



Green Day

"Whatsername"

American Idiot

09/2003

Reprise

Remember Whatever

(for Elaine)

Gabrielle Gilbert

Let this be a love song for a love song / a love song for a sacrosanct song / something belonging to no one / except - let me claim this, just once / except for my friend and I and, my friends, this is / a love song we have saved // don't worry, it's just the house screaming

I wasn't going to write this yet. Eventually, sure, but not yet. Until I rolled over thinking of the things I have loved, the many people I have loved in varying degrees, what about them I had loved and carried with me even now. Thought of the songs, the ones that hurt to listen to, even as I had replayed them over the years, counting seconds until the fizzle in my nose turned to tears and ruined a perfectly good drive with my mother or friends, kind enough to ignore - testing myself - getting over and over. I think of songs ruined for me by boys. I think of girls who wouldn't let me dedicate anything to them. I think of choruses not loud enough, never loud enough.

I have gotten over and over, finally, and my blood, now, has a calm disposition, if maybe a little erratic at times. It was as I rolled over, yet again, under the dark skylight in my strange, liminal bedroom, that I remembered the paragon that is Green Day's "Whatsername." It was that conclusive miracle from *American Idiot* that I had found both buried under my bed and locked away in glass, like a shirt you see yourself wearing in a photograph, a favorite shirt, at that. Strange to remember the cotton once on your body, your parent's money spent once and once, so small - the cotton so soft and dirtied - how we all want that shirt back in our new sizes.

/Let this be a love song for us again/

I think of 2004 but remember almost nothing except for my best friend and this album. God knows who bought us *American Idiot* (had we stolen it?), but we read through that 4.5 x 4.5 lyric booklet like scripture, highlighting all the swear words we couldn't sing around our mothers, trying to figure out what Ritalin was and laughing at "moms and Brads." We had gone through many music phases, from Evanescence to the *Wicked* Soundtrack and our embarrassing pop punk phase (mine, admittedly, much more thorough than hers) but Green Day transformed our lives. As Billy Joe sings in "Homecoming," arms out and eyes closed, I imagine: "You tauuuught me how to live!" And live, we did, Elaine and I. This perfect album started it, through to the last note of "Whatsername." It was that song that, once we settled down after analyzing "Jesus of Suburbia" to death and reincarnation, we had the least amount of words for. We did have one thought: perfect. Wherever we were when Whatsername was playing, we would zoom right into it, into impetuous recitation of each syllable and echoed guitar strum.

It's a strange love song, to say the least. It rolls with me as I sleep. How it's dedicated to a nameless, faceless someone to which so much love is professed. Of course, *American Idiot* is a concept album, and an unrivaled one at that, in which many critics and fans have raved and theorized since its release, of youth and mislead ambition and bad habits, so much so that Green Day took it to Broadway.

"Whatsername," as a concluding anthem, is a sort of waking up from a long trip, the sunlight streaming through an apartment that's been dark for so long, with memories so euphoric that there is slippage of quotidian details. We remember how much love we felt, the realizations made that we struggle to hold onto, and the instincts we relearned and relished but, strangely, we forget who was there through it all; we forget simple identifying things like names and faces. It seemed contrary to me then, and still to me now, how one could possibly forget those things. They're essential details to the experience! I have always been one, though, to zoom out on the happiest moments of my life, fisheye it and mark it and then, only then, can I continue to enjoy it. I've been trying not to do that as much. Many times, it has been close-ups of me and Elaine singing in tune together. Of all the times Elaine and I have seen Green Day in concert together (four and counting), "Whatsername" has never been performed for us. I understand why. And when it was integrated on stage (which Elaine and I saw three times), even with the storyline realized right in front of us, it felt precious, still.

It's a song driven heavily by surreal nostalgia, as the best songs are. With so much distance and time and sobriety between the "I" and the "She" in "Whatsername," the confused details do not depreciate the feeling there once was - the purity of it, near dream. If anything, they romanticize it, driving the desire even more, though aimless on where to begin in the recreation of it. The song builds with the pulse of confession and smudged faces that resurface, not giving a shit whether it makes sense anymore, and ends on a final acknowledgement that nothing similarly golden may happen again, that love may not reach those standards risen by someone you can't even remember, not fully. *American Idiot* ends the way it began - with a frustrated ache.

We vowed, Elaine and I, when we were very young that we would reserve "Whatsername." Give it to no one, dedicate no memories to it, that way, it wouldn't get ruined by any boys or girls who wouldn't appreciate it or us. It's meaning has warped around itself again and again over the years, but through us alone. I realize, though, after fourteen years, that I, at least, have failed in my promise. Elaine and I can pretend that no one else has heard "Whatsername" as much as we want, though delusional. At the end of the day, "Whatsername" belongs to her and I, as a unit, as friends, as syndicates to the frustrated ache, the surreal nostalgia, and to old friends that grow within you and without you.