

Static

By Kelsey Sha

“Bzzzzzzzz...pzzaat, bzzzzz”

“Dammit!” She slammed her fist down on the roof of the cassette player—a Vintage 80’s Conic Portable Radio Cassette Player and Recorder, one of boss’ favorites.

“Pssssat, bzzzzz... bzz, it-”

For a second, she heard a smooth fragment of the recording. Then, it was gone—leaving just shards of broken noise scattered in a boundless field of static.

Damaged, she noted in the inventory.

Ejecting the tape, she tossed it into a burlap sack sitting by her feet, then turned back to the box of yellowed miscellaneous tapes waiting patiently on the bottom left shelf of the storage room. She peered down into the half-emptied box, searching for her next victim. A crease formed between her brows as her attention was drawn to a tape of a particularly inconspicuous grey, submerged in a sea of other inconspicuously grey tapes—yet somehow still managing to stand out just the same. She reached in and picked it up, dusting off the sides with the hem of her dirt-stained uniform—a shirt no cleaner than anything else in the room.

The cassette had the words *Kathryn Monroe* scrawled across the front on a piece of masking tape.

“Kathryn Monroe...” she muttered to herself.

That, as far as she’s aware, was her name. Intrigued, she placed the tape into the cassette slot and briskly shut the door. Pressing play, she took a step back and waited with as much patience as a child outside a candy store was capable of garnering. Then, smooth as a piece of glass rounded by the lapping beach waves, the blasé voice of a man filled the room.

“Name?” the voice asked.

“Kathryn Monroe,” a meek voice responded.

“And address?”

“1346 Linden Valley.” The timid voice came again.

“Do you have any previous job experience in audio stores?”

“No sir, I just graduated from college but I used to wo...pzzaat, bzzzzz...”

She slammed her fist down once again, but that was that. The glass had shattered into tiny pieces, waiting for some unsuspecting fool to fall victim to its ear-piercing crackle. But though she had just punched through a radio and her knuckles should probably be throbbing right about now, her mind was somewhere else altogether.

That voice she heard, though a little higher than usual, was hers—she was almost certain of it. *So how come she had no memory of it?*

“Dammit!”

She knocked herself on the head in frustration, then decided she was to go find her boss and try to clear things up. Turning to the exit, she tugged on the handle, and as she stepped out of the room, she wondered why the hefty door had seemed so much lighter.

Walking into the shopping area, she peered around on her tiptoes. Who was she looking for again? Her boss, was it? *Wait... what does he look like?* She scoured her mind for clues but found it devoid of anything. Dropping back down onto her heels, she sighed, yet again. Then, the address came falling into the emptiness, like the first burger Flint saw raining down from the sky. *1346 Linden Valley.* Why she had it fully memorized she didn't know, but she couldn't be bothered to figure it out. Without another thought, she marched out onto the street. Can you really just ditch work like that? Who knows. But hey, might as well.

Minutes later, she found herself standing outside a sizable two-storied frame house, designed without the least bit of imagination. She made her way up the set of sagging wooden steps and onto the front porch. The door was of a particularly disagreeable yellow, with a tint of nauseous green. There was no doorbell in sight, so she gave it a knock. No response—not even the creak of a floorboard. Stumped, she decided to take a stroll around back, to the rear gate opening to the back yard. She gave it a promising push but it refused to budge. Crestfallen, she made her way back towards the front porch. As she sauntered past the garden, she bent down, like a sleepwalking child deep in trance, and reached under a

nondescript stone. She felt her hand tighten around the edges of a rectangular prism. Then, the fragile equilibrium of the conscious and unconscious ruptured. She hesitantly retrieved her hand and found herself holding a pocket-sized box. After studying it for a split second, she tore open the lid. Inside sat a shapely pair of keys, fettered by a rusted keychain. *Too late to turn back now.* She seized the keys and went straight for the door.

Raising the left key to the slot, she found them as compatible as chalk and cheese. She tried the other, and this time around, it slid in perfectly. Turning the key, she gave a slight push and the door gave with a weary groan, followed by a booming thud as it slammed onto the thick gritty carpet. Dust flew up in a gust of wind as a blast of mustiness—that damp smell of winter sweaters—filled her nostrils. For a split second, she thought she saw a flash of a fully furnished interior with polished wooden floors and a Persian rug that laid neatly across the center, well lit under the diffused sunlight streaming in from the windows. Then, the dust rose to eye level and she found herself staring into a decrepit entryway, with the door laying lifeless on the ground. The furnishings—or what was left of them—were all covered in ashen sheets that had, in all probability, once been white. She blinked in confusion, having sworn she saw a grand foyer just seconds ago. Rubbing her temples, she sighed, then stepped in.

After treating herself to a tour of the first floor, she made her way up to the second. And as if by some sort of muscle memory, she found herself approaching one particular spot—a carved-out door on the side of a seemingly ordinary hallway. She gave the door a push but found it locked. Then, she remembered the keys clenched tightly in her hand. *Perhaps...* Trying the left key, she found it a perfect fit. *Nice.*

The door opened to the first few steps of a staircase. Where it led she had no clue, for it was engulfed in a numbing darkness. And like any character in a horror movie, she began up the stairs—with her flashlight turned on, of course. She might be a little strange but she's not stupid. Soon, she reached the top and found herself standing in an attic barely big enough to exhale into. Once again, she felt pulled to a precise spot in the room. Going along with her instincts, she grabbed onto what seemed to be a piece of fabric and flung it aside. Light flooded into the room as the cloth came flying off and fell in slow motion

through the vortex of dust in the previously stagnant air. The walls shriveled up, as if taken aback by the sudden brilliance—but she was too busy looking at the dusty particles that reflected the sun-rays to notice. *How pretty.* It was like seeing the first snow. Then, she snapped out of her trance. In a corner of the room sat a couple of boxes. She walked over and was unsurprised by those same words written across them. *Kathryn Monroe.* Opening the nearest, she saw a picture—a wedding picture, her wedding picture. *Had she been married?* She looked down at her hands and now saw a ring sitting on the base of her left ring finger. *Had that always been there?*

Then, it all came flooding back—the light re-entered her long starved mind. This had been her home. She had been pregnant. She had been in pain. She remembered the shouts of the surgeons, the cramp of her stomach, the echo of cries—hers, quickly followed by that of another, that of a baby, her baby. Then, came the slowing beep of a heart monitor, followed by a vast expanse of nothingness. She had died on the operating table, without ever seeing her baby girl.

When she regained awareness of her surroundings, she found herself standing by a Weeping Willow. *There's a pond just on the other side,* she recalled. She used to come here as a child whenever she was upset, then later on with him. This was their spot. As she started towards the pond, she froze. A soft laughter sounded from afar—the laughter of a man and a little girl. She recognized that deep laugh of his—that settling laugh she had fallen in love with. The wind picked up, and through the billowing of the leaves, she caught a glimpse of them. Tears welled up in her eyes as she stood there, unable to feel. Then, she smiled and took a step back. The tears slid down her cheeks and landed on the grass.

Amidst the susurrantion of the leaves, the man looked up. There was no one there. Perhaps there never was.