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RADIO REBEL

BY

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**PROFESSOR LEILA MANSOURI
PROFESSOR THOMAS KOENIGS**

DECEMBER 15, 2021

It's surprisingly sunny on the day Edith gets arrested.

She'd flung open the worn curtains to let in light as she sorted through the last stack of tapes in the box, relishing in one of her rare off days from work. With luck, she thought, as she went through the familiar motions of sliding a tape into the tape player, hitting play, and taking notes on the music contained within, she'd be able to complete the massive undertaking of sorting the tapes tonight. There weren't many left, as she'd dedicated almost all of her free time to listening to the tapes that Reina had left behind, but even so, it had been a huge box. She and Reina had struggled to carry it into her apartment when she'd first moved in.

A soft but insistent knock on her door rouses her from her muddled thoughts of nostalgia and music (currently, she's playing something electric and syrupy, an odd combination but Edith thinks she likes it), and Edith rolls off her lumpy couch to answer the door. There's only one person who would come to visit her, and sure enough, the somber face of Karina greets her when she opens the door. Edith wordlessly steps aside to let her in.

"Did you hear?" Karina asks as soon as the door is shut behind her. "The protests last night got really intense. The Black Cast said that at least thirty people were taken in. Two of their reporters got caught."

Edith eyes the illegal tapes scattered on her floor. If anyone were to see those, she'd be caught and arrested faster than she could count to ten. "Should I close the curtains? Are those visible from the outside?"

"You're on the third floor; it's hard to see in." Karina runs a hand through her hair. "Actually, maybe you should."

“It’s a nice day out.” Even so, Edith pads over and tugs the curtains so they’re half-shut.

“You think that’s good?”

Karina nods. “It should be okay. I don’t know if you’re on the government’s radar, since you’re not providing actual information. Your radio is just a place for illegal music.”

“And a lot of it is older,” Edith adds. “Not much recent stuff.”

“Oh yeah.” Karina rummages around in her purse. “I’ve got three new recordings for you—one from me, two from a friend. You can play them if you want.”

“Put them on the counter.” Edith jerks her head in that direction. “Do you need anything else?”

Karina opens her mouth as if to say something, but then closes it. Something flashes across her face, and Edith waits for her to work out whatever it was that she wanted to say.

Eventually, she says, “Look, I was wondering if—”

Before Karina can say finish her sentence, however, there’s a sharp knock on the door. Both women freeze and stare at each other.

“Expecting anyone?” Karina whispers.

“Nope.” Edith shuts the tape player off. “I’ll answer it. You hide.” She walks to the door and cracks it open, only to be greeted with the serious face of a police officer. Her first instinct is to slam the door shut. Her second instinct is to step outside and hold the door loosely behind her.

She goes with the latter.

“...can I help you?” she asks, praying that Karina’s eavesdropping.

“Yes, actually.” The officer gives Edith a bored smile. “I’m looking for an Edith Huang? Is this her place of residence?”

“...Whatever for?” Edith asks faintly.

“I have a warrant out for her arrest,” the officer explains, and Edith feels her heart drop.

She should have sent Karina to answer the door.

“Can I ask why?” Edith asks.

“For running an illegal radio station,” the officer replies, peering at her. “You are her, are you not?”

Well, shit.

Edith smiles weakly and tries to think of any way out of it. If she went inside and snuck out through the window, the officer would surely follow her through her apartment, and she’d risk Karina getting caught as well. If she bolted outside...there’s probably officers surrounding the building, in case she tried to run.

Plus, she isn’t that athletic to begin with. The police would probably catch her before she made it to the end of the block.

“Yes,” she says, finally. “I...okay. Shall we go?”

The officer produces a pair of handcuffs and clips them to Edith’s wrists before guiding her out. Edith doesn’t look back at her apartment as she is led to the officer’s car and helped into the backseat. She hopes that Karina heard enough of the conversation to guess what had happened and know that she should run now while she still had the chance.

As she’s driven away from her home and down to the police station, Edith closes her eyes and wonders what she’s supposed to do now.



The police give her perfunctory explanations. They immediately send her to a temporary cell for a day or two while they bustle in and out, asking her for her basic information, and adding her to their database. They take her thumbprint and numerous photos of her face. Edith lets them order her around and get the information they need. No one asks her about the radio (at least, not yet), so she is content to ignore the elephant in the room and comply with their demands instead.

After that, she is informed that they will be transferring her to the Gnires prison, effective in two days.

“Am I allowed to go home before that?” Edith asks.

She’s given a clear no, with no real explanation. Edith slumps in her cell and waits for her transfer, picking at the threads in her clothes and wondering what’s going to happen.

It would strike her as odd that she’s not being given a trial or anything, but she knows that the government’s been less transparent with their justice process, given the rise in protests over...well, nearly everything at this rate. That’s been one of the issues people have been bringing up. She’s heard it mentioned on the Black Cast.

So she spends the next few days internally complaining about how she’s stuck in jail until they transfer her, and wondering if she’s going to rot away, forgotten, for the remainder of her life.

That thought isn’t as bad as she thinks it should be.

Eventually, they collect her for the transfer. She’s bundled into a truck with several others. None of them make for interesting conversation partners, and so Edith remains quiet as she is taken away. Once there, everyone is unloaded and sent to solitary cells—“It’s the standard

treatment for everyone here; you're lucky to get space all to yourselves", or so they tell them. Edith thinks that's nonsense, and that they're looking to dishearten them so that they're pliant for whatever future torment they have in store. But it'll be okay, she reasons with herself. She'd dealt with the thick wash of depression that had coated every inch of her life when Reina had disappeared, was familiar with the ways you could lose track of time and spend hours doing nothing when you should be doing something.

She could handle it again.

She had to be able to handle it again.



Reina's radio station—Worm Father, she'd called it—was a project that Edith wasn't supposed to get involved with.

"It's for *my* dad," Reina had said after Edith had asked her what she needed help with. "Look, I know it was your idea, but this?" She'd gestured wildly. "This wasn't what he wanted."

"Then why'd you even tell me that he left you all this music?" Edith had demanded, gesturing at the open cardboard box full of illegal tapes. "Why would you even let me listen to them if I'm not supposed to hear it? Are you even going to let me listen to all of them?"

"Because!" Reina had been near tears at that point. "I didn't know I was going to be broadcasting them for him to hear!"

Edith had closed her eyes. "Fine. Fine. I should go, then. So that way we're both not incriminated in this mess."

At that, Reina had rolled her eyes. "It's not...illegal...kind of." Edith had arched her eyebrow, and Reina had frowned back, before acquiescing with, "Alright, it is technically illegal,

and that's why my mom wants to get rid of all of this. But he's out there! I know he is. If I could just get a message..." She'd trailed off. "I just want him to know that I'm waiting."

"You really think he'll hear you?"

"He will." Reina held out the tapes that she'd selected. "I've got the equipment, see?" She'd gestured to the corner of her room, which had been cleared up and set with equipment that at the time, Edith hadn't known the name of. Looking back, though, she recognized that Reina had a ridiculous amount of supplies: a large transmitter and an antenna and a soundboard and a headset complete with a microphone and some other pieces that hadn't survived the move. Reina hadn't been willing to sacrifice for this project.

"It'll be fine," Reina had continued. "Just...can you hang out with me?"

"And do what?" Edith had asked.

"Take notes or something." Reina shrugged. "I don't know. Just don't leave me, please."

You want me to stay with you but you don't want me to actually help you run the station, Edith had thought bitterly, but instead of saying any of that, she simply sat down on Reina's floor and wordlessly pulled out a notebook.

"Thanks," Reina said. "Um...wish me luck?"

"Good luck." Edith hadn't managed to give her a smile. "I'm sure you'll be fine."

Reina had nodded before turning her attention to the radio set-up.

That show had been the first of many. Edith hadn't been there for all of them, but Reina had said that she hadn't minded having company and Edith didn't know how to turn her down. So that became their routine, even though Edith had backed out of hanging around while Reina ran her broadcast whenever she could.

It got worse, Edith supposed, when they'd gone to college. The catch here was that only Reina had gone; Edith had chosen to quit schooling. She'd had a huge fight with her parents over it, and it had ended with them telling her in no uncertain terms that she was going to have to fend for herself if she didn't go to college.

Edith had accepted the consequences and immediately began looking for work. Reina had been supportive, sending Edith as many job openings as she could find and helping her search for apartments so that she wouldn't be homeless. It had taken Edith a while before she realized that Reina was only sending her listings located in the same city that she was going to go to college.

"Hey, Reina," she'd asked. "Why is everything by your school?"

"This way we'll still be close," Reina had said. "You don't have anywhere to go, right?"

Now, Edith punched the flat pillow that had been provided her. Didn't have anywhere to go. It might have been true, because fresh-out-of-high school Edith certainly didn't know what she was doing. Her parents had been hoping she would reconsider if they cut her off.

Edith had refused to even consider re-thinking her decision.

Reina, ever the opportunist, had convinced Edith to go to the same city. Edith hadn't even figured out the real reason until Reina was helping her move in.

"I'll move into the dorms next week," Reina had said. "So...could you...help me move the radio sometime before that?"

"Move the what?" Edith had asked, nearly dropping her suitcase.

"The radio?" Reina had squeaked. She had the decency to look guilty. "Like...to here? Because it's not going to fit in my dorm, and there's no way my mom's going to let it stay there

while I'm gone. She'll get rid of all of it. So would you mind helping me? Just until I can get a place of my own? It'll be temporary, I promise."

Edith opened her mouth to say no, but something stopped her from doing so.

Really, she thought, she owed a lot of her current situation to Reina. It was Reina who had helped her look for housing, Reina who had helped her look for a job, and Reina who had helped her move in. And they'd continue to be friends, now, since they were still in the same city. Edith's apartment was decently close to Reina's school. It would work out.

"Please," Reina added.

So against her better judgement, Edith had closed her eyes, swallowed down her protests, and said, "Fine. But it's going to be in the living room, not my bedroom."

"Of course!" Reina had been quick to agree. "You're the best, Edith!"

And then a year later she'd vanished, leaving Edith all alone with an illegal radio station in her apartment.

Edith wants to scream. All of that, and for what? For her to get stuck in a cold prison cell with nothing but a slightly scratchy wool blanket for warmth? While Reina was...

Edith rolls over on the mattress and wraps the blanket tighter around her shoulders. It didn't matter. She'd figure something out. She had to.

She manages a fitful sleep, plagued by memories of Reina.

