

You wake up wanting to scream. You're not sure why, but you can feel it in your chest like rocks trying to crush you. You choke on it and cry instead. It's not heaving tears that empty your body of its water, but rather silent tears tracing down your face slowly, echoing a different kind of pain.

You remember dreaming about space. You always dream about it. But that makes sense because that's where you are. You feel as if you should dream about Earth. You should miss it. But you've been up here for so long you're not even sure if you remember what Earth is like. Your brother does though.

He's older than you and it feels like he never shuts up about it. Some days you wish he would. You feel bad about it. You feel bad about a lot of things, or rather you think you should feel bad.

Your brother talks about your parents too. You don't remember them. He tells you about two beautiful women; your mothers. Nothing comes to mind.

You can tell that it pains him that you don't remember. You can see it in his eyes, the way they tighten when you stare blankly at him. The way his smile burns off his face in sadness and leaves nothing but ashes. You hate doing that to him. But you can't help it.

Or maybe you can.

That makes you feel worse.

Sitting up in your bed you are faced with a picture of two women. Your mothers. Your brother keeps telling you their names, but it never actually sticks, as if your mind refuses to take

in the words that he tells you. But you remember when he tells you about his girlfriend. Vanessa. He talks about her the way he talks about Earth and your mothers. Happily.

There are no pictures of her in the small apartment you share with your brother on the spacecraft. But you feel as if you know what she looks like. You remember her more than you remember your mothers. You dream about her. You dream about space.

Getting ready for the day you aren't surprised to find your brother is still sleeping. He sleeps a lot now. He says it's age. You fear it's worse.

You move through the apartment before leaving to go to your appointment. Every day before school you go to see the doctor. Dr. Jacobs is trying to help you remember. You never feel like it helps. He feeds you pills saying they will help.

You take them. They don't.

It's quiet as you walk, expect for the sound of the constant humming of the space craft. It hovers around Earth, but you don't get to see it. Only higher-ups do. Your brother used to. He still tells you about how it looks, and you can't imagine it beyond a green and blue blur. He says that's good enough. But he gives you that sad broken smile and you know it's not.

Dr. Jacobs is running late.

You sit on the floor in front of his office door. There are no benches because he is always on time. But not today. You're okay with that. You already know that you will tell him about your nightmare. About space and watching Vanessa fall away from you. You tell him about this

every day. Or most days. You don't know what else there is to tell him. He will ask you questions, and you say no or yes or I don't remember. You say that a lot.

I do not remember.

He doesn't have the same disappointment as your brother does. But it's there. And he's makes you feel ashamed, whereas your brother's makes you feel sad.

His feet are quiet and it's almost like he just appears. It doesn't look like he slept well. He looks how you feel. You wonder if doctors see doctors. Or do they just see themselves. He continues to look at you and you look back at him. He's wearing a grey suit and a red tie. It stands out in the monochrome hall. It doesn't fit and you wonder if that's allowed.

He shakes his head. "Not today. I don't think I can see you today." You continue to stare, and he doesn't seem to like it. "Dr. Smith should be able to see you today." He nods at you and you stand. "Just down the hall. Room fifty-five."

Nodding at him you turn and leave. You hear him sigh before the door closes with a click. You are alone again. And you prefer it. But you are only alone for so long. The screaming starts soon after the silence falls.

You flinch from the noise; feeling like your eardrums might burst. But that can't happen when the noise is in your head.

It's your brother.

He has nightmares too. But he wakes up screaming. You've long since learned to stop doing that. His dreams seem worse than yours. You wish his would stop. You wish that he would stop screaming. You feel bad for thinking that.

But not by much.

The screaming stops and you're thankful for it.

It would have been distracting to go to class with the screaming. You want to ask your brother if he's okay over the mind link. All families have them. It keeps them connected and together. But you can feel it cut off as your brother forces it closed.

You don't know when they made mind links a thing for families. But you do know that you and your brother shouldn't be able to force it closed. You should always be feeling something from your family. But some days you're not sure you want that. Some days the lack of anything is better than having something. Some days you wonder what your brother would think if he could always feel what you feel.

