Eddie Takes the Scenic Route

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Eddie Takes the Scenic Route

by whos_scruffy_looking

Summary

Eddie stepped forward into the oppressive murk of the tunnel, feeling his skin crawl with goosebumps at the drop in temperature. He reached into his pocket involuntarily, grasping for the comforting plastic grip of his inhaler, and huffed dejectedly when he came up empty. Well, I guess this is it, he thought. Time to find out what this little reunion is all about. He took a deep breath, in and out, and steeled himself.

Or, an alternate version of adult Eddie's initial encounter with It. Takes place in present day with the Losers returning to Derry in Summer 2017, mixed with some book stuff.

Notes

So this is a book/2017 movie mashup that is heavily influenced by, if not outright based on the Lovesong series written by WaxAgent (an excellent fic, please go read it if you haven't had the chance yet!) In case you haven't read it, Richie an Eddie are in a committed relationship and did not separate after moving away from Derry, although they did forget the other Losers and the events of the Summer of '89. Richie has a history of drug abuse and he and Eddie went through a brief breakup sometime in their 20s relating to this. This scene would take place after the Losers have reunited at lunch (in the book) and Mike has sent them all out on their own. This is my first time writing something like this here or really anywhere, so helpful tips would be appreciated. Thanks for reading!

**There is significant cursing throughout as well as one instance of homophobic language (taken from the book)**
Inspired by You Only Live Twice by WaxAgent

At 7:26 pm Eddie Kaspbrak found himself traversing the wooden bridge spanning the canal where it turns into the Kenduskeag River. When did it get so late? he wondered, looking at his watch and then back up at the sky, watching the burnished copper sun sink lazily down towards the horizon. The old timber creaked dryly under his shoes as he crossed over the water. Eddie stopped at other end of the bridge where the steep sandy bank folded into the river, more accurately a stream at this time of year. The New England summer air was close and muggy, and seemed to drape itself heavily about his neck and back which were already damp with sweat, apparently the only token of his fruitless hours spent trudging through Derry that day. He had wandered aimlessly around town for most of the afternoon, his anxiety building hour by hour, waiting for something to be revealed to him, for his memories of that fateful summer to come flooding back. Wasn’t that what Mike had said would happen back at the restaurant? Just venture out by ourselves while this shitty, freakish clown is hunting us, what a great idea guys, what a stellar plan! Eddie fumed silently. He hadn’t noticed anything strange so far, but just to be safe he had mostly stayed close to the bustling stores and peopled streets of the town center. Eddie had ambled up and down Main Street where the old Aladdin Theater and the arcade Richie had so loved had stood decades ago, now replaced by a shiny new bank. Almost like they’d never been there at all. Richie would be outraged, he knew. He could practically hear him squawking, A bank? They bulldozed the Aladdin to put up a fucking bank? Christ, Eds, what’s the world coming to!

He had walked past a deserted Derry High which now sported a brand new expansion on the north side, a great, hulking cinderblock fused onto the red-brick of the school. They had put in a new parking lot too, he’d noticed, paving over what used to be a gravel plot filled with tufts of ragged dry grass. Derry’s certainly getting bigger, he’d mused, all these new buildings and housing developments, its nearly suburban. The town was swelling outside its boundaries, like the Kenduskeag after a heavy storm, growing engorged and full. Growing fat, he had realized with dread, suddenly sure of the veracity of this thought. The town is being fattened. He’d imagined those identical ticky-tacky houses filling up with elderly retirees, adult couples with two-point-five kids and a dog; people who were looking for cleaner air, a quiet of life outside the city, or just someplace nice to raise their families. Not here, he’d thought forcefully. This isn’t a safe place, not for kids, not for anyone. He had tried not to linger on the disturbing idea as he walked away.