When she wakes up the next morning, she doesn't do anything, content to lie on the squeaky mattress and drift in and out of sleep. No one's coming for her, she thinks, and it's hard to keep track of time in solitary confinement.

When Reina had vanished, at least there'd been things to focus on. Here, there was nothing.

Which is why she's still half-asleep when her cell door is opened and a guard comes in.

"Up," the guard orders, and Edith squints through bleary eyes and tries to work out what's going on.

"You're wanted for questioning," the guard says when Edith doesn't move.

"Huh?" Edith lifts her head up and pushes some of her bleached hair out of her face.

"What? Me?"

The guard sighs. "Yes, you. They're going to interrogate you now."

It takes Edith a moment to process those words, but once she does, she's scrambling out and off her mattress. The guard cuffs her wrists together before leading her through several different hallways until they reach a plain metal door. Edith is unceremoniously told to get inside before the door slams shut, leaving her alone in an unfamiliar room.

She cautiously looks around, taking stock of the white painted cinderblock walls and lack of any windows. A shudder runs through her body—at least her cell has a window, barred as it may be. There's nothing on the ceiling, save for a surprisingly bright lightbulb dangling from a short black wire. The only furniture in the room are two metal folding chairs with a plastic table in between them.

Edith pokes at the ground with her shoe. Grey concrete, with a silver drain set in the middle. There are dark red stains around it, and another shudder races down her spine. It's not a promising sight.

She paces the room for a bit, looking up at the ceiling and the walls for any cameras, but she doesn't see anything that suggests that she's being monitored. Even so, after making a few rounds of the small room, she settles down in one of the chairs, and waits for whoever they'd decided will interrogate her to arrive.

After what feels like hours, the door opens and a man with bushy eyebrows and a square jaw enters the room.

"Hello," he says, his voice a deep rumble. "I am Officer Brackendale, and I'll be your interrogations officer for today."

Edith just blinks at him.

Brackendale doesn't seem to mind her silence, as he sits down himself and pulls out an empty notebook, a surprisingly thick file that's bursting with papers, and a tape recorder. He then fumbles around in his pocket and eventually produces a pen.

"This interrogation will be recorded," he tells her once he's gotten his things organized.

Edith nods. It's not like she has much say in the matter.

Brackendale is quiet for a few more minutes, flipping through the file. He hums a little as he does, and Edith taps her fingers against her knees as she waits for him to be finished with his pre-interrogation ritual.

"Alright, let's start with the basics. What's your name?" Brackendale asks.

"Edith."

"Full name, if you please." The pleasant edge to his voice is already fading.

"...Edith Marie Huang."

Brackendale hums and makes a note in the file. "Age?"

“Twenty-two.”

“You’re quite young for this.”

Edith shrugs and doesn’t respond. Brackendale doesn’t seem like he expected her to, as he easily continues with the interrogation.

“Where did you live?”

“An apartment complex in Ddahl.”

Brackendale nods and makes more notes. “Nice city, isn’t it?”

Edith just shrugs again. Brackendale doesn’t seem bothered by her unresponsiveness. Perhaps all interrogations are like this. Or maybe they’d mentioned it in her file, that she always gave them the bare minimum whenever asked. Maybe it was a little of both.

He continues looking at her file, silence settling over them. Edith tries not to fidget in her chair.

“Just a few more basic information questions. What school did you go to?”

“Graduated from Votrevel High.”

“Nice,” Brackendale says, writing down her answer. “It says here with honors?”

“Yeah.” Part of why her parents had been so mad that she’d chosen to skip college, honestly. They’d thought she was throwing away her smarts.

“What about college?” Brackendale asks.

“I didn’t go.”

At that, Brackendale looks up from the file to frown at her. “Why didn’t you go to college?”

Edith frowns right back. “That’s a little personal, don’t you think?”

Brackendale scoffs. “Just answer the question.”

Edith’s frown deepens. “It’s just...not...something I was interested in.”

“Elaborate.” Brackendale’s gaze is cold as he stares her down. “What made you decide to quit but move so close to one anyways?”

Edith closes her eyes and tilts her head back. “I hate school,” she confesses to the ceiling. She’d only confessed this to Reina; giving everyone else half-hearted shrugs and vague explanations whenever they asked why she hadn’t chosen to go to college. “I hate it so, so much. I don’t know how anyone can get through that shit without killing themselves. Not going to college was probably one of the best decisions of my life.”

Maybe they’ll take her honesty at face value and realize that she was a college dropout for reasons that were very much unrelated to a certain radio station.

Brackendale scribbles something down in his notebook. Edith is only aware of the action because she can hear the scratching of his pen on the paper. She keeps her eyes closed and her head tilted back and braces herself for the next question. This interrogation isn’t about her parents, or why she didn’t go to college.

“Did your decision to quit school have anything to do with the Worm Father radio station?” Brackendale asks.

Edith pulls herself back so that she’s no longer staring at the ceiling. “Nope.”

“Hm.” Brackendale flips through the file. “Because the radio station has been running since around the time you would have graduated.” He pauses. “When did you graduate, anyways?”

“Almost four years ago.”

“That’s about the length of time that the radio station has been running for.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Edith replies, resisting the urge to correct him. Reina’s radio station was started about half a year before she and Edith had graduated. She would know—she’d been there when it started.

“Miss Huang.” Brackendale puts his pen down to look at her. “You’re being held for suspected illegal activity, namely, the running of an illegal radio station which did, in fact, play music that was not authorized by the government or any existing record labels. The radio station in question is called Worm Father, and the police have gathered sufficient evidence to incriminate you as the sole host of the show.”

Edith just nods. What Brackendale said to her was almost exactly what they’d told her when they informed her of her transfer from the station to the prison. In fact, she’s pretty sure the wording was the same.

“I didn’t start the radio station,” she replies.

“But you were involved with it,” Brackendale presses. “They found equipment and tapes at your apartment in Ddahl.”

“...I was storing it,” Edith says after a moment.

Brackendale’s face looks unimpressed. Edith wonders what he’d say if she told him the truth: that Reina had basically coerced her into storing it at her apartment until she’d disappeared, and that was when Edith finally started to run the radio station.

Well, she hadn’t really coerced her, had she? Reina had said please, after all.

“Storing it,” Brackendale repeats. “An illegal radio station. And a really large box of tapes, all of which were unauthorized and rejects. You were storing all of that in your apartment.”

“...yes?”

“And am I expected to believe that someone else came over to run it?” He arches an eyebrow at her.

Edith shrugs. It sounds ridiculous, when Brackendale says it like that. But that’s exactly what happened...at least while Reina had been there to run it.

“Yeah.”

“Well then.” Brackendale looks distinctly unimpressed. “Who ran it?”

“Reina Tanaka,” Edith says easily.

“Reina...Tanaka...” Brackendale flips through the file. “Who is she? How do you know her?”

“My best friend.” Edith can’t help the fond smile that crosses her face. “We’ve been friends since high school.”

A look of confusion crosses Brackendale’s face. “Reina Tanaka ran the radio station?”

“Yeah.” Edith nods. “Her father worked for the government. He was one of the ones who approved whether or not music was published or not. That’s where all the tapes came from.”

“Tanaka,” Brackendale mutters. “Where have I heard that name before?”

“It’s sort of a common name,” Edith supplies. It’s true; she can think of at least one other Tanaka who’d gone to her high school. But Brackendale doesn’t seem convinced.

“Tell me about her,” Brackendale prompts.

“We’ve been friends since we first met,” Edith says. “A lot of people thought we’d known each other before high school, but no, we met on the first day. She graduated in the same year as me, with honors as well. She got accepted to Nainijeh, to study engineering.”

Brackendale looks up at her, and Edith stops talking.

“...was Reina Tanaka the one who set fire to Argenta Hall at Nainijeh College?”

Brackendale asks slowly.

Edith blinks. “What?”

“The Argenta Hall fire, from two years ago.” Brackendale’s gaze is steely. “I assume you’ve heard of it, given that you live pretty close to the school.” Edith feels her heart race. “Is your Reina Tanaka the same one who started that fire?”

“I...well...she...” Edith winces.

“Did she start that fire?” Brackendale asks.

“She didn’t start it!” Edith blurts out. “She wouldn’t have!”

“So it is the same one.” Brackendale writes something down in his notebook. “You are aware that she died in that fire, aren’t you?”

“I attended her funeral,” Edith whispers. “I know what happened.”

“Then why are you claiming that she ran the radio station? Even if she had, she died two years ago, Miss Huang. There is no way for her to have continued run it, unless you are saying that she’s secretly alive somehow.”

Edith’s shoulders slump. “She...died,” she says quietly, looking down at her shackled wrists. “That’s what they told me. Her mom said that there wasn’t much of her body left to bury, but she buried what was there. I did go to the funeral.” She swipes at her eyes with the back of

her hand. “If she is alive, I haven’t seen her.” Her voice cracks at the end of that statement. “But she did start it.”

“The Argenta Hall fire, you mean.” Brackendale makes another note in his notebook.

“They declared her to be the culprit.”

“And the radio,” Edith adds. She swallows the lump in her throat. “It was hers. There’s not much space in a dorm room, you know. Since we were best friends, and I wasn’t going to school...” She trails off. “It just made sense.”

Brackendale hums. “Interesting,” he says after a moment. “Thank you for that, Miss Huang.”

Reina would be so mad, if she knew that Edith had told. Edith stares at her hands and tries not to feel the guilt churning in her stomach.

It was true, after all. Reina died two years ago in a fire that had burnt half of the building.

She just couldn’t believe that Reina would have been the one to start it.

“Is there anything else that you would like to share about the Worm Father radio station?”

Brackendale asks, drawing Edith out of her thoughts.

“...no,” she says softly.

“Then I believe that will be all.” Brackendale shuts both the file and his notebook. He turns off the tape recorder as well, then gathers up his things. “Wait here until you are escorted back to your cell.”

Edith doesn’t say anything as Brackendale leaves. She keeps her head down and twists her fingers and wrists as best she can, restrained as they are. After what feels like forever, but in reality is probably only around five minutes, the door swings open and a different guard appears

in the doorway. This one doesn't even bother with niceties, just immediately grabs her arm and starts dragging her back to her cell. Edith goes along without complaint, letting her body be moved roughly down the halls.

“Oi! Who do you think you are?” A voice shouts, and Edith hears a pained grunt. There's more shouting, and the noise is getting louder as she is dragged down towards it.

