

constrict a life without one even realizing it.

As I stood on the platform, my mind raced. The past, present, and future all jumbled together. Am I crazy to even contemplate this? How did I get here? Maybe no one would even notice me here. Maybe no one would even be on the platform today and I'd have a valid excuse to just go home. The thoughts continued to race. My small, five foot one stature somehow felt extra tiny surrounded by the cold steel tracks and endless cement tunnels of the subways. It was dirty, very dirty, and dark. The kind of dark one might imagine right before the last shovel full of dirt was piled onto you in a grave. There are things in the city subways you sometimes wish you hadn't encountered: rats, garbage, an array of the foulest of smells, even human excrement in the most unusual of places. The smell stuns the senses. And yet, I still didn't turn back.

I got to the bottom of the stairs to the platform. As I stood on the cement, the cold bleeding up through my shoes, I suddenly had a change of heart and felt sad that there were no people anywhere to be seen. I had gotten brave enough to get all the way down there and logically I knew— more people meant more money. *I mean, if I'm going to do this, I want it to be worth it*, I thought. But at the same time, I was somewhat relieved because I was still feeling completely intimidated by this unimaginable performance space I was about to sing in. When I got to the bottom of the steps to the subway platform, I just stood there. If anyone was watching, I must have looked rather silly as I kept taking very small steps forward, then back, sideways, then back again, trying to figure out where to land, still too afraid to unzip my guitar case. I was just about to leave, just about to give in to my fear, when I saw two violinists coming down the opposite staircase. They were heading toward me. In an instant, all the fear that had been clutching me was replaced by an overwhelming sense of competition. If these two musicians were headed toward where I was standing, there must be a reason. Now I wanted this spot to play in. I unpacked my guitar. I laid my case on the platform floor with one dollar strategically placed inside. With my now frigid fingers, I kneeled down to check the tuning, stood up, and began to sing a song I'd just finished writing:

Give me somethin' I can walk with  
That you and I can talk with  
And we won't stop 'cause  
There's a brighter day  
There's a brighter day

After two or three tunes, I felt braver and wiser: braver because I realized that I would prefer to have people around than not if I'm going to put all this effort into performing, and wiser knowing that the two girls were probably not headed to perform where I was standing, especially since there were no people around to listen. But I was grateful for that illusion, as it got me singing. However, the lack of an audience and the cold was taking its toll. I decided to see if there were any waiting passengers on the uptown side of the tracks.