Some parts of Derry had remained unchanged; the town square was the same, its gaudy Paul Bunyan ogling the late afternoon dog walkers and couples crisscrossing the park’s well-maintained lawns from his great height. He had spent a good chunk of time inspecting Freese’s Department Store too, a Derry mainstay since long before Eddie had been born. He had even tried going back to the pharmacy he had frequented as a child—the place where he had finally learned the truth about his medication and the extent of his mother’s manipulation—but couldn’t seem to remember its name nor exactly where it was, or perhaps he did and it had been demolished and remodeled into something unrecognizable. He supposed he could have tried to find the house on Neibolt Street again—he felt something important had happened there as well—but in the end decided not to. It was probably torn down too, an old ruin like that, he reasoned, but a small voice in the back of mind disagreed. I don’t think so, the voice wagered. It wouldn’t be allowed to be torn down, just like you weren’t allowed to throw away your inhaler. The hunk of blue-green plastic was currently sitting on the formica counter of his hotel bathroom with the rest of his remedies. Eddie wished miserably that he had it with him now, here on the weathered planks of the Derry landmark known as the Kissing Bridge. Famous for sucking face and carving names, his brain recited, and he wondered if Derry kids today knew the
adage like all of them did back then. *Apparently so,* he thought, tracing the freshly etched letters in the aged wood alongside old faded ones.

A light breeze blew down the canal and across the bridge, ruffling through his thick chestnut hair. Eddie shivered mildly and squeezed himself with pretzeled arms, leaning down onto the wooden railing and looking out over the water. *At times like this you could almost be forgiven for thinking it’s beautiful here,* he mused, listening to the soothing burble of the river and admiring the warm hues of the sun setting through the trees. He watched a pair of birds winging low over the water, skimming the surface in search of dinner, curious what species they might be. Eddie was suddenly struck with a pang of grief. *Stan would know what they were,* he thought sadly. *I bet Stan would have known everything about them.* He brooded for a while, distractedly observing the reflection of the burning sun in the water as he picked at some illegible marks carved into the wooden siding of the bridge.

As he watched the river flow beneath him on its journey to the sea, he felt more than saw a shadow on the water, flitting under the bridge, and stiffened. A half-second later the shadow was revealed to be a bright red balloon, floating low over the river. Eddie gasped audibly and his heart dropped into his bowels. All the moisture in his mouth abruptly evaporated, and he swallowed thickly. The balloon bobbed jauntily below him, as if to say, *Hey there Eddie! I’m here for you, your time’s up, now don’t make it hard on yourself!* He knew at once where he was meant to go--below the structure he stood on now was an outlet of the sewer system beneath Derry, a series of tunnels branching off from the canal. Had he not been buzzing with adrenaline, Eddie might have taken a moment to consider how easily that information had come to him, free of the fog that enveloped most of his knowledge of Derry. *We had to go into the sewers the last time too,* he remembered, *down in the Barrens.* But what had they found?

Eddie climbed gingerly over the railing and down the eroding bank towards the river. The balloon drifted slowly ahead of him, floating back under the bridge--*against the wind,* he thought briefly--back up the canal, towards the sewer entrance. His feet sank into the sandy floor of the riverbed, then he splashed up onto the concrete channel. The water was only about ankle deep now, and would probably slow to a trickle before the summer reached it’s end. He peered uneasily into the opening of the tunnel, and wiped his clammy palms on his slacks. It was tall enough that he didn’t have to crouch, but it would surely be cramped fit for the other Losers, except for Beverly, who was nearer his height. Eddie looked into the receding blackness and wished he had a flashlight or at least his phone, which had been left back at the restaurant at the behest of Mike, who thought modern devices might impede their respective trips down memory lane. *Something, anything, hell, even a lighter would do!* He thought wistfully of Richie, who’s habitual tic of playing with his lighter had annoyed him to no end over the years. Richie had already smoked nearly half the pack he had spontaneously bought at a gas station on the way from the airport last night, puffing condensed clouds out the window of their rental car. The last time Eddie had seen him smoke before that was at his father’s funeral two years earlier, and he hadn’t said anything then either.