The guard yanks her around the corner, and Edith takes in the scuffle before her. A woman is trying to punch her guard. Even with her hands cuffed together, it looks like she's succeeding. Edith frowns. Something about the woman's form seems familiar...but...

Her guard glares at her but releases her arm. “Stay here,” he snaps, and rushes forward to rescue his fellow guard.

The prisoner turns around, and Edith takes in the familiar face of Karina Yoo. Edith feels her heart sink.

So Karina hadn't gotten out, then.

She raises her wrists and flashes her a short wave.

Recognition flashes across Karina's face when she sees her, and she immediately whips her head in the opposite direction. Edith's jaw drops as she avoids giving her a second glance, instead keeping her back to her as he dodges backwards from the guards. She tries to move away from her, but the guards advance on her, pushing her closer into her space.

A pained grunt erupts from Karina as one of the guards catches her in the face, and something slips out of his jumpsuit. Karina doesn't seem to notice, instead, focusing on attempting to push past the guards. There's a brief shoving match, but Edith's attention is captured by the tape, which clatters unceremoniously and unnoticed to the ground. Around her

there is yelling and pushing, but no one pays attention to Edith or the tape. Unless you count Karina's pointed avoidance, which Edith decides doesn't count.

She knows she saw her though. There's no way Karina hadn't seen her.

Edith eyes the tape while Karina breaks through between the guards. It stares back at her from the ground, daring her to grab it. The tape she had swiped earlier burns against her skin.

Don't move, her guard had said. If she bends down to pick it up, it'll be too obvious. They'll want to know why she moved.

After a moment of hesitation, she collapses onto her right side, knees smashing into the concrete with an exaggerated pained cry. Her body falls across the tape, and she wriggles her hands around until her fingers close over it.

"Fuck, what's wrong with her?!" one of the guards yells. Edith lies on the ground, squirming as she shoves the tape into her jumpsuit. Overhead, she hears Karina running, and the guards yelling, both about her and Karina. Another punch echoes overhead, followed by a loud grunt. Edith simply closes her eyes, rests her cheek on the dirty cement floor, and smiles.

A tape, she thinks, feeling giddy. As of right now, she doesn't have anything to play it on, but it's better than nothing. She presses the tape against her skin and lets the guard escort her back to her cell.



A long, long time ago—nearly a decade, but not quite enough years had passed yet—Edith had met Reina Tanaka for the first time.

It was the first day of high school, the period right before lunch to be exact. Already out of her element, even though they'd only had four classes, Edith had silently slipped into her desk

and was fiddling with her pencils, switching the placement as she waited for class to begin. She didn't give her classmates a second glance, not even realizing when a girl dropped into the seat in front of her.

"Hey," the girl had said, turning around in her desk and giving Edith her biggest brightest smile. Edith had looked up from her pencils, something halfway to a frown on her face. Reina's smile remained undeterred. "My name's Reina. What's your name?"

Edith shrugged. "I'm Edith," she'd said softly, still shifting her pencils around.

Reina snickered. "Edith?" she'd asked. "I didn't know people were still named that."

Edith's mouth curled into a frown, the way it wanted to the moment Reina turned around to talk to her. "I am."

"Clearly." Reina leaned back in her chair and gave Edith a critical glance. She must have liked whatever she saw in Edith, however, because her face relaxed and she had added, "Anyways, we have lunch after this. Want to eat together?"

And Edith, relieved that someone was talking to her, had stopped frowning and slowly gave Reina a shy grin of her own. "Sure," she said.

Before Reina could say anything more, their teacher walked in, and Reina had turned around, but she gave Edith a quick smile and a wink before she did.

After class ended, Reina waited for Edith to put her pencils back in their case, and then she'd grabbed Edith's arm and dragged her out to the cafeteria. "Come on," she'd said. "The way I see it, we have to get a table now, to establish dominance."

“Oh?” Edith asked, letting Reina tug her along. She hadn’t realized there would be so many politics in high school. Or social hierarchies. But Reina seemed to know what she was doing, so Edith would trust her.

“Everyone’s going to be fighting for a place to sit,” Reina said practically, “As well as food. The food, of course, will be their priority, so if we can stake out a good spot to sit, then we can emerge as winners on the high school social scene.”

Edith blinked. “What?”

“Place is everything. You don’t want to sit next to the trash cans—” Reina wrinkled her nose. “—or too close to the door, but we’re freshmen so I don’t think we can sit in the middle of the room, but we don’t want to sit in the back—”

“Hey,” Edith had said, cutting Reina off. She’d been looking around the room, only half-paying attention to Reina’s beliefs about high school lunch placements. “There’s a spot under that window. It has a good view.”

Reina opened her mouth to protest, but then her gaze fell on the table. It wasn’t bad, at least, not in Edith’s opinion. It wasn’t too close to the trash can and it was somewhere in the middle-ish of the room, albeit closer to the wall.

“...I suppose.” Reina had sighed and flopped dramatically down onto one of the seats. “Yeah, this is good.” She’d started rummaging around in her backpack and pulled out a purple plastic lunch container. “So! Tell me about yourself. If you were a bug, which one would you be?”

Edith had blinked. “A bug?”

“Yeah, like—” Reina waved her hand in the air. “Would you be basic? A butterfly, a ladybug, a dragonfly? Would you be edgier? Like a spider?”

“Aren’t spiders arachnids?” Edith had asked. “So they aren’t...technically...bugs?”

Reina narrowed her eyes in response. “Shut up and answer the question.”

Edith hummed to herself as she thought over Reina’s question. Finally, she said, “I guess I’d be a beetle. Just a regular beetle, nothing special. Pretty when the light hits it, like the blue-green ones, but otherwise kind of plain.”

“Huh.” Reina leaned back and eyed Edith again. “You know, everyone always picks something they think is cool or pretty. I don’t think anyone’s ever chosen beetle before.”

“There’s a first for everything.” Edith shrugged. “So? What bug would you be?”

Reina had paused then. “You know, no one ever asks me that. I’m the one asking them.”

“Well, I’m asking.”

Reina had giggled in response. “You are, aren’t you?” She rested her head on her chin and smiled brightly at Edith. “Well, I’d like to be a worm.”

“...a worm?”

“Worms are great!” Reina beamed. “They’re really good for the earth and they’re nice and wriggly and I like to put them on my face.”

“Oh.” Edith blinked. “Okay. I get that.” She hadn’t, not really, but in that moment she didn’t want Reina to look away. “You’re wriggly like one,” she added, just to keep the conversation going. “And your limbs are all noodly, too.”

Reina’s jaw dropped. “That...I do not wriggle.”

Edith thought of how Reina had shifted in her chair all throughout their last class. Maybe she shouldn't have said that, true as it was.

But instead of taking it back, she blurted out, "Are you sure about that?"

"Yes!" Reina rocked back and forth on her chair. "I mean, I like worms, but saying I'm wriggly..."

"You're wriggling right now." Edith paused. "I thought that was a good thing. You're the one who said that you wanted to be a worm."

"...I guess." Reina frowned. "Well, Beetle—"

"Wait, why are you calling me Beetle?"

"Because you want to be a beetle?" Reina blinked. "Just call me Worm if it bothers you."

Edith nodded. "Okay, Worm."

The expression on Reina's face is something she'd cherish for years. Even now, the memory of it still brings a fond smile to Edith's face, and she rolls over the shitty mattress in her cell with a soft smile.

In comparison, her first meeting with Karina had been...more explosive, perhaps. Messier. Because the first time Edith met Karina, she was drunk.

Well, no. Edith tries to reason with herself—she hadn't been drunk, just a little tipsy, enough to ease the jagged-edged grief that clung to her bones.

It took a lot of alcohol for her to get over the sad stage and hit the softer, happier stage.

Perhaps she should admit that she really had passed that stage and was decidedly drunk when Karina dropped down in the stool next to her, black jacket sliding off one shoulder to reveal a tattoo of tree outlined there. When Edith glanced down, she saw a pleated leather skirt,

ripped fishnets, and laced up boots that ended just below her knees. Her dark hair was short and silky, cut into a severe bob. She didn't spare Edith a second glance as she slid one dark blue-nailed hand across the bar, card pressed underneath.

"Start me a tab," she'd said, voice low and slightly raspy. Edith was enchanted. "And get me a glass of whiskey, neat."

"You're drinking straight whiskey?" Edith had blurted out, and the woman had turned to her, dark eyes narrowing as she took Edith in. Her pink lipgloss was smudged but that didn't detract from how utterly terrifying she looked as she stared at Edith. Even so, Edith hadn't backed down.

In a way, it kind of reminded her of Reina, wanting to know why she was calling her a worm.

"That shit's nasty," Edith had said, because drunk her had lost her brain to mouth filter. "Like, at least get something sweet if you're going to suffer."

"And who are you?" the woman asked.

Edith blinked, and felt her drunken courage collapse under the weight of the woman's stare. "...someone with better taste than you?" she had offered after a second.

To her surprise, the woman laughed. It softened her features, giving the fierce line of her mouth a gentle edge.

"Sure," she'd said. "I like my whiskey, though. You keep your sugary drinks for yourself."

Edith can't recall what else they spoke about, or when she learned that the woman was called Karina, but she does know that at some point, they'd slipped outside and had made their

way into a random, shoddily-lit alleyway. Peak romance, if romance meant taking someone to a stinky alleyway when a few scant feet away stood a dumpster, clearly full of garbage. Uncaring, Karina lit a cigarette and took a long long drag before exhaling the smoke into Edith's waiting mouth.

"Your turn," she had drawled, voice low and slightly raspy, as she held the cigarette out for Edith to take.

"...sure." Edith had accepted the white stick, still glowing red and yellow at the end, and brings it up to her own mouth. She took a drag before exhaling the smoke into Karina's mouth. Karina exhaled it back out and then smiled.

"You're good at this," she had said, before taking one final drag. She'd then dropped her cigarette to ground, grinding the ash into the pavement with the heel of her boot. "Sweet, too."

"Thanks?" Edith had tilted her head and gazed up at Karina through her lashes. "You're very pretty."

Karina flicked her hair over her shoulder. "So I've been told," she replied, and then she leaned in for a kiss.

Later, Edith had let Karina press her into the wall, the bricks leaving marks on her back, as she shook around Karina's fingers. Karina tasted like smoke and spit but Edith hadn't once lost her mouth anyways. They eventually separated when Edith's legs felt like jelly, Karina laughing before patting her cheek and telling her that they should do it again.

