weed took the edge off and relieved the stresses of class. It was easier to avoid the RA's attentions if both roommates were involved in the crime. Not that it was illegal anymore in Toronto, just not allowed in the dorms. With that slight buzz, Randy felt he could speak more freely, anything stupid he said dismissed or forgotten.

70%

"Hey, how you doin'?" Deke's catchphrase, if anything, yet the girls were seeking attention and ---surprisingly--- it seemed to work. Gretzky once said, "You miss one hundred percent of the shots you don't take", Deke had made this his creed, and had taken a lot of shots. The girls introduced themselves, LaVerne and her single (wink) friend Amanda. Deke began to converse comfortably, as if he had known them for longer than all of ten seconds.

"Ever go past Finch Station?" Deke asked---and to this day I still don't remember how he had gotten on this tangent.

"Past Finch? No. That's the end of the line, a terminal station."

"Nah, TTC is building another, at Steeles. The trains sometimes go there. After hours the lights go out, it gets dark. You can't see the hand in front of your face."

"How the fuck do you know this?"

"Forgot my bag once, went back to get it. The doors shut and brought me there. We should go! It's a life experience! Like ummm... What are those rooms where you turn off your senses?"

"Sensory deprivation?"

"Heck yea, that's it. A different kinda high."

The girls, obviously uncomfortable, excused themselves at the next station. LaVerne got off and Amanda followed.

Deke, however, was still stoked. "How about it Randy? You said you'd try anything once." When Deke got excited it was very difficult to say no.

*dooo-dooo-dooo*

*Next station is Finch,*

*Finch Station,*

*This is a Terminal Station.*

63%

The train was empty, except for the last car where the two fugitives sat. They had snuck back in at the last moment and laid low, to escape notice. Now, as the train rumbled to a halt, Randy noticed that Deke was humming, a familiar tune which he could not make out. As the subway shuddered to a stop, the lights flickered, dimmed and then went out.

Randy tapped the button on his phone and the display lit up, the glow illuminating his face. *60% battery, no bars, no wi-fi, fucking fantastic.*

"Hey, turn that off! You afraid of the dark?" Deke reached into his knapsack pulling out a beer. "Want one?" He offered.

"Nah, I'm good." Randy turned off his phone. "Reminds me of home."

"Like home? Goderich yeah! Salt city. Anyone ever get lost, down there in the mines?"

"Every so often, so many kilometres to lose yourself. My brother says 'distance and direction seem distorted down under the lake, it's easy to get turned around.' And sound is tricky also, sometimes it echoes back in your face, sometimes it's absorbed, muffled by the earth. A decade ago, a man by the name of Jim McGee got lost down there."

"Did they ever find him?"

"Of course, they did. When you get lost, you are trained to sit put. There is a setting on your headlight which makes it light up at 30-minute intervals and emit a shrill beep. Sit still, conserve your energy, shout only when you know you'll be heard. They found Jim alright, twenty meters from their worksite, sitting patiently in the dark. If only they had found him eight years earlier."

"Gross!"

"Not at all, the salt down there, removes the moisture from the air. When they found him, he was perfectly preserved. Just sitting there, like Rodin's "The Thinker", he hadn't aged a day, mummified, Jim Jerky! They brought his body back for his widow to identify, could've had an open casket, except for him stiffening in that awkward pose."

"Unreal." Deke casually set his empty bottle down, where later he would forget it. This had always bothered Randy, an annoying habit, a point of friction between the roommates. He ignored it for now.

Randy glanced at his phone, "Christ! It's one o'clock! How long were you down here last time?"

"Twenty minutes, tops" Deke lied. Randy could tell when Deke was lying, he'd run his fingers through his jet-black hair, flexing the muscles in his right bicep. A distraction to the ditz Deke was dating, a glaring tell to his best friend Randy.