Eddie stepped forward into the oppressive murk of the tunnel, feeling his skin crawl with goosebumps at the drop in temperature. He reached into his pocket involuntarily, grasping for the comforting plastic grip of his inhaler, and huffed dejectedly when he came up empty. *Well, I guess this is it. Time to find out what this little reunion is all about.* He took a deep breath, *in and out,* and steelied himself. The wet echo of his careful footsteps in the water reverberated off the cold cement walls as he began advancing deeper into the passage. He fought back disgust at the fetid water sloshing around his feet as it began seeping through his shoes, focusing instead on managing his tenuous footing on the slimy tunnel floor. *Grey water,* he thought offhandedly, *that’s what we used to call it.* As a kid he used to think it was sewage runoff. *Like walking around in a toilet bowl.* A reflexive shudder passed through his body and he grimaced. It wasn’t sewage but it was still contaminated, *full of bacteria and trash and the things people shove down their garbage disposals--*
Eddie forced himself to stem the flood of anxious thoughts currently hijacking his brain, and took another calming breath. He looked up from the water and back over his shoulder at the circle of light he had come from—*just a few feet away*—then at the dark, curved walls surrounding him. He had noticed graffiti on the concrete embankment of the canal and there was more here, mostly indistinguishable shapes and tags, some curse words, and what might have once been a phone number. Something in the poorly-lit jumble caught his eye, and he leaned in closer to examine the writing. In bold, crimson lettering, it read:

**SHOW ME YOUR COCK QUEER AND I’LL CUT IT OFF YOU**

He sucked in a breath, and the sick, leaden feeling in his stomach intensified. The bitter tang of fear soured on his tongue, and hot anger rose in his throat. All amiable sentiments of the river and the sunset now forgotten, Eddie thought violently, *that’s what this place really is. It pretends to be civil and pleasant on the surface, but underneath you can see the ugly truth, you can feel the hate and malice that lives in this goddamned town.*

The rippling sound of something moving through water drew his attention further down the tunnel, and he whipped his head around to see what had made it. For a moment he could see nothing, and he panted unevenly as he waited for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. After a few moments, he could distinguish the outline of a person. Whoever it was was sitting with their back against the side of the tunnel, water lapping at their feet.

“Hello?” Eddie called down the tunnel. The stranger stayed motionless. “Who’s there?” Eddie asked apprehensively, his pulse racing. A cold sweat broke out on his temples and the hair on the back of his neck began to rise up. His lungs drew in air shallowly, and his breath became labored and wheezy. The person in front of him stood, shoulders hunched under the low ceiling, wobbling slightly as they supported themselves against the wall of the tunnel, and Eddie felt his heart stop beating, felt his breath freeze in his chest. *Oh fuck,* he panicked, *ohshitohfuck*—because he knew that body, knew the way it moved, the way it slouched languidly against the side of the passage. He had mentally tried to prepare himself for this, had tried along with the other Losers to visualize what *It* would use against each of them, but it was different here, alone at the mouth of the sewer at dusk. This was *Its* territory, more so than the Neibolt house or even the town of Derry itself. *This is where It lives,* he thought, then felt his body convulse as a memory came to him, unbidden:

*All of them inside the cistern, an unconscious Beverly hanging in the air, a towering, swirling mass of detritus above them—shoes and backpacks, toys and stuffed animals, and bodies, so many bodies floating up, up, up—*

The flash of memory was so clear and sharp that Eddie felt as if he had been transported back in time—back to when he was twelve years old, surrounded by his friends and scared out of his mind. He gasped in a breath, and with a jolt remembered that he was not twelve anymore; he was a grown man standing ankle deep in the polluted water of the Derry sewers, searching for answers, a stone’s throw away from the thing that had drawn them all back. And they had finally come back, back after all this time to Derry—hateful, hateful Derry. They had been ripped away from their successful and fulfilling lives and dragged back to the place most of them had tried desperately to escape, had been shown that their carefully cultivated lives were nothing more than a pitiful, meaningless rest stop on a circular journey to hell and back. They had been barred from memories of their childhood both good and bad, cut off from the deep and powerful bond of friendship that they had forged all those years...
ago. He thought of all the Losers then: of Bill and his selfless bravery, of Mike and his steadfast kindness, of Ben and his loyalty and sweetness. He though of Bev and her fierce protectiveness, of Richie, who had been with him through it all, and the way he laughed wildly into the dark unknown, as if to say, *Bring it on fucker, show me what you got!* And he thought of Stan, poor, poor, Stan who understood the way of things perhaps better than any of them and couldn’t bear to face it all again.