Even now, Edith still doesn't know what possessed her to come back. All she knows is that something spurred her out of her lonely apartment and back into that bar two days later, and

to her surprise, Karina had been there, sliding her a glass of something pink and fruity as Edith had wordlessly dropped into the stool next to her.

After they'd stumbled outside, chasing each other's mouths in the messy way drunk people do, Karina had pulled out a cigarette and lit it. She didn't offer Edith a drag this time, simply inhaling in her own smoke and leaving Edith to smell it as she caught her breath. Edith had rolled her eyes but ultimately decided that this—standing in a dirty alley, smoke and garbage all around her—was better than being in a place that Reina would never walk into again.

“You really are sweet,” Karina had said, while Edith struggled to hold back tears at the realization that she would rather stand in a dirty alleyway with a stranger than be in her apartment. “Should we do this again? We could make it a thing.”

Somehow, Edith's scrambled brain managed to work out a proper response. “If I can find you,” she heard herself saying. “I'm surprised you were able to find me a second time.”

Karina had just laughed. “I didn't think you'd come back. Who comes back for bar hook-ups?”

Edith had shrugged. “You're hot,” she'd settled on, which had been true. Easier than saying it was too quiet in her apartment, or that a ghost had left her fingerprints all over the walls. “I thought it was worth a shot.”

“You're weird. I like that.”

Even though it had been Karina in front of her, it was hard not to see the similarities between her and Reina. They were both pushy, maybe even a little mean. Edith didn't think she minded (she still doesn't think she minds, even after everything).

“I've always been a little odd.”

Karina had laughed again. “Come back,” she’d said. “We can do it again. I don’t mind.”

And so against her better judgement, they had met up again, and again, and again, in dirty alleyways and the shitty bar bathroom if they were too impatient to go outside. They’d never once talked about a time but instead relied on the other to show up at some point, any point.

The weird part was that it worked. Edith would enter the bar that she’d unconsciously began considering theirs and would look around for the tall, dark-haired woman. If Karina was there first, she’d make her way over to her before sitting down quietly. If Karina wasn’t there yet, she’d find somewhere quiet to sit, making sure that the spot next to her was empty for whenever Karina would inevitably show up.

Even now, Edith still thinks that it’s the closest thing she ever had to real relationship.



To “commemorate” her first week in prison, the guards release her from solitary confinement, which really only meant that she was allowed to join the communal mealtimes, exercise hour, and bathroom breaks. Edith keeps her eyes peeled for any glimpse of Karina she can find, but either the other woman has yet to be released from her own solitary confinement, or she’s gotten really, really good at avoiding Edith in the time since Edith’s arrest. Edith doubts that it’s the second option; after all, they’d stumbled into each other after Edith’s interrogation. A chance like that? What are the odds? Besides, they’ve always been good at finding each other, haven’t they?

Even so, she doesn’t see any sign of her in the following days, until one day, Karina slides into the seat next to her during a meal.

“Hey,” she says, calmly and casually, like they’re two friends meeting for lunch instead of two...exes? Former friends with benefits? People who’d been hooking up before one of them peer-pressured the other into breaking the law? New prison mates? Is there some sort of protocol for this?

“How are you?” Karina asks, oblivious to Edith’s inner struggle.

Edith eyes her warily, trying to decide whether or not she should bring up their last meeting. Karina’s just sitting there, acting like nothing happened, as if the last time they’d seen each other wasn’t while Karina had been actively pretending like she didn’t even see Edith and Edith had stolen a tape that Karina had dropped.

Was their second-to-last meeting any better, though? That one had ended with Edith getting arrested.

“...you good?” Karina asks when Edith doesn’t respond. Edith jolts from her thoughts and blinks.

“Uh,” she says intelligently. “As best as one can be, given the situation,” is what she settles on. Karina nods in response.

“Anything interesting happen?” she asks.

Edith arches an eyebrow at her. “We’re in prison,” she points out. “It’s not that interesting.”

Even so, she can’t stop thinking about Karina refusing to meet her eyes when they saw each other in the hall. She’d been avoiding her: it wasn’t like there had been space in that hallway for her to pretend like she hadn’t seen her.

Karina, however, doesn't need to know that that short interaction has been weighing on Edith's mind ever since.

"Have you met anyone interesting?" Karina presses.

Edith blinks. "...we're in prison?" she repeats.

Karina blinks back. She looks around the room. "...there's lots of interesting people in a prison. Like the Black Cast." She lowers her voice. "At least several of them are in here. And I'm willing to bet that most of the people here were involved in protests at one point or another. Just because we're in prison doesn't mean we're stuck."

"Okay, jailbait." The words slip out before Edith can even consider them properly. They don't even make sense given the situation.

A surprised snort escapes Karina. "I'm not doing anything."

"You're sitting here, talking to me." Edith doesn't smile, because it's not meant to be a joke. But Karina does, a small thing but a smile nonetheless. "And you're eating, theoretically."

"The food here is trash." Karina pushes her tray away. "I'd rather survive off of convenience store snacks."

"...we're in prison. We can't be that picky." Edith eyes her warily. Karina nods in agreement, looking right back at Edith without a trace of malice in her eyes. It's unnerving honestly. Edith is unsettled by how intently Karina stares at her.

Neither of them say anything for the longest while, and then Karina leans in again.

"Did you pick it up?" she asks.

It takes Edith an embarrassingly long moment to figure out what Karina means. "Oh, yeah." She nods. "Do you want it back?"

“Nah.” Karina moves away. “You can keep it. Do you want more?”

“What would I do with more?” Edith asks.

Karina shrugs. “You never know.”

Edith just stares at her. “We’re in prison.”

Karina leans in. “Nothing’s impossible, Edith.” Her face is serious, mouth set in a grim line. “Remember that, okay? No matter what, nothing is impossible. Even in here.”

There’s another brief staring contest, but Karina ends it by suddenly standing up and grabbing her tray.

“Okay, thanks!” she says, just a little too brightly. “It was nice seeing you again!”

Edith gapes as Karina wanders off. She watches as Karina moves through the crowd, hair swinging behind her. It’s gotten long, Edith thinks idly, as she watches Karina flick some of it over her shoulder.

Not once does Karina turn to give Edith a second glance. Edith just stares at the spot that Karina just vacated, and wonders why and how Karina has entered her life, yet again.

And what, Edith thinks with growing dread, did she mean by wanting more tapes? There’s no way for Edith to get more of them...right?

Even if she could, hypothetically, get more tapes, what would she even listen to them on? Edith shakes her head and forces the idea out of her head. There are other things for her to worry about. Whether or not she can play illegal tapes is the least of her concerns.

But it turns out that *Karina* is largely unconcerned by such thoughts. Two days later, Karina slips into the shower stall next to Edith’s and turns on the water to full blast, in hopes of

covering up their conversation. Edith has no idea that it's her until Karina clears her throat and says, loud enough to be heard over the spray, "Hey, Edith."

Edith drops her bar of soap.

"How did you know I was here?" she asks.

"Lucky guess?" Karina offers.

Edith rolls her eyes, but picks her soap up with a frown. She continues with her shower, waiting for Karina to say something else.

"I wasn't kidding about having more," Karina says eventually.

"You're playing a dangerous game," Edith replies. It's not as good as telling her to back off, but she doesn't want to risk a yelling match in the prison shower. The less attention she calls to herself, the better.

"We're still here," Karina says in response. "We can still fight."

Edith sighs. "We're in prison, Karina."

Karina's quiet, as if she'd expected that answer. The shower water shuts off a few seconds later. Edith hears Karina dry herself off with a towel, and then the shower curtain is pulled back before Karina shuffles out.

Edith waits until someone else gets in the stall Karina had been using, then shuts off her own water and dries herself. She slips her jumpsuit back on and then checks her shower caddy, which contains the bare minimum: a small bar of soap and a small container of shampoo.

But there's something extra. Edith pulls out a tape from her shower caddy and resists the urge to bang her head against the wall. She thinks it might be one of the tapes Karina had

brought over for her when she'd gotten arrested, but she never had the chance to look at them, so she has no way of knowing for certain.

Edith doesn't want to know how Karina managed to sneak that in here. Or the first tape. How many did she even have, to bring into a prison? How had she managed to get it past security?

"Stupid," she mutters to herself, but she shoves the tape into her jumpsuit anyways.

"What am I going to do with this?"

A week later, Karina finds her while they are showering, once again. Edith claims a stall of her own, and Karina slips into the stall next to her almost as soon as Edith's stepped inside her own.

"Fancy meeting you here," Karina says, so Edith knows who's next to her.

"We have got to stop meeting like this," Edith remarks to her showerhead. A second shower meeting...Karina's kind of crazy.

It reminds her of their bar meetings, except this time Karina's the one seeking Edith out. And both of them are decidedly sober. And they definitely won't end up making out in a dark alley.

Okay, so, these shower meetings are nothing like their bar meetings.

"Hilarious." Karina turns the water up as high as it will go. "I hate the water pressure here."

It's such a mundane complaint that it startles a laugh out of Edith. "We're in a prison. That's the whole point. We're supposed to be miserable."

There's no response from Karina's end. Instead, she finishes her shower quickly and towels off quickly, the plastic shower curtain rings clattering and clanging in her wake as she leaves. Like the first time, Edith waits until she knows that Karina's left and then slowly checks her stall to see what Karina's left for her.

To her surprise, it's two more tapes, and a slip of paper that has the words "thank you" written on it. Edith slips the paper under her tongue, letting her spit dissolve it into a soft mess for her to swallow, before turning her attention to the tapes nestled amongst her shower things. One of them belongs to Karina (she recognizes the titles), but the other one belongs to a singer that Edith had really enjoyed. She stares at that particular tape for a moment before collecting herself and shoving both tapes into her jumpsuit.

How had Karina gotten hold of that one? There's no way that she could have brought it to the prison with them, unless she'd also grabbed a few from Edith's collection before coming here. But then how would they have made it into the prison?

It's giving Edith a headache to think about. It should be impossible for her to even have these.

But the tapes burn against her skin, a physical reminder of their very real presence. It's a pressing weight that grows heavier as she rushes back to her cell, barely sparing a glance at the guards as she moves from the bathroom and back to the cell. She releases a sigh the moment she makes it back to safety, collapsing on the concrete and looking around to make sure that no one can see her before she slips them out of her jumpsuit. The tapes are temporarily shoved under her pillow, and Edith groans before she goes back to pretending that everything is normal.