You continue down the hall until you reach the door. Knocking, you wonder if Dr. Smith is even there. What if they're running late too? What're you supposed to do with yourself? You need to see a doctor.

Right?

You're not sure why. But it feels important to see someone.

"Come in."

Entering the room, you find it like the rest of the ship. White. Clean. Impersonal. Not like your apartment. Your brother works hard to make the same white walls feel less hard. He makes them feel like a place where someone should live. You're not sure which one you like better. Your brother always says that the doctor's office looks whiter, and it smells weird.

You don't understand what he means. It all seems the same to you.

Dr. Smith is sitting in a chair facing you. Waiting for you. Their hair is short, and their glasses seem to take up most of their face.

“Sit.”

You enter the room and the door closes behind you. You sit in the chair closest to the door. You feel like it’s the best place to sit. Easiest escape.

“How have you been?”

“Okay.”

“Are your pills helping you?”

“I guess.”

You don’t know what the pills are for. Your brother keeps asking you. Keeps telling you to ask. But you never do. You’re just given pills and you take them. You’re not paranoid about the pills. Shouldn’t you be paranoid about everything?

“Do you know what they’re for?”

“No.”

“And yet you still take them?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

You frown. You just do. You blink at them. They blink back. You feel like the glasses are blocking off their face. Keeping their eyes hidden even if it makes them bigger. You don’t trust them.

“Because.”

“Because... why?”

“Dr. Jacobs gives them to me.”

They hum and you don't like it. It sets you on edge. It makes you want to leave. It makes you wish that you could be seeing Dr. Jacobs instead. Dr. Smith doesn't feel right.

“Does your brother take pills too?”

“Yes.”

“What're they?”

“I don't know. Vitamins?”

“Who told you that?”

“My brother.”

“Okay.”

Dr. Smith finally looks away from you and you feel something tense. You feel like a windup toy wound too tight. Ready to explode with energy. Ready to pounce.

“Please get onto the medical table.”

You do as you're told. The tension is still there as you move. It's thrumming in your bones. Heavy in your chest. You don't know what it is. But it stays. No, it grows as Dr. Smith checks your vitals. It builds like a crescendo in a symphony. It builds and builds and builds and you're waiting for it to explode.

The bell rings. It echoes in your head and you know it's not from the mind link. That's just your own mind reflecting the sound back at you. You look up and you're in the bathroom. You're staring at the walls of a bathroom stall. Your hands are shaking as you place a hand over your chest. Almost as if checking to make sure your heart's still there.

It is.

It's beating slow, calm, and steady. You're fine.

You're late.

You leave the stall and make your way to class.

You walk in and everyone looks back at you. You look back at all the brown, blue, purple, yellow, and green eyes. You're the only human in the class. You stand out compared to their hard and dark skin. Your brother says it reminds him of an armadillo.

You don't know what that is.

Something from Earth. Another thing you don't remember.

You move to the only empty seat which is at the back of the room. You prefer the seat. No one else wants to sit there. So, you'll happily sit there.

You're talking about Earth today in class.

It always seems like you're talking about Earth. But there are never any pictures. How were you supposed to learn anything when it was just words? No one else seems to mind. You wonder if they remember. You wonder if you should remember.

You don't remember a lot now.

The screaming starts again.

It takes you a moment too long to realize that it comes from your mouth.

Everyone is looking at you. You're sure they are, but you can't really tell through the pain. There is so much pain, it blinds you like you decided to place your brain in a hot pan and are searing it.

All you can think about is the hurts. It hurts. It hurts. It hurts.

You wake up to screaming.

It's not yours.

It's not your brother's.

You know where you are.

"Hello again."

You open your eyes and find Dr. Jacobs looking down at you.

"You passed out in class."

He looks away from you. The screaming stops.

You're in the hospital wing.