Eddie felt a rush of fury at their circumstances, at the utter ridiculousness of his current situation, the injustice of it all. *It’s summertime,* he thought, strangely, *we’re supposed to be having fun.* Instead he was standing frozen in the maw of the sewer, letting his feet get soaked, waiting for his childhood nightmares to come and torment him. Eddie felt rage broiling inside him, felt hot blood surging to his head. *Stan is dead,* he thought bitterly, *and now there are six of us. Six, and the turtle couldn’t help us.* The blaze of emotion knocked him out of his shock and he felt his lungs start to work again as he tried to process the scene in front of him.

It was Richie but not Richie. *The Richie that might have been,* he thought, the one who had plagued his guilt-ridden and anxious mind in the months after Eddie had left him. He was younger than the real Richie and paler too, so pale, and skeletally thin, his arms protruding like luminescent bone from his baggy t-shirt in the weak light of the tunnel. His clothes hung off his thin, lanky frame, jeans belted far below his narrow waist. A pair of glasses hung from his neckline, their lenses thick and fractured. Not-Richie raised his arm and dragged a hand through his disheveled hair, his shirt lifting up to reveal bluish-white hips jutting out sharply. Eddie’s eyes snapped back to Not-Richie’s face in terror as he began to speak.

“Eds, Eddie baby hey,” Not-Richie slurred, and Eddie could see him now in the dim light. His dark curls were wildly unkempt and spiraled listlessly around his aristocratic face which had been made even more angular by his hollowed cheeks, his scattered freckles brought into sharp relief by pallid skin. His gaze was heavy-lidded and unfocused as his darkened, glassy eyes met Eddie’s, slid away, and then found them again. They were red-rimmed and sunken into his skull, framed by long black lashes and symmetrical half-moon bruises. His full lips were ashy and chapped, stretched across his face in a roguish grin that didn’t reach his eyes. *It’s not him,* Eddie reminded himself, *it has his clothes and his face and his voice but it’s not him, it’s not him, it’s not--*

“I missed you Eds,” Not-Richie rasped, his voice rough and cracked, the way it was when he’d been up all night chain-smoking or when he was coming down off a bender, and Eddie shuddered. He had hated when Richie was high. Different from his excessive drinking or the occasional pill-popping, smack sedated him, taking him far away from himself and the rest of the world. After he had been using long enough to build up a tolerance, shooting up gave him a strangely elegant and ethereal affect; his movements became almost graceful, lacking the abrupt, quick-twitch energy that typically poured out of him along with his smart-mouthed retorts. Eddie could always tell, could hear it in the eerie, dreamlike quality of his voice that meant he was far gone, off on a cold blue planet a galaxy away where nothing and no one mattered.

Perversely, he had much preferred the irritable moodiness and instability that came with a strung out Richie, especially when Eddie was looking for a fight. Even that Richie, with his unpredictability and mood-swings, his frantic eyes reminiscent of an animal caught in a trap, felt more real and familiar than the doped-up one. The thing in front of him seemed to be flashing back and forth between the two versions, at one moment distant and loaded, the next wild and volatile. The Not-Richie started moving closer to him, long-fingered hands scrabbling at the damp walls for balance. Eddie instinctively took a jerky step backwards, swallowing a yelp of fear. He felt the squelch of filthy water gush through his already sodden shoes and socks. Fighting the urge to gag and ignoring the bile rising in his throat, he thought desperately, *keep it together Eddie, don’t freak out, don’t lose it now!* He looked up at the Not-Richie and saw ghostly arms extended towards him along the tunnel wall. Instead of the patchwork of colorful tattoos that the real Richie’s arms now bore, these arms
were mottled with scars and bruises, far more track marks than Richie had ever had, even at his worst. He had to suppress another gag when he noticed some of the sores were open and inflamed. *Infected,* his mind supplied, *he’s infected, he’s diseased, don’t let him touch you--*

“How could y’leave me baby, don’t you want me anymore?” the Not-Richie wailed, and Eddie backed away again and felt a knife-edged pain cut through him. Unwanted tears stung his eyes as he remembered how Richie had sounded the day he’d walked out, the same exposed, raw edge to his voice, jonesing for a fix, pleading with Eddie to stay--