But really, she muses that night, what is she supposed to do with these tapes? It's not like she can broadcast them. The government will be keeping an eye on her, she's sure. Not to mention the very pointed lack of equipment. She eyes the four tapes that she's collected and frowns. Does Karina have an outside contact of some sort? Had she been expecting to get imprisoned as well?

It wouldn't surprise Edith if she had. Karina had always been more invested in that stuff, had gone to a few protests and listened to the Black Cast almost religiously, giving Edith updates whenever she could.

In contrast, Reina hadn't been a revolutionary. She'd started the radio solely with the intention of finding her father, and had only played the tapes that she'd declared to be her father's favorites. Edith had asked her, once, why they didn't listen to anything from the rest of the box, and Reina had shrugged.

"My dad didn't play those ones for me," she'd replied. "I want him to know this is a message from me, so I have to play our songs."

Edith doesn't really think she'd been one either. Maybe some part of her had hoped that Reina's death was all staged, that Reina had found her father and had disappeared along with him, and now it was Edith's turn to broadcast the music out in hopes that Reina would hear it and come back to her.

It's just, she hadn't thought that Reina would ever...leave her like that. That she'd set fire to a dorm and die in the process. Edith had seen Reina just that afternoon, because they'd met up for a late lunch. How could she have just died that same night?

The more chilling fact is that Edith had, perhaps, been broadcasting it in hopes of dying herself.

Maybe it was some combination of both of those things. Or maybe it was neither, and she had just been in need of something to do with herself.

She pokes at the tapes again. The tapes gently clatter against each other, plastic hitting plastic and the bed beneath it. There's nothing that the tapes can tell her, for they're just little recordings of music.

"Reina," she says softly to the tapes. "You're not coming back, are you?"

Like always, there's no response.

Reina wouldn't have liked it if she knew Edith was listening to other tapes. She can still recall the ghost of Reina's hands batting hers away, the way Reina had said stop that and those aren't for you as Edith drew back from the tapes. "This box is private," Reina had said, pushing the large box of tapes that she'd taken from her father's closet away from Edith. "But these ones...yeah, we can listen to them." She'd pulled out the tapes that she'd listened to with her father, when he was still around, and carefully places them on the floor. Edith hadn't reached for them that time.

In contrast, Karina's hands had always been gentle when she pressed a tape into Edith's hands, curling Edith's fingers over the tape before patting her hand and giving her a soft smile before she'd left her apartment, hair swinging behind her.

Karina is here and she might be fierce and pushy but she was willing to give Edith a tape. Reina's gone and she didn't once give Edith anything, just let her listen in to whatever she wanted to listen to.

Even so, Edith doesn't think she'll ever forget her.

Four tapes. Edith shoves them under her bed, only to hear a sudden unexpected clatter. Her heart drops and she shoves her head under her bed to look.

To her surprise, there's a decent-sized hole under her bed. It's not very deep, presumably because there's more cells underneath hers, but it's fairly wide. The tapes fell over the edge, and she can just make them out.

She sticks her hand in, fumbling around until she can grab them and carry them to safety. To her relief, they aren't broken, but all this dropping can't have been good for any of them. Then she looks back at the hole.

Slowly, she slides the tapes back into the hole, setting them on the concrete as gently as she can, before sliding her body back out from under the bed so she can sit up.

"Huh," she says to herself. "Fancy that."

Four tapes, and a hole under her bed. Maybe things are more promising than she expected.



Two or three days later, Edith finds herself rudely ordered out of her cell and brought to the interrogation room. This time, Officer Brackendale is already there when she enters.

"Sit," he orders, not looking up from her file and his notes. Edith silently slips into the chair opposite him. Brackendale shuffles through the manila file folder.

Edith fidgets in her chair, wishing there was a way for her to free her hands.

Brackendale is content to read her file. Silence stretches between them, the only noises the turning of pages as Brackendale seeks out whatever it is that he is looking for. He doesn't

even say anything whenever he finds something interesting, only pulling out a pen and scribbling something down.

Some interrogation this is, she thinks. She's not even doing anything. Brackendale hasn't even acknowledged her besides telling her to sit.

"The interrogation will be recorded," Brackendale says calmly. "I trust you have no issue with that?" At her nod, he takes out the recorder and presses play. "Excellent. Let's begin. What's your name?"

"Edith."

"Full name, Miss Huang. It's more of a formality at this point, but I trust you understand the reasons for it."

Edith sighs but gives him her full name.

Brackendale hums and makes a note in the file before going through the list: age, date of birth, schooling, etc. It's all been done before, and Edith finds herself growing bored.

"Last time we spoke," Brackendale starts, cautiously. "You mentioned that you hated school."

"Yeah." Edith's instantly on edge. Now they're getting to real questions, the real reason she's here, the real reason they want to talk to her.

"Do you think that Miss Tanaka may have had similar feelings?"

Edith closes her eyes and bites back her sigh. There's no way for her to know what Reina had been thinking. But, she thinks, there's no way Reina wouldn't have told her if she'd been struggling.

“Excuse me?” Brackendale asks when Edith doesn’t respond. “Do you think Miss Tanaka killed herself due to feelings of misery in regards to school?”

Edith inhales sharply. “She wasn’t—she didn’t—it wasn’t suicide.”

“That’s not what the police reports said.”

“Reina wouldn’t kill herself!” Edith snaps, sitting upright so fast that her neck hurts. “She wasn’t miserable!”

“Calm yourself.” Brackendale’s eyes narrow even more, even as he scribbles something in his papers without really looking at it. “You’re making a scene.”

Tears burn in her eyes. Edith takes a shaky breath and forces herself to hold the air in her lungs. Reina wasn’t miserable. The two of them had gotten lunch that day, laughing as Reina ranted about her classmates (“I swear, Cate never shuts up, and I can hear her chewing gum from across the room”) and a terrible group project (“Stephen wanted to work with Alex so he could get their number, and he better score a date out of this because I’m going to commit a homicide soon”) and a professor who was so out of touch with the current events that even Edith had dropped her head to the table with a groan (“He was complaining about the demonstrations preventing him from getting to work! That’s the whole point!”). She’d been so vibrant that day, so loud and full of energy and opinions.

She wouldn’t have done something like...that...without telling Edith first.

“She wouldn’t have,” Edith repeats.

“But she did. They ruled it as a suicide.”

“A faulty gas line, then. Something. I don’t know, but it wasn’t her fault!”

“It’s been ruled as suicide, and you would do well to remember that.” The warning is clear in Brackendale’s voice. “You attended the funeral, did you not?”

Edith releases a breath. “Yes,” she says dully.

Brackendale’s lips thin into a white line as he looks back at the file. Silence settles between them once more, with nothing but pages turning and the occasional pen scratch. Edith wishes he’d stop drawing this out and get on with the interrogation.

Reina wouldn’t have committed suicide, and even if she had...well, it wasn’t like *Edith* had anything to do with the Argenta Hall fire.

“Is it true that Miss Tanaka ran an illegal radio station up until the time of her death?” Brackendale asks suddenly.

Edith wants to scream again. Last time she’d been interrogated, she’d all but announced that Reina was the one who ran the radio station. She can’t lie about that now.

“Yes,” Edith says slowly. “I’m not certain when it started.”

“So you’re claiming no involvement until after Miss Tanaka died.”

“Correct. Reina didn’t want me involved.”

Brackendale frowns at his notes, before pulling out a tape player and a tape. He slides the tape into the player.

“I’d like you to listen to this and tell me what you know about it,” he says, and then hits play.

It’s silent for a moment, and then a woman’s voice counts “One, two, three, four!” before launching into a loud crashing of drums. The sound is so, so familiar to Edith. From the tape, Karina starts singing.

Brackendale cuts it off after a minute.

“Never heard that before,” Edith says at Brackendale’s expectant look.

“That tape was found in your apartment.”

Edith feels her heart stutter. “Well,” she says, scrambling about for an excuse. “Then. You should know that Reina left behind a large box of tapes. I didn’t get the chance to listen to all of them.”

“This tape belongs to Karina Yoo, who claimed to be close to you.”

Edith doesn’t think she’s a violent person. She was always content to go with the flow, stick things out and get a feel for the mood first. But in that moment, she wants nothing more than to strangle Karina.

“Was it her submission tape?” Edith asks, blinking as innocently as she can. “Don’t all artists have to submit a proposal to get approved?”

“This wasn’t a proposal tape.” He looks at her, before glancing down at the file. “Miss Yoo submitted that tape and was rejected,” Brackendale presses. “That is an illegal recording.” He gives her a look, with his mouth twisted down and his eyebrows forming that familiar caterpillar again.

“I didn’t help her record that,” Edith says when his stare grows uncomfortable. “I’m not a musician.”

“I’m aware.” Brackendale’s words come out clipped, too short. “Did you broadcast her music on Miss Tanaka’s station?”

Edith shakes her head. “Reina had a different vision for the station.”

“How so?”

“Well, for one, I wasn’t supposed to know about it. She only wanted me to store it. Like I told you earlier, an apartment has a lot more space than a dorm room.”

“Hm.” Brackendale regards her for one long moment, then pulls out another tape. “Why don’t you listen to this?”

Like the first tape, it begins with a few moments of silence, and then Edith hears her voice say, “Hey guys,” softly and tentatively.

Edith presses her lips together to bite down the swear that threatens to leave her lips. She can’t afford to break now, even though that is pretty damning evidence.

“Welcome back to the Worm Father station,” Edith’s voice says through the tape. It sounds weak and uncertain, and Edith bites down her frown at just how unconfident she sounds there. “I’m sorry for the unexplained absence. There’s been some changes. The Worm has moved on. I’ll be your new host from now on.” There’s a sharp inhale from the Edith recorded on tape. “You, uh, you can call me Beetle, I suppose.”

There’s a pause. Edith risks a glance at Brackendale, who is staring right back at her.

“I don’t expect the radio to change that much,” tape-Edith says. “And, again. My apologies for the absence. It’s been hectic, trying to figure out what to do. But, um…” And here tape-Edith trails off, the Edith in the radio’s gaze landing on the new tape she’d received from Karina earlier that week. Edith can still feel the tape under her hands, the smooth plastic cool under her trembling fingers.

She still remembers the way her heart had swooped the first time she heard the song, recalls the way she knew that others had to at least get the chance to hear it. Karina had pressed it into her hands, gently wrapping her fingers over the plastic. “Thank you,” she’d whispered.

