An Ocean of Noise

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“...someone that's more for real.” She sat quietly, listening to Elliot Smith play guitar through the speakers on her computer. She looked down at her feet, smiled as she saw her dainty female toes, the nails bathed in girly pink. I like that shade of pink a lot, I think. I’ll buy it again. “Sunshine 'been keeping me up for days.” I need to get some sleep. The song ended. She reached forward, hit the repeat button, and lay down on her bed. “Sunshine 'been keeping me up for days.”

She looked out the window. “Partly cloudy,” her mother had said, “with a slight chance of showers tonight. How are you sweetie?” She remembered her mother pouring those words that morning, reading the weather aloud to her husband as she added milk to her daughter’s cereal. I don't care. Rain. Sun. Clouds. What are they anyway? Weather patterns based off of ocean currents and the gravitational pull of the earth as it moves around the sun, a burning ball somewhere up there in the big black night. Up, ever up, always up.

The same words played again. Why do I even care? But she knew she had to care. If she didn’t care, then she didn’t have a reason to live. She would be like her brother—her father. The way he treated—she shook her head, chased the Jabberwock away. “But it's not worth it to you, 'cause you got to get high somehow.” Her mind jumped. She remembered her older brother talking about how, when he was feeling stressed, he would cut his arms a little with a razor blade. He had explained that doing so released some kind of endorphin into his bloodstream. She resisted the memory. “There is no night time,” she murmured. She couldn’t grasp it. What was Smith trying to say? She thought about songwriters and their reasons, their vagueness.

She got up and flipped through iTunes until she found what she was looking for. “Ocean of Noise,” by Arcade Fire. The singing began: “As if I had a choice.” As if I had a choice. Somewhere, she had heard that there was always a choice.

“Now who here among us still believes in choice?” Not I. Where had she heard that? Maybe it was in church, but that never made any sense to her. She was taught that everyone had free will, but that God knew everything that ever was, is, and will be, from the beginning to the end of everything. She remembered the burning bush, “I AM WHO I AM,” and the Book of Revelations, Alpha and Omega. Where does free will fit into that equation? She had no idea.

“Gonna work it out.” The voice faded away, losing itself amid the chorus of string and trumpet. Her iTunes on repeat, the song was still playing. “As if I had a choice.” A choice to do what? Somewhere, she knew there was an answer. There had to be. What answer is to be found if choice is an illusion? “No way of knowing what any man will do.” She couldn’t accept that. There had to be a way. But there could not be away. For if there is a way to know, then free will is a lie, and if there isn’t a way to know, then God cannot know. It made no sense to her. Her eyes closed to the sleepy tones of indie pop. “An ocean of noise – I first heard your voice.” His voice sounded in her memory like a siren.

She could remember the first time she heard his voice. It was a long time ago. She had been younger. It felt like a lifetime ago, but it was only six months. “No way of knowing what any man will do.” It had only been six months. “You got your reasons and me, I got mine.” Six months since she asked him to go steady. Six months praying her way through sleepless nights. Six months pleading her way through his collection of lies. I wasn’t the one who lied. Why should I work it out for him? Why couldn’t he work it out for me? Her brain meandered to the five stages. Where am I now? Denial, anger, depression... She knew it wasn’t acceptance. Acceptance meant peace. Acceptance meant normality. It meant closure, and she had no closure.

She was sitting on a park bench, watching mothers push their toddlers on the swings. She remembered her mother doing the same for her when she was their age. It was little more than a fleeting recollection, more of a feeling than a memory. She couldn’t actually remember sitting in the uncomfortable swing set. She couldn’t remember being pushed back and forth, neither the giggles nor smiles, nor the
screams when she was pushed too high. But watching those toddlers, she could feel that it was something she had done, something she knew. She could feel, in her heart, the exhilaration of the ride, the terror boiling inside of her at being so far from the ground. She felt the love of her mother and her heart burned with yearning. Sixteen years is too long to leave a memory. Maybe what I have is better.

She was sitting on a park bench, watching mothers push their toddlers on the swings. The warmth of memories flooding her, she closed her eyes. She formed a picture in her mind, to search the archives of her brain. She looked around, opened her eyes. She had heard a voice—a man’s voice, from out in the dark. There was magic in that voice.

The siren’s song. The voice—she heard it again. She closed her eyes, focused on the nuances of the tone, the timbre, the pitch. She closed one ear, and then the other. Words. She could hear words, murmured soft as sand beneath bare feet. Tenderness. Sexuality. Passion. A promise. She heard it all inside the gentle murmur of the breeze against her heart. Who is this centurion of faith? She rose, turned, and gazed.

Her eyes were open now, but she saw the past no more clearly than before. She couldn’t work out what had happened. How it had happened. Why it had happened. That was what bothered her most; she did not know why. No longer on the bed, she paced in vague anger. He had his reasons. She didn’t know what they were. She didn’t care. “No way of knowing what any man will do.” Even now, she didn’t know what she had done wrong. My love is my body. I gave him my love, I gave him my body. He had corrupted the purity of her mind—her love. He wore his shoes in her temple. “Time to work it out for you.” She remembered his words: “We’ll work this out together babe.” Lies to buy myself some time? “We’ll work this out together babe.” Lies to buy myself some time. “We’ll work this out together babe.” She had learned to detest those words; once an expression of affection, they later devolved into gross Parisian lust. A broken promise.

