

The Infinite Playlist

“I never delete songs from my *iPod*.”

It's true. He never does, never did, and probably never will. From the moment he stepped on the bus, he's been glued to his music players and now with him sitting all alone in the back seat, he's as predictable as a rock. There's no other reasonable explanation.

Yet, you can never tell, with his quiet smile and carefree gaze, his tussled hair and silent teeth, what he's listening to on his old, first generation *iPod*. Sometimes, you hear peaceful melodies and cacophonous slashing; sometimes, somber bass-lines and wistful beats coming out of his headphones. Currently a digitized voice floats from his head to the bus that moves ever forward.

Pens and knives apologize, for leaving you tonight~

Suddenly, the much-too-cold air-conditioning that the overweight bus driver insisted on opening transforms into a warm summer breeze blowing across the golden beach. There are lively laughs and cozy arms, seaside smells and happy screams. It's so blissful, yet it tinges with melancholy.

Reality and fantasy blurs for a moment.

An extra-cold blast of air bombards the bus. The driver momentarily loses his steady-tempo focus and takes out his face-cloth to wipe off his forehead of sweat.

The guy smiles a bit, and changes the song. Thoughts focus back to the little girl at the front of the bus, who thinks in droll nursery rhymes, as she hums a quiet show-tune as if it's the most interesting thing in the world. A scowling man is standing by the door, gracing his thoughts in ol' Rhythm and Blues, bobbing somewhat involuntarily up and down to the rhythm of the speed bumps. The loving couple gazing into each other's eyes in front is conversing *not-with-each-other-but-still-kinda-with-each-other* in a perfect Shakespearean love song, their ear-buds shared between them like a twisting vine. You try to give them some privacy.

Yet no matter how much you try not to listen, with all the different types of languages they think in, no matter how much you say not to judge, with all the different way they think of, you'll listen to them as if you are dispensing cold justice, as it all blends into a lull of monotony.

Then, you realize his, and only his, is silence.

Then another breeze, smelling of musty basements and leather amplifiers, blows into the spotlight. Aggressive riffs ionize the air. Angry verses, exciting hooks, a catchy chorus. The same tinge of sadness, but mixed with hate. The moment of Charisma in his head, it's impossible not to sing along. *Do you remember the day...way back when we used to say...*

“*Nothing can stop us, no one...* oh. S-sorry, ma'am.” A disapproving eye, like an apparition, stares right into my face. An old lady, sitting by the windowsill... She looks cross, her Chopin being abruptly interrupted. It seems that I'm drawing more attention than I should in a quiet bus seven in the morning. I reluctantly throw my

gaze away, back to the vibrating scenery outside.

You know, I don't know how he does it, the man at the back of the bus, that is; the one of the chaotic hair and the unknowable eyes.

It's true. People, in midst of their lives, forget things that they don't like to keep the rest so they can build themselves in their own image. That's how it is, how it was and how it will always be. And in the end, they always become what they appear to be, just like how a musician's songs slowly reflect their inner truth, no matter how much he tries to hide it with clichés. The only difference is that a musician can erase those lyrics and start all over again. Yet, despite all this...

You know, he and I are not much different. We both know the value of a song and what it means to have a list of favorites in an age where everyone just listens to whatever the DJ crops up on their *Radio-on-the-Go*'s. They're like long-lost friends that keep you going for another day, or silent reminders...

He still sits in a lone chair at the back of the bus, unmoving...

"Hey!"

"..."

"Mind if I sit here? I don't know about you, but the bus always seems warmer when you have someone to pass the time with."

I pull up a seat beside him, and tone out my mind from everyone else...

"You know, I like that song you were listening to... you know like the one with the bass and the t-thing 'cause you must have liked it a lot, you know with the, umm, loudness that makes me hear it all the way in the front. I mean, it must've been awesome! Heh."

I don't think he heard me, though I don't know if that's a bad thing. Some secrets should just *remain* secrets, for the good of things.

"I'll tell you a secret. Some people think that songs are like pieces of memory, a quiet reminder of things that passed and things you wished had passed. Fake memories, true memories... experiences, fantasies, sad things, happy things. Weird things. Funny thing is, as much as songs mean so much, what I found is that most people delete songs after a while, like deleting memories from a computer... some even just abandon them entirely, listening to whatever brain-rot the DJ cooked up that day, every day. Honest opinion, I think those radio remixes are just plain boring and they're almost always about the same things: parties, sex, and having gazillions of money. *Bleagh*. They can all go to *hell* for all I care."

I figured if I gave him a part of the real me, maybe he'll realize how similar we are to each other...

"But then... there are those people. The ones that keep every song, every download. Even the ones from the old CD's! They keep everything as if every memory, the good on the bad, is all locked up in the music player, making a list that never ends... Like an infinite playlist! Can you imagine?"

He cocks an eyebrow, I have his attention.

“Yet, in the end, why they do it and how they tick, no one ever knows. Honestly, I don’t think anyone can... Well, don’t get me wrong, like, that’s not necessarily a *bad thing*. You know...”

His turns away and closes his eyes, and he remains unmoving for a while. At this close, I can see the blank surface of his *reality* crack, peeking into a multitude of other surfaces like an iridescent opal. It’s the first time in a while that I’ve seen such a phenomenon; it’s as if millions of different personalities were meshed together to create a somewhat chaotic, but complete landscape. The longer I stare, the more it makes me wonder why he threw a blanket of snow on top of them... then it occurs to me: it’s not snow; it’s a whole new canvas.

That’s when I finally realized the full meaning of what *that* meant. That one thing he screamed out on the top of his mind for all those who cared to listen, before he closed it against a world that was too busy for him. The silence; the tinges of white sadness in his mind... I think I understand what it is.

“You know... Sometimes running away is easier than accepting who you are. And trust me, it took a long while for *me* to accept who I am... heck, ever since last year, I don’t think I even *know* who I am anymore...”

“But, who am I to say that you should accept who you are? Who I am to assume that you have similar experiences, memories and thought processes as me and therefore must conform to my values? Honestly I think acceptance shouldn’t be about you but about others; making a connection between two minds is to accept all the things, good and bad, that comes between them, like listening to each other’s Infinite Playlist of songs together. You never know what you’ll hear next, but you’ll enjoy it anyways. You know what I mean? “

I think everybody heard me, because suddenly a deafening silence envelopes the bus. The bus stops, but no one even makes a move to exit. Staring into the window, a small smile slowly emerges from his face and I knew I made a connection. The door closes and the bus carries on forward...

There it is again, loud and proud like the main melody: *Pens and knives apologize, for leaving you tonight~*

“*Over and Out.*”

“Sorry?”

“The song that you said you liked, right? It’s called ‘*Over and Out*’ and it’s from this awesome band; my best friend introduced me to them and well, he was my best buddy in high school so I kind of want something to, you know, remember him by. So...”

“Well, it’s *awesome* and I shall be downloading it onto my music player as soon as I can find a working computer. By the way, I’m Dresden. Nice to meet you.”

“Heh... Ethan. Me too.”

We shake hands. A while passes and I start to appreciate his silence, and we talked like old friends all the rest of the ride; he even laughed a little at one of my bad jokes, whaddyaknow? Why I stopped minding his silence, and he... well, me, I don’t know and I don’t think I ever will.

An exchange of understanding, I suppose. That’s all.

~~~~~

~~~~~  
“Hey.”

“Yeah?”

“There’s this totally awesome song that’s my all-time favorite. It’s just absolutely the best thing in the world! Wanna listen? Lemme just get... hold on... trust me, this is something you won’t forget!”