Edith had scowled at their folded hands. “I’m not doing this for you,” she’d murmured in response.

“If you don’t mind...” Tape-Edith’s voice is shaking. Edith remembers having to stop just so she could wipe her hands on her leggings.

“I, um, found some new music for everyone. This is by Karina, and the first song is called Day and Night.” Her words are followed by the opening beats to the song, which had already filled the room once. Edith almost hums along to the familiar tune, but catches herself.

She has to pretend that she doesn’t know anything.

Brackendale eventually presses stop on the recorder and looks at her.

“That was you, was it not?” he demands.

“I’ve...never heard that audio in my life,” Edith replies.

“I didn’t ask that,” Brackendale snaps, and his hand slams on the table. Edith jumps from the sudden noise, hunching down in her chair as Brackendale rises up, up, up, looming over her. “I asked if you ran a radio station after the untimely death of Miss Tanaka, one that played illegal music provided to you by other people in your circles. The most prominent one would be Miss Yoo. So tell me. Did you, or did you not, take over the radio station formerly hosted by Miss Tanaka?”

Edith shakes her head. “I didn’t take it over. Reina was...Reina didn’t let me touch her things.” She smiles bitterly at the thought. It’s truer than Brackendale could even know.

“Liar! Tell me what you know.”

“She kept a lot of things from me! I wasn’t supposed to be involved; I was a convenient excuse for her.”

Brackendale scowls down at her. “I thought you two were best friends,” he says coldly. “This doesn’t sound like something a best friend would do.”

“We started drifting after her father disappeared.” Edith bites her lip, casts her thoughts around to try and think of something that will convince Brackendale of her innocence. “They never found a body, and—she was desperate to find him.”

“You followed her to college,” Brackendale points out. “You didn’t go to school and yet you ended up there anyways.”

Edith blinks and waits for Brackendale to continue. When he doesn’t, she asks, “Sorry? I don’t get what you’re saying?”

“You followed her to college,” Brackendale repeats. “How could you possibly keep secrets from her when you’re doing that? It’s a lot to do for someone, regardless of whether or not you two were friends. You had to have some involvement with the radio in order to do that.”

Edith blinks. “My parents kicked me out for not going to college,” she says. “I needed to go somewhere.”

“So you moved to Ddahl? Was that the easiest option for you?”

“It was really hard,” she admits. “I worked a lot of odd jobs to manage rent for the first year.” She remembers not turning her heating or lights on, just to save a bit here and there, so that she wouldn’t have to move back to her parents’ house.

“And I’m saying, that’s a lot to do for a best friend. Again, one would think that you might run an illegal radio station after said friend’s death with that kind of loyalty.” Brackendale sits back down and looks at her. “Since you were so intent on following her.”

Edith stares. “Are...are you serious?”

“Yes.” He won’t stop looking at her, and Edith wants to run away. She wishes she could be anywhere but here. “I think you understand what I’m saying.”

Silence stretches between them once more, Brackendale staring at her as his words sink in. Edith feels her ears burn.

“...I liked her,” Edith whispers finally, dropping her gaze to her lap. Her face heats up. “I would have followed her anywhere. But she didn’t...she didn’t tell me about the radio, so...” She can feel the tears gathering in her eyes again. “It doesn’t matter.”

“I see,” Brackendale says after her confession, sitting back down. He makes a few notes in the file before thumbing through the pages once more. “Well then...I believe this interrogation is finished. For now.”

Edith doesn’t look up. “Thank you, officer,” she whispers.

Brackendale doesn’t look at her as he picks up the file and walks out of the room. The door slams shut behind him. The tapes and the recorder are left sitting innocently on the table.

Edith tilts her head back and peers around the room once again. White cinderblock walls, grey-brown concrete floor with reddish stains around the dark metal drain, a plain white ceiling with a bright light bulb dangling from the center, are all she that sees. It’s the same room she had the first interrogation in, if she had to guess.

Her eyes land on the tape on the table. There’s no real reason for her to take this, nothing that she could possibly gain from having the tape back in her possession. It’s not like there’s any way for her to play it—she doesn’t have a tape recorder, and even if she did, she’d probably get caught listening to it.

But she already has four other tapes, courtesy of Karina. Who cares if she can't play them? They're nice to have.

In one motion, Edith swipes the forgotten tape and drops it into her jumpsuit, adjusting the fabric until the tape is resting snugly against her left hip, held in place the waistband. Then she resumes sitting in her chair, hands folded in her lap, patiently waiting for a guard to escort her back to her cell.

Once she's back, she slides the fifth tape into the hole under her bed and thinks. Five tapes. There's not much she can do, but...but.

Hadn't she started Reina's radio back up?



Looking back, Reina's radio station could have very easily stayed dead. But somehow Edith had ended up reviving it.

Her first mistake was bringing Karina to her place.

"My place is out for the time being," Karina had said apologetically. At that point, her "thing" with Karina had been going for about two or three months (actually, it had been ten weeks since Karina started taking them home. Not that Edith was keeping track). "There was a fire."

The mirth had died in Edith's face. "A fire?" she had asked.

"Yeah."

"...my friend died in a fire." The confession slipped out, too easily. Too casually. A self-started one, according to all the reports. Not a tragic accident, but intentional.

Karina had drawn back immediately. “Oh,” she’d said, a lot of conflicting emotions crossing her face. “Do...I...I’m sorry for your loss.”

“It happened a while ago.” Edith had made a flippant wave of her hand, desperate to move on.

“Still. That’s horrible.”

It hadn’t been a conversation Edith wanted to have, but she supposed it was probably good to at least air that particular fact. She had quickly changed the subject and Karina was content to let Edith lead them back, so despite that one moment of vulnerability, the night was still going smoothly.

The second mistake was not forcing Karina into her bedroom.

Karina’s eyes had lit up the moment she saw Reina’s radio equipment, all laid out neatly in Edith’s living room because Reina couldn’t keep it with her and Edith hadn’t wanted it in her room. And also because Edith still hadn’t gathered up the heart to dispose of it all.

“You have a radio station?” Karina had asked, starry-eyed with excitement. “Are you one of those rebels?”

“No. No no no. That...that is all inactive.” Edith had scoffed at the radio station. “I’ve been meaning to get rid of that.”

Karina frowned. “Are you sure you want to do that? That’s a lot of stuff. What did you broadcast?”

“It’s not mine. Ignore it.”

Karina’s frown had only grown. “But it means something, doesn’t it? Look, I won’t turn you in. I’m just curious. What is it for?”

“Someone I lost.” Edith could feel the lump in her throat. “It’s not mine to run, Karina.”

Karina had gently cupped Edith’s face in her hands and wiped at the tears gathering on Edith’s cheeks. Edith hadn’t even realized that she was crying.

“It is now, though,” Karina had said softly. “Are you alright?”

That was always the question, wasn’t it?

“No,” Edith had wailed, the force of her cry catching her off guard. “I miss her so fucking much!”

They ended up not doing anything that night. Instead, the only sounds were the harsh sobs that kept escaping Edith’s mouth and Karina’s quiet whispers as she promised Edith that it would be okay.

The morning after, when Edith had woken up with her tears dried on her face, she found Karina still there, studying Reina’s radio.

“Oh, you’re awake,” she had said.

“And you’re still here.” Edith rubbed at her eyes. They felt crusty and puffy from all the crying. “Are you looking at the radio?”

“It hasn’t been used in a while.” Karina wipes her fingers on the hem of her shirt. “I just think that it’s worth running again, instead of letting it collect dust.”

“It wasn’t mine to run,” Edith confessed.

“It was your friend’s, right?” Karina asked. At Edith’s nod, she continued with, “Don’t you think you should continue her legacy? Revolutions aren’t the work of one, you know. It takes multitudes. When one person falls, another person stands in their place.”

“Legacy.” Edith had scoffed. “Reina’s selfish. She was doing this to find her father. She only played the songs that he’d shared with her, the ones that were their favorites. It had nothing to do with your revolution. Reina had nothing to do with your revolution.”

“I think you should consider it anyways.” Karina had rummaged around in her purse and pulled out a tape. “Look, you don’t have to do anything, but this is mine. Give it a listen. If it’s good, maybe you should start the radio back up again.”

She’d pressed the tape into Edith’s hands before saying that she had to go, leaving Edith standing there, alone, with Karina’s tape in her hands.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” she asked the shut door, but no one answered. Edith had frowned down at the tape before going to her kitchen to eat cereal.

The tape had taunted her for several hours before she finally caved. Her hands shook as she blew the dust off of Reina’s old tape player, and she hesitated before pressing play.

To her surprise, Karina was good. She’d primarily been a drummer, and Edith could hear the passion and fire behind every beat she hit.

If Karina was that good, Edith had mused to herself, what did that mean for the other people who had auditioned and gotten rejected? Reina had played her the songs that her father had wanted her to hear, and those pieces were good as well. What did that mean for the box of unopened box of tapes that Reina had brought over?

Her gaze landed on the box, sitting innocuously next to rest of the radio equipment.

As if in a trance, Edith had grabbed a pair of scissors and sat down to cut open the box. Her hands wouldn’t stop shaking, and she kept looking towards the door as if expecting Reina to

burst through at any minutes and say, “Edith, stop, what are you doing, I *told* you that those tapes weren’t important—”

But nothing of the sort had happened, and Edith had cut through the duct tape completely uninterrupted. The glue clung to her scissors as she forced them through, but in the end, she had pried open the cardboard flaps without anyone running in and telling her to stop.

That, in retrospect, was her third mistake.

The fourth mistake was obvious: she started listening to the tapes, curious about each artist and every song. What exactly had meant that they didn’t make the cut, she wondered, sliding in each unfamiliar tape with care. Why had these ones been deemed unsatisfactory, and now listening to them was illegal?

She never did come up with an answer.

The more tapes she listened to, the more Karina had urged her to share them. “You can’t be their only audience,” she’d said. “Others deserve to hear this stuff too.” And so, eventually, Edith had agreed. It made sense: she had the equipment, and in the darkest recesses of her mind, she thought that maybe, just maybe, if Reina *was* out there, she’d hear Edith and come back.

In the present, Edith is sprawled on the floor of her cell with one arm under her bed. There are five tapes tucked into a hole under her bed. The only thing preventing her from running a radio is the lack of actual broadcasting equipment. Maybe, she thinks, trying to start it up for the second time counts as her fifth mistake.

“Well,” she whispers to herself, eyes fixed on the ceiling. “I’ve got five tapes, don’t I?”



