Signal to Noise
by kindkit

Summary

Denial is the first stage of grieving.

When Scott was blind, he used to listen to the radio. In bed at night, when the house creaked and he couldn’t open his eyes to see what might be there, it helped to know that other people, somewhere, were awake. He especially liked the AM stations. He would turn the dial fraction by fraction, bringing words through the staticky crackles and howls. Once he pulled up a station in French and imagined the radio waves bouncing from earth to atmosphere and back across all those miles of ocean. Later, he figured out it was probably coming from Quebec.

Later still, he asked Jean if it was like that in her head—faraway voices overlapping, pops and buzzes of interference. She laughed and said her telepathy wasn’t that good.

Scott has no telepathy, but his mind's full of channels, full of static. And braided through it, surfacing and fading, distorted, incomprehensible, is her voice.

Denial. That's what comes first, when someone you love dies. You hear her voice everywhere, and you think she's alive, still alive under all that water at Alkali Lake and she needs you. You hear her voice, echoing where she used to be.

Every morning, Scott wakes up alone in the double bed between sheets she picked out, and he tells himself Jean's dead. Every day, walking past her classroom. Jean's dead. Every night, looking at the hamper of her dirty clothes and his, which he won't let anyone wash. Jean's dead. Time to do the laundry. Time to move on to anger, or bargaining, or whatever comes next. Time to let go.

And constantly, the radio dial in his head sweeps through the frequencies, and he hears her in
whispers and fragments.

He starts going out onto the grounds late at night. You always get better reception after dark.

One night very late--he thinks it's a Monday, but he's stopped teaching so he's not sure--he's sitting on a bench near the topiaries, listening. Tonight she's barely louder than the crickets and frogs, but clearer than usual. There are recognizable fricatives and plosives--bits, perhaps, of his name.

"Scott," another voice says, nearby, confusing him until he recognizes it.

"Logan." He doesn't open his eyes to see that Logan is really there. To see that Jean is really not. He's Scott Summers, Cyclops, leader of the X-Men, and he can deny anything. "Are you still following me around?"

With a grunt, Logan drops down onto the bench. All that adamantium makes him heavy; Scott feels the bench vibrate. "Guess so."

"Any chance of you stopping?"

"Not yet."

Scott doesn't ask why or when. Other people can't hear Scott's internal radio, but they can see Scott listening. "I came out here to be alone," he says, and opens his eyes. After so long in the double darkness, he can see Logan clearly. He looks like always. Like before. He doesn't forget to change his clothes or wash his hair, the way Scott does.

"I get how you'd need that. After being in your crowded bedroom all day."

While Logan talks, Jean's voice comes on in Scott's head. They harmonize, her voice and his. Maybe that's what she liked about him. It's a pleasant sound, and with one set of words Scott can understand, there's something less urgent about the other, shattered ones.

Logan takes out a cigar, clips the end, checks his pockets for a lighter, puts the cigar to the flame, puffs. Throughout this process, he gives Scott little glances, like he's expecting something.

Scott doesn't remember what until he gets his first whiff of the smoke. "That thing's disgusting. Go smoke it somewhere else."

But instead of going away, or arguing, Logan grins and stamps the cigar out on the paving stones. "I knew Scott Summers was still in there." He taps Scott's head.

Jean's voice has disappeared beneath the static. More evidence for the hypothesis Scott has been tentatively forming, which is that if he wants to really hear her, he'll have to go away. Far away from all these people with their questions and interruptions and everything they want from him, all well-meant, all dragging him into a world where she's silent and gone.

His motorcycle is tuned up and has a full tank; it's the one thing he's been able to bring himself to do.

How many tanks of gas to Alkali Lake? Does he have any money?

He closes his eyes to picture a map, and he's trying to estimate mileage when Logan's hand falls on the back of his neck and pulls him forward against Logan's body, into a cigar-smelling kiss.

"What the hell are you doing?"
Logan hasn't let him go. His whiskers and the broad flat of his shoulder make Scott think of the X-jet, of crying. "Scott, you can't do this to yourself."

"I'm not doing anything."

"Yeah." Another kiss, to his cheek this time. Maybe Jean liked this about him too, the gentleness, the way feeling it is like being let in on a secret. "Chuck can't run this school by himself. Anyway, you're like his fucking kid. It's driving him nuts that he can't help you."

"So you thought you'd help?" Scott says this practically into Logan's ear, because Logan's still got him, and Scott hasn't tried to move away. Somewhere outside himself, or deep inside, in the place that reminds him five times an hour that Jean's dead, he knows this is bizarre. Some aftereffect of trauma and grief. The rest of him just stays here, smelling school-issue laundry detergent under the cigar reek of Logan's clothes. Jean hated that detergent and bought something unscented for herself. After they started sharing a room, she made Scott use it too.

Did she ever get close enough to Logan to smell this?

"Did he send you?" Scott asks. It's not likely, but the professor's always said that when orthodox methods fail, one has to innovate.

"Yeah. Told me to kiss you and everything." Logan snorts, the way he does to show he's been around the block a few hundred times more than anybody else. "For a smartass, you can be a real dumbass."

Jean's voice floats up through the static for a half a syllable. Agreement? It's the sort of thing she'd say in fond exasperation, although she'd say it better.

Maybe Logan is like radio-Jean, harsh and indistinct but familiar, and that's why Scott has started to lean in. Head on Logan's shoulder, hands clutching Logan's arms. Logan is touching his hair. No one but Jean has ever done that. No one but Jean has ever kissed him.

"She loved you," Logan says.

"You should hate me."

"That'd make sense, yeah." Logan kisses him again, on the lips. Did he ever kiss Jean? Is there some whisper of her still on Logan's mouth, some trace that Logan's trying to give him? Scott opens his mouth for Logan's tongue, sucks on it, sweeps his own tongue over Logan's lips. Taking what's left of her, which is Logan. Which is Scott.

There's silence in his head. All he hears is Logan breathing.

"Come on. Come up to my room. Don't sit out here by yourself." Logan's holding him so tightly it hurts. His mouth feels bruised where Logan kissed him. In the morning, after Logan's metal-laced fingers have been touching him, he'll probably be bruised all over. It will, he thinks, feel good.

"In a minute." Scott says. "Give me a minute. Just let me - let me - "

"Okay." Slowly, like his arms have locked shut, Logan lets him go and walks off towards the mansion. He looks back once and smiles.

Scott is trembling. His body feels like the pictures in an anatomy book, every system isolated, made distinct. Circulation, the blood hot and pressurized through his arteries. Nerves, sparkling and illumined in traceries.
Arousal. This is what it feels like. He remembers it. The last time he and Jean had sex was the day before she died.

He doesn't think she had sex with Logan, but he could almost wish she had.

After a few minutes, he thinks his legs will carry him to the house. To Logan. He breathes, steadying himself. And again. And again.

Out of the quiet, the static fades in. And her voice above it, so faint that he freezes. The slightest move might block her. The slightest interference.

Scott sits in the darkness and listens. Waits for her message to come clear.

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