She had read a poem somewhere that said “every woman adores a fascist.” She thought of her father, her brother, her boyfriend. He beat his wife. He beat himself. He beat her. She walked to her computer, turned off the music. She was disturbed—she needed quiet. He crossed her mind too often, with too little provocation: a triumvirate of vampires. He is one and the same. She cast down her eyes, looked at her pink painted toenails. She liked painting her toenails pretty colors, girly colors. She liked their feet. They were well-shaped, slender and small. He never liked my feet. Why didn’t he like my feet? She pounded aggravated fists against the wall, chastising the plaster for demurring words it never spoke, for clandestinely vindictive ideas never uttered but often communicated. Ideas watered and nurtured by the indifference with which she had been regarded. Ideas the tears of her heart had nurtured into tumors, ideas that chewed away her peace of mind.

She felt alone. Too alone. Panic rising, she called out. “Mother?” The absence of reply reminded her of her solitude. Alone. He always left me alone. I have always been alone. She remembered that Shakespeare once wrote, “There’s daggers in men’s smiles.” He is the dagger. He is Cassius, Cain, Chapman. She hated Mark Chapman. “I could be bounded in a nutshell,” she murmured. But for this fucking nightmare! Grapping her Nemean despair, she looked again at her toenails, the only refuge from her anxiety. The pink shone vibrantly. They were Ozymandius’ ruins, a funeral pyre of smiles and songs, an ocean of flames. He, once her gallant knight, had become her headless horseman. Her boyfriend. Her brother. Her dad. One and the same. He ran away. They ran away. She remembered his words: “We’ll work this out together babe.” He never liked my feet. She pictured the words in slow motion, spoken to his other lover, to the sensual, vulgar harlot she imagined the woman must be. She knew how Othello was driven to murder. She longed for him to be herself, for him to be Desdemona and she instead the Moor; but he was Othello, and she his wife.

“Father.” Quietly she implored Him to light her way. Her lips trembled. Let him go. He is only a broken promise. She faltered. To turn her back on him was to turn her back on love, to crucify it on a cross of redemption. She couldn’t destroy him; he was her father, her brother—her lover. Am I too scared to eat a fucking peach? She realized she was shivering. She ran her left fingers up and down the goose bumps popping out of her arm. “Daddy…why did you leave Mom? Why did you leave
me?" She spoke to a ghoul, a memory with no conscious or conscience, praying for an answer she could never find. The key was in her hand; her spirit snapped. She twisted the key and opened Bluebeard's closet—he was too late.

The blood...the body...the blade...my brother...my boyfriend...my heart...his lies...his fucking whore...my mother's tears, my father's note...my tears—mom's tears—the lies...the lies...It all became a blur. All the memories she had suppressed confused themselves and fused together in her hyperventilating mind. The blood-soaked visage of her dead brother arched his back over the naked body of her lover's flame. His last words—the bastard's last words. She fought herself. She lost. The memories were hyenas and she their prey, nothing but carrion to her own demons. "I don't love you anymore baby," he had said—stuck in my head!—the words growing louder with every inch the hyenas moved. There was nothing left to do, so she screamed. Years of pain sounded in her ravished wail. It was gone. Her father's note, her brother's body, her paramour's goodbye—he was gone. Her heart beeped like a hammer as she struggled to control her breathing.

The front door creaked. Her mother was home. Quietly, limply, she made her way to the door, squeezed her head against her mother's shoulder, laughing as snot leaked onto her mother's blouse. They rocked together gently. "I love you mommy." "I love you too sweetheart." The door opened again, and closed just as soon; her stepfather hated walking in on awkward moments.

She sat in her room that night. She knew the demons would return. She knew the traumas would never go away. She knew she could beat them. I've conquered the oven; I can conquer anything. She smiled gaily as she looked down at her bare feet and pink toenails. She overheard the words being sung in the background: "Sunshine 'been keeping me up for days." She turned off her computer, turned off her lamp, said her prayers. And as she drifted off to sleep, she smiled.

Anna: April 9, 2010 ~

I quivered in that dark room, my back against the wall, trying to make myself as small as possible. The room was stuffy; there wasn't a fan or even a cracked window to let in a slight breeze. The only thing that shed a little light was the street lamp outside that cast shadows of the furniture onto the floor. My knees were bent to my chin and I cowered behind them. The only two sounds in the room were the suffocated whimpers that sought to escape from my mouth and the scratching sound of Hayden's shoes against the worn Berber carpet as he paced back and forth. Every five steps or so he would pause and hit the wall that was quickly being covered with holes—like a piece of Swiss cheese. With every punch, I jumped a little and my whimpering would jump an octave.