A few days later finds Edith getting pushed into the interrogation room for the third time in...well, she doesn't know anymore. But it's her third interrogation; she's aware of that much.

At this point, she thinks that she knows what to expect. So she obligingly walks inside, only to freeze in place when she sees the woman sitting in one of the chairs.

"...fancy meeting you here," Karina says after they've stared at each other for longer than is comfortable.

Edith sits in her own chair and closes her eyes.

"Fancy meeting you here," she murmurs.

Karina's laugh is quiet, but her amusement is quickly killed by the door to the interrogation room opening once more to reveal the now-familiar face of Kalen Brackendale. Edith slouches down a little more in her own chair, wishing the ground would swallow her up. Next to her, Karina straightens her spine and lifts her chin, just a little.

In response, Edith slides down even more. Brackendale, of course, pays them no mind, perfectly content to flip through his notes as if he isn't purposefully dragging out the interrogation for longer than it needs to go.

Eventually, he begins to ask them the usual basic questions: name, age, place of residence, what they did for a living. It's nothing that Edith hasn't heard before, and judging from the flat answers Karina gives, she's used to it as well.

After a while, Brackendale grows tired of keeping the conversation basic. "Miss Huang," he says. "Would you mind telling me everything you know about the late Miss Tanaka and her radio station?"

Edith slides down even further in her chair. “I already told you about it,” she mumbles. “Reina didn’t tell me these things, so I was in the dark about most of it.” But she made me sit with her anyways, she adds silently.

“Most of it.” Brackendale’s eyes light up. “So she told you some things.”

Edith settles on saying, “She told me that her father worked in the music department, and that one day he disappeared.” She refrains from adding, “I thought we discussed this already.”

“But surely she told you more. The radio was found in your apartment, after all. You are the one who took it over.”

“I helped her mom clean out Reina’s dorm room. Her mom let me keep some of the old photos of us.”

“She let you keep more than that, then.”

How much more does she share? If she’s too honest, she’ll never get out. But how much do they know? It’s getting harder and harder for Edith to keep track of what she’s told them. She blows her hair out of her face and frowns.

“Well?” Brackendale prompts when the silence has dragged on for too long.

“Mrs. Tanaka didn’t approve of Reina’s activities. I told her that I would get rid of the equipment,” Edith settles on.

“Clearly you didn’t.” Brackendale glares at her before leaning in. Out of the corner of her eye, Edith sees Karina shift to the side. “You helped run it before she died, didn’t you? The signals always came from your apartment.”

“You have no proof,” Edith replies shakily. “Maybe once she was dead, yes, but before that, they didn’t come from there.”

“But you’ve been involved, since the beginning, haven’t you?” Brackendale hasn’t moved away from her, is still pressing into her space. Edith wishes she could slip down lower, but if she slides down any lower she’ll fall off of her chair.

“You’ve been helping her run the station, and you continued it even after she died, out of respect and love, didn’t you?”

“She didn’t tell me much,” Edith mumbles weakly.

“Sit up,” Brackendale orders, finally pulling away. Edith drags herself up as Brackendale keeps staring at her.

“You know something about the radio; in fact, I’d wager that you’re a part of its history just as Reina is. So why don’t you stop playing games and tell me what you know?”

“She didn’t want *me* to have any part of it,” Edith finally snaps, voice cracking. “I wasn’t supposed to be involved.”

Brackendale is quiet for a moment, before he turns to the file and scribbles something down. Edith takes the moment to blink back tears and tries to calm her racing heart. He’d been so close, so demanding. So determined to get her to crack. She finds herself sinking down in her chair once more, feet sliding along the concrete as she slips down on her chair.

“Did you know the late Reina Tanaka?” Brackendale eventually asks Karina. Because of course Brackendale would push at her, push and push until something in her broke, just to get an answer, before turning away as he hadn’t just done exactly that.

“I did not,” Karina says calmly. “I never had the chance to meet her.”

That is the truth, Edith thinks, pulling herself out of her slumped posture. She doesn't sit straight like Karina does, but she feels less like a puddle of a human when she's not nearly falling out of her chair. Maybe that's why Karina tilts her chin up like that. To be in control.

Edith doesn't really think she's been in control of anything since...well. She's not exactly sure about that one.

"Are you sure about that?" Brackendale presses, drawing Edith out of her thoughts.

"Yes." Karina keeps her hands in her lap. "I didn't know anything was significant about her, other than the fact that she was one of the people who died in the Argenta Hall fire."

"She was the culprit," Brackendale corrects.

"Reina wouldn't set fire to a dorm." The words are out before Edith can stop them.

Brackendale's eyes slide over to her, cold and flinty. Edith fights the urge to sink lower in her chair.

"This isn't your interrogation."

"She was my...friend," Edith replies, feeling like her insides have been rubbed raw.

The corners of Karina's lips curl up. "She was Edith's *friend*, but I met Edith after her death."

Brackendale seems unconvinced.

"I've already told you how we met, Officer," Karina says, placatingly. "Edith and I met at a bar. She was drunk."

Edith nods. "Really drunk," she adds.

"Reina was out of her life at that point. I believe that was why Edith was so drunk."

Edith snorts, but any retort dies in her throat at the way Karina arches an eyebrow at her.

Brackendale just hums and notes something down.

“So then how did you learn about the radio station?” Brackendale asks. “Were you a frequent listener of it?”

Karina shrugs. “I don’t have a radio.”

“That’s not the question.”

“Can’t listen to someone if you don’t have a radio, can you?” A snarky edge is creeping into Karina’s voice. Edith closes her eyes and wonders if they’ll get into a yelling match right in front of her. Wouldn’t that be something, she thinks wryly.

“You have plenty of options.” Brackendale’s voice is tight. “Plenty of other people have radios.”

“What was her station called?” Karina asks. “I don’t know much about either of them.”

Edith shrugs. “Reina didn’t tell me the name of it either.”

She hadn’t directly told Edith, but she had said it, multiple times, while Edith was in the room with her, listening to Reina give her broadcast.

...so it wasn’t a lie. Not by Edith’s standards, anyways.

“It was called Worm Father. An odd choice for a radio station, but it went over well. I believe Worm Father was listed along with a few other important radio rebels: the Black Cast being the biggest one, but there’s several others.” Brackendale removes a tape from his file and puts it in a player, unaware of how Edith’s world had just shifted. Her little radio station... part of the notorious radio stations? The ones that people mentioned in hushed whispers whenever they wanted to know more information about the protests?

She wants to ask Karina if Karina had known about her apparent impact, but this isn't the place for that.

Brackendale presses play. This time, the voice that fills the room is Reina's.

"Hi. This is the Worm Father Radio Station, brought to you by the Worm herself. Today I have a selection of music by various underground artists."

Worm Father. It still strikes Edith as a silly name for a radio station. She'd asked Reina about it, after Reina had finished her first broadcast. The only reason she'd been there during that broadcast because Reina had asked her to be, had leaned with a pretty smile and said, "Edith, I don't think I can do this alone."

"I think you have to," Edith replied, drawing back. "Didn't you say this was between you and your father?"

Reina fell silent, looking down at her fingers and twisting them together as she thought through whatever it was that she wanted to say. Finally, she looked up.

"I don't...I don't want to be alone," she'd confessed. "I don't want to chicken out."

You won't let me help you with this but you want me to be here with you, Edith had thought bitterly, but she had sighed and set her bag back down on the floor anyways.

"I knew you'd stay," Reina said. She handed Edith her notebook. "Any requests?"

"Yeah, actually. Play Airplane."

"Will do."

And then Reina had turned her attention to her radio, fidgeting around with everything before finally, finally starting up her broadcast.

And Edith had sat on the floor, unsure of what exactly she'd been supposed to take notes on. She watched as Reina slid different tapes into the player, taking small breaks between each tape to say something and talk to any potential listeners. When it was just the music playing, Reina would quietly do her homework. Edith, for the lack of anything to do, had begun hers as well.

Eventually, after a few hours, Reina had called it. "Thanks for tuning in to Worm Father," she had said. "I'll be here next week. Same time."

And then she'd cut the broadcast, pulled off her headphones, and flopped over dramatically into Edith's lap. Edith had dropped her book on the floor in surprise.

"What did you think?" Reina had asked. "Do you think he'll hear it?"

Edith had looked at her wide eyes and slightly red cheeks and messy black hair. "Why Worm Father?" she'd blurted out, instead of answering Reina's question.

"Because I'm a worm, remember?" Reina had grinned. "And I'm looking for my father."
The worm herself.

Edith picks at a stray thread on her jumpsuit while Reina's recorded 17-year old voice continues to play through the room.

"Sorry for making all of you wait," Reina says from the recording. She sounds near tears. Edith also remembers this episode, remembers the way Reina's hands had curled into fists as her voice shook. She wonders just how many broadcasts Reina had ended up asking her to sit through, even though Edith hadn't been allowed to help with the actual process. "Father, if you are out there...I'll never stop waiting. And now, Vivi."

She had put in the tape and then taken her headphones off to cry.

Brackendale, of course, cuts the tape off before the music can start, and Edith's reminiscing comes to an abrupt end.

"Yeah, I've never heard that before." Karina's steady and calm beside her. "Was that the Worm Father station?"

"...she said that in her speech," Brackendale says wryly. "Is your hearing going?"

Karina scowls, but stays quiet. Brackendale's eyes slide over to Edith. Edith doesn't say anything.

"Did you recognize that clip?" Brackendale asks her.

"I recognized the speaker," Edith settles on. "That was Reina."

Brackendale lets out an annoyed sound. "We've already established that that is Miss Tanaka's radio station! The question is what has your involvement been?"

Edith shrugs. "I mean...I wasn't part of that clip, if that's what you're asking?"

"I just want to know what your involvement looked like," Brackendale snaps.

"And I told you that Reina didn't want me to be that involved."

"Why does it matter?" Karina cuts in. "Edith is the one who ran it after Reina died. You've said as much. Who cares what her involvement looked like prior to that? If Reina was the only one who ran it before Edith took over, then—"

"Shut up!" Brackendale slams a hand on the plastic table between them, and Edith flinches. "I'm the one asking the questions. You would do well to remember your place, Miss Yoo."

"So it doesn't matter." Karina smirks. Edith's eyes widen, and it's her turn to shift away from Karina.

“It is a matter of national security!”