*Classic fucking Deke, spends the night in the dark, has the time of his life. An adventure even, fucking idiot. A mediocre student coasting by on scholarship funds. Deke always proud of his barely pass, not quite fail grades (anything more would have been a waste of energy).*

"Relax, I can see you fuming over there" Deke reached into his bag finding his Crimson King e-cig. Standing up he leans against the sliding door of the subway. The coils in the e-cig glow orange as the room begins to smell of strawberry.

35%

Deke was humming again; Randy had finally recognized the tune.

*---Hello Darkness, my old Friend,*

*I've come to talk to you again---*

*Was Deke enjoying this?*

"Yo Randy, check this out!"

"Deke, I'm not talking to you."

"No, look at my arms, heh, looks like I have tattoos. Wicked, check this out!"

Across Deke's arms were intricate patterns, celtic knots of shadow in the orange glow of the King. Looking over, Randy sees the strands of shadow, spider webbing, forming an intricate mesh on Deke's arms. They converge and coalesce into the corners and crevasses of the door.

"What the? Hey, OW! It stung me! And I can't..." Deke tries to pull free.

Randy grabs Deke's hand, and with his other anchors himself to one of the subway's bars. Together they strain against the shadowy bonds. From the darkness tendrils unravel and brush Randy's arm with a soft silky caress, and then a voice:

"We could be together, you and I ---I and Deke--- in the dark. He doesn't love you like I do. Like you do. You do? Don't you?"

Randy stumbles back, tripping on Deke's empty. It rolls in an arch as he falls to the ground. Grabbing the beer bottle, he smashes it on the floor, creating a sharp edge. Randy begins to hack, and Deke to scream.

"Stop it! Stop it! You're hurting it Randy! Stop hurting it!"

Randy retreats in shock and watches. Randy watches as black tendrils become fingers and puncture Deke's flesh. With each pump of Deke's heart, these shadowed veins fill with life---*remove the moisture, preserve the body*. Deke, no longer struggling, stands spread-eagle, a goalie in a grotesque goal. Deke's face is stretched back in a hideous grin. Randy thinks of the Vitruvian man and adds the stench of vomit to the scent of strawberries.

He pushes himself backwards into the centre of the railcar. Randy cannot bear to watch, but he cannot look away. Long strips of skin unravel from Deke's body and slip out of the cracks of the door---*like peeling an orange*. The shadow engulfs Deke's body, a swarm of African Army Ants in some twisted episode of Natural Geographic. Randy feels something warm rolling at his fingertips, brings it to his mouth and replaces the taste of vomit with that of strawberries.

17%

Deke is dead,

his body dissected, dragged out the door.

Deke is dead.

Randy sits sobbing in the centre of the rail-car.

Deke is dead.

Around Randy a dim halo of light, but his phone won't last forever.

Deke is dead.

Randy watches each door carefully, it is still out there, *somewhere*, in the dark.

Deke is dead.

*What happened last time you were here Deke? Did you know what lurks below?*

*Did you lure me here? Did you know?*

Randy sits sobbing.

Deke is dead.

6%

Deke was dead. But outside the window a spectre stitched with strands of shadow. A puppet. Black eyes empty pits. Deke was back.

tap---tap---tap

"Randy ol' buddy, ol' pal, could you let me in?

I'm cold out here, I'm tired, I'm hungry, I'm..."

*Darkness?*

"Ha, you do know me! You've known me for awhile.

That silent voice in the back of your mind.

Telling you 'you'll never be good enough, never be ready'.

I made it easy to sink into the haze, to avoid your problems.

Remember me? Your constant companion?

How about it, please let me in? I'll make it quick, as your friend.

Don't keep me waiting, you know how impatient I can get."

0%

*My phone is dead.*

Standing at the door, Randy grasps the broken bottle in his right hand. Inside it a couple newspapers tightly bundled. In his left the Crimson King, partially disassembled, coil exposed

and glowing angrily. Randy presses the two together to ignite his makeshift torch, then he slides the door open. The flames illuminate Deke, standing, smiling, torchlight flickering in the deep black wells of his eyes.

"Hey, how you doin'?"