“Stop it,” he croaked, and cringed when he heard his frail, wavering voice echo off the cement walls. *You’ve always been so delicate Eddie-bear, sometimes I think you don’t even understand how delicate you are, you have to be careful, so careful--*

**NO.** Eddie pushed his mother’s nagging voice away forcibly. I’m stronger now, we both are. I made it through that, I can make through this, he thought, and took a centering breath. *In and out, that’s it, just breathe.*

“Stay away from me!” It came out much louder and firmer this time, and made the Not-Richie creature jerk his head up. His eyes met Eddie’s again as his head lolled to the side, familiar brown irises that he had looked into thousands of times before. He had seen those eyes glitter with mischief, had seen them filled with joy and anger and lust and pain; now they held nothing but a vast emptiness: a black, emotionless void. *Like a shark’s eyes,* he thought, and felt nauseated.

“C’mon baby, I’ll make you feel good, so good, I promise, jus’ lemme touch you, I’ll do anything, please--” the Not-Richie moaned, and Eddie recoiled, his face contorted.

“I know you’re not him you stupid clown, now get the F**K away from me!” he screamed. The Not-Richie stopped moving towards him, and lifted its head. Eddie watched its lips part, saw it start to open its mouth, heart hammering in his chest. *The teeth, oh God, it’s going to tear me apart with those horrific teeth,* he thought hysterically, but the Not-Riche just smiled a wide, exaggerated smile with Richie’s human teeth. Not-Richie’s eyes opened wide and rolled crazily, and then it began to laugh. The weird, hollow sound ricocheted loudly off the water and around the narrow tunnel, and Eddie thought it was as if Richie’s laugh had been sanded down and rattled around in a can before bounding raucously out of its mouth. The bizarre noise grated against his ears and made his jaw ache as it died slowly.

“Mmmm, Eddie gets s’off a good one,” Not-Richie stated dispassionately.

“Fuck you, what the fuck do you want?” Eddie yelled savagely, watching the Not-Richie’s movements warily. It was close now, not close enough to reach out and grab him but close enough that Eddie could identify the purple shirt draped loosely over it’s emaciated body. He used to love that shirt, had loved the soft, well-worn feel of it on his face when he was pressed against Richie’s chest, loved to breathe in the comforting aroma of cotton fibers and laundry detergent and tobacco and RichieRichieRichie...

*It doesn’t smell like Richie though,* Eddie thought, wrinkling his nose at the dank and moldy stink of the sewer tunnel, the acrid bite of vomit wafting towards him from the Not-Richie along with some other, familiar odor he couldn’t quite place. He found himself wondering briefly if that was something beyond Its powers--maybe It couldn’t replicate Richie’s smell, or perhaps couldn’t mask Its own scent. The stench was almost overpowering now, and Eddie reflexively held a hand up in front of his face. *That godawful smell,* he thought, almost sickly sweet, and yet rank, and...

*Rotten,* he realized, *he’s rotting, just like the leper at Neibolt, the leper Richie said was diseased--*
--a disease you get from fucking, you know about fucking, don’t you Eds?--

And now Eddie did gag, revulsion rippling over him as he dry-retched painfully. He tripped and nearly lost his balance in the scummy water as he backed farther away, the Not-Richie still in front of him, coming closer and closer, leaning over him, breathing its foul, poisonous breath on him, reaching out with weeping, bloodied arms--

“I’ll blow you for a quarter, kid,” the Not-Richie whispered, leering over him, irises glowing burnt-orange. “I’ll do it for a dime.” With that Eddie turned and ran, sprinting towards the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel and out into the rapidly cooling air of Derry, Maine, his feet squishing loudly in his soaking, water-logged shoes. He felt blood pounding in his ringing ears as he gasped for breath, eyes streaming, but he didn’t stop and he didn’t look back. He scrambled up the sandy bank of the river, climbing frantically on all fours until he was up and over the side of the Kissing Bridge. All the while behind him he heard the Not-Richie’s terrible tin-can laugh, heard It shout,

“Come back here, kid! I’ll do it for free!”
He kept running and didn’t stop until he reached the Derry Townhouse.

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