“It’s—”

“None of your business. Neither of you,” Edith cuts in. Both Karina and Brackendale turn to look at her, and Edith shrinks under the force of their gazes. “I ran the radio. I...I ran it once Reina died. Before that, it was hers, all hers.”

Brackendale narrows his eyes. “You certain about that?”

“Yes.” For once, Edith’s voice doesn’t crack. “I’m certain.”

Brackendale only hums in response, flipping through the file before writing something down. More notes, Edith assumes.

Finally, he looks up. “We’re done,” he says. “Thank you for your cooperation.” The words ring hollow. He stands up and leaves, door slamming shut behind him, and leaving Karina and Edith in silence.

“Why did you tell Brackendale off?” Edith asks.

“You weren’t going to,” Karina replies.

“I did, though. I told him my answer.” Edith frowns at Karina. If her wrists weren’t shackled, she’d fold her arms, but she can’t. “I don’t need you to fight my battles for me.”

“I wasn’t fighting it for you,” Karina snaps. “You just...you seemed upset.”

“...well.” Edith looks at her hands. “Just. It’s fine, Karina. They’re going to bring up things that I don’t want to talk about no matter what.”

“You never want to talk about it,” Karina blurts out. “It’s always you have a way to get me heard but I can’t know what it is and also there’s this girl hanging in all the photos in your apartment but I don’t even get to know her name and there’s someone who you’ve been missing

and you're not doing the radio for me but you'll still take my mu—" Karina cuts herself off with a frustrated sigh. "It doesn't matter. It *doesn't* matter. You do you, Edith."

Edith opens her mouth to say something, but the door opens and a guard enters. He nods at Karina, who stands up and wordlessly follows him out without giving Edith a glance as she leaves. The door shuts behind her and Edith sighs, sliding down in her chair for the upteenth time that day.

"I didn't realize you felt that way," she says softly to the empty room, and waits for her own guard to escort her back to her cell.



The thing about prisons is that they're designed to keep people in, and this one is no exception. Getting out seems near impossible to Edith, except hadn't Karina told her that nothing was impossible? "Even in here", she'd said.

Edith wouldn't have expected to be able to get five tapes in prison, but they were there, under her bed. It had to mean something.

Maybe that's why Edith is spending the allotted exercise hour wandering through the courtyard, looking for Karina. Where was she getting the tapes from? Could she get more?

And what had she meant by "nothing is impossible, even in here"?

Worm Father was apparently one of the more notorious stations, one that the rebels told each other about, one that the government had considered a threat. If Edith could find a way to get the station running again, would more people listen to it? Were there still people out there who cared?

Could she really run it again?

There's a multitude of questions running through her head, primarily about radios and rebellions and a tiny voice whispering to her about escape attempts, both failed and successful, when she spots Karina sitting in a corner, tracing something in the dirt with her fingers. She makes her way over to her.

"Mind if I sit?" she asks.

Karina just shrugs, which Edith takes as permission. She wastes no time sinking into the dirt, pulling her legs close and resting her chin on her knees so she can peer at Karina through the bleached strands of her hair. Karina tilts her head up to look at the sky, revealing the long line of her neck and her jaw, which is still sharp enough to cut glass. It's one of the things that Edith's always liked about her—Karina has always had a severe sort of grace to her, what with her sharp jaw and angled eyes that made her look fierce. Her hair's grown out from the short bob it was in when Edith had first met her, which only adds to her seriousness. And though she's sitting in the dirt yard of a prison, wearing a baggy neon green jumpsuit instead of the leather skirt and loose jacket she'd been sporting that night in the bar, she manages to make it look cool and intentional.

"You know," Karina remarks, still looking at the sky, "You're not being very fair to me."

Edith doesn't deign to respond.

"It's not like you weren't using me as well." Karina sighs and drops her head. "You're still hung up on Reina, aren't you?"

Edith can't help the miniscule flinch upon hearing those words. "...she died two years ago."

There's a snort from Karina's end. "Grief looks different on everyone. And from what I've heard, you two were really close."

Edith twists her fingers together and frowns. “I can’t be hung up on her forever.”

“And yet, you are. It was her radio that you started up again. Did you even change any of the names?” Karina’s voice is hard, flinty. Edith can hear the bitterness, radiating off of her in waves.

Underneath that bitterness, though, she can hear the hurt, which is what causes her to brush some of her hair out of her face and look properly at Karina.

“I wanted to move on,” she confesses. “Why do you think we even met in the first place? It got so suffocating in my apartment. I didn’t know how to get rid of her.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Yes?” Edith frowns. “I didn’t go out with the intention of drowning in my sorrows. I could do that at home.” Surrounded by the memories of her, is what she doesn’t add. She hadn’t even taken down any of the photos, instead stealing a few old ones from Reina’s dorm to add to her wall.

Those had been the only additions to her decorations since Reina died. Edith wonders if her photos are still taped to the walls, or if they’ve been destroyed. If she could go back, would her apartment still be the same: mattress and couch and radio set up with the photos as the only thing that really made the space feel lived in and comfortable?

“She was everywhere in your place. All over the walls.” It’s as if Karina knows that Edith’s thinking about her old space. “It was impossible to not see her.”

“I didn’t really have any other friends besides her.” Edith shrugs. “My parents moved a lot when I was younger, so I didn’t make a lot of lasting friendships. Not until Reina.”

“She really was the only friend you had.” Karina rolls her eyes. “Did you ever talk to anyone besides Reina?”

“I knew a few of her college friends.” Edith thinks it over. There’d been a couple of people: Stephen who was all smiles and Aubrey who’d thought that Edith’s decision to not go to college was the coolest thing, but Edith had never really spent time with them when Reina hadn’t been around. After all, they’d been Reina’s friends first.

Not until Reina was gone, and Edith had found herself terrifyingly alone in a place that she had never really planned on calling home.

Karina hums a little at the admission. “So you were reliant on her.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore.” Edith scowls. “Because her dorm caught fire and she didn’t make it out. And before you say anything...I don’t care if she’s the one who started it. She still died and I had to figure out what I wanted to do on my own.”

“I held you while you cried over her.” Karina’s voice shakes, and it startles Edith. She never thought she’d hear Karina sound so shaken up. “For a whole night, until you cried yourself to sleep.”

“I never did thank you for that.”

Karina finally turns to Edith. Her dark eyes are slightly glassy, as if she’s on the verge of crying but refuses to do it here. “And?” she asks. “Did you? Figure out what you want?”

For some reason, in that moment, all Edith can think about is how the first time Karina had taken Edith home, she had gotten distracted by Karina’s drum kit.

“You play?” she had asked, breaking away to poke at one of the cymbals. “Are you a musician?”

“That’s the dream.” Karina had laughed. “The government won’t accept me, though. They say I’m too...out there.”

Edith had nodded in understanding. “Okay,” she’d said. “Well. You want to play me something anyways?”

Karina’s eyes had widened as Edith had picked up the drumsticks and offered them to her. “Well?” she had asked when Karina didn’t say anything. “Are you going to play or not?”

“You want to hear me play?” Karina had asked. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” Edith had shrugged. “Unless you don’t want to...”

“No. No, I’ll do it.” Karina reached out and twirled the drumsticks between her fingers, before settling down on the stool. She’d flashed a sharp grin and, for the first time in years, Edith had smiled back, right before Karina launched into something loud and fierce that had taken Edith’s breath away.

“Do you remember the first time I came to your place?” Edith asks now, ignoring Karina’s earlier question. “When you played for me?”

“What about it?” Karina asks.

“You were good. I was right about that.” Edith stands up and offers her hand to Karina. “There’s nothing wrong with wanting to keep Reina’s project going, you know? But it’s not hers anymore. It’s mine.”

Karina eyes her hand for a moment, but she reaches out and lets Edith pull her up to her feet.

“That’s as good an answer as any,” she says, dropping Edith’s hand. “I got you another one anyways.”

She pulls at the waistband of her jumpsuit, the elastic snapping audibly against her skin. Something clatters to the dirt, and Karina bends down and picks up a tape, blowing off the dirt before she places it in Edith's hands.

"This is the end, for real," she says, folding their fingers over the tape. It's a familiar habit of hers. "Take care, alright? And remember, nothing is impossible, not even in here."

Edith nods. "Thanks, Karina," she replies. "For everything."

Karina smiles in response. Her eyes are softer than Edith ever remembers them being, and there might not be smeared glittery lip gloss on her mouth, but her lips are still pretty when curled into a smile like that. Edith has one last moment to take Karina in before she drops Edith's hands and walks away.

Two days later, Edith finds a portable transmitter and an antenna in her shower caddy, along with a slip of paper that says, "these are the last things I need to give you." Edith laughs drily and wonders how she's going to sneak it all back to her cell. The paper she eats, placing it under her tongue and idly wondering how much paper she's consumed since her arrival in prison as she waits for it to dissolve.

She manages to smuggle the transmitter and antenna back to her cell without attracting any attention. That night, Edith sorts through the few tapes she's accumulated and considers them alongside the radio equipment. It's a shame that she doesn't have a headset, because there's no real guarantee that her own voice will come through well. But, Edith reasons, beggars can't be afford to be picky.

Too bad she doesn't have access to her tape collection. It would make for a better show, but, again. She doesn't really have the space to be picky.

It takes her a while to get everything set up, given that she's fumbling around in the semi-darkness and relying on the thin slivers of light that fall into her cell from the outside. But she gets it done, and in the security of her cell, she whispers an apology to any listeners who might still be out there, before slipping a tape into the player and broadcasting it for everyone to hear.

The next morning, the sirens go off, and everyone starts whispering about an escape. It had happened before, of course, for no prison was perfect, not even this one. "Nothing is impossible, even in here," Karina had said. Edith keeps her head down and follows instructions as the guards line them up for a count, but she is barely paying attention to the chaos happening around her. Instead she imagines Karina driving away, sitting in a car and fiddling through radio stations, and hearing her whispered voice through the speakers. Later, when everyone has been sent to their cells and the guards had banned all noise, she stares out her barred window and imagines Karina banging on her drums as she screams out in anger, before recording it to give to Edith so that she can broadcast it later.

Maybe next time, she thinks, counting the six tapes in the hole under her bed. Maybe next time, Karina will record her music and hand it over to Edith, who will broadcast it the same night. Maybe next time, they'll have something more than chance bar hook-ups and prison yard meetings.

It's a nice thought, but Edith shakes off the delusion. There's a lot of work for her to be doing, after all. She doesn't have time to be reminiscing.

She can't dwell on that for long, because she has a radio station to start up again.