The lights are too bright. You close your eyes. Maybe you can go to sleep—fingers are snapping, and you open your eyes slowly.



You wonder where Dr. Smith is. From how Dr. Jacobs talked earlier in the day it seemed Dr. Smith was going to be your new doctor, forever. And yet here is Dr. Jacobs and not Dr. Smith.

“This is your fourth trip here this week. It’s almost like you’re trying to break a record.”

“Where’s my brother?”

“He’s been contacted and should be here soon.”

Dr. Jacobs’ eyes are dark and he’s tired. You can see it in the bags; have they gotten darker since you last saw him?

The downturn of his mouth looks more pronounced, especially echoed by the wrinkles near his mouth. He moves slowly and blinks like each time he’s hoping to drift off to sleep.

The screaming starts again.

It doesn’t last long, cutting off suddenly. The loud beep fills the air. And you wonder if the person was scared to death.

Dr. Jacobs runs a hand over his face.

“I’ve upped your pills. But they’ll be keeping you here overnight.”

“What do the pills do?”

He looks at you with wide eyes. You wonder if you’ve asked about them before. You don’t remember.

He stares at you. You stare back.

“They help.”

“Is there something wrong?”

“Yes.”

You fall quiet and stare at him. He stares back.

“Did you like Doctor Smith?”

“No.”

The answer falls from your mouth before you are given a chance to lie. You watch dark eyebrows pull together into a frown. Dr. Jacobs’ a human too. So is Dr. Smith.

“Why not?”

You don’t know.

You remember the tense feeling. You remember it filling you. Trying to devour you. You remember it swallowing you whole and you drowning in static. It was so loud.

“Who was screaming?”

“Dr. Smith.”

You focus and it all comes back to you. Your fingers around their neck. You remember bashing their head in against the wall until they stop moving. You remember screaming.

Dr. Jacobs is watching you. You want to claw out his dark eyes. He looks disappointed. You’re not surprised.

“We’ll have to start the trial again.”

The words are familiar. You've heard them before. But they mean nothing. You're not even sure Dr. Jacobs is talking to you.

"The dose will be upped once again."

The static is back. But you don't feel tense. You don't feel ready to attack. The static is buzzing. Like a TV with no channels. How do you know what a TV is?

"This is the tenth," first, second, third, fifth, sixth, thirty second "failure this month."

The static gets louder and louder still. Dr. Jacobs is talking and talking. It sounds like he's talking over himself. Like he's a broken record. Like he's said these words before. Has he said them before? You don't remember.

You remember hands on a fragile neck. You remember her trying to scream. You remember their nails clawing at you. Trying to get free. Dr. Smith's face blends into Vanessa's.

The static grows until it's consuming you. Until you're breathing it. Until there is nothing in you that hasn't been touched by static.

You wake up screaming.

You try to hold it back. You try to swallow it. But it's pulled from you the way colourful handkerchiefs are pulled from a magician's throat. But with less care and more force. You had been dreaming.

It must have been a nightmare.

You're not sure.

Your brother is sitting next to you. You're in your apartment.

It must have been a dream.

His hair is as it always is, cut short and his eyes are tired and empty. They only seem to look happy when he talks about Vanessa or your moms or Earth.

You want to take them out. You want to use your thumbs to pop them out. Or squish them into nothingness.

"You're awake."

You stare at him.

"Did you have a bad dream?"

You stare at him.

"C'mon, talk to me."

"Where's Vanessa?"

The question makes his face drop. Like you shot him. You wish you had. You wish you had put your fingers into his eyes. He slumps in the chair as if everything has left him. You wonder if you broke him.

"She's... uh..."

You wonder if he doesn't remember. You don't either.

Or maybe you do. You remember your dream. You remember the taste of blood.

"Where is she?"

He stares at his hand. You wonder if he's hearing static. You wonder if he's drowning in it. You wonder, where is she?

"Earth."

You don't know if he's lying. You don't know where she is either.

"Why do I take pills?"

"To get better."

"Better from what? Am I sick?"

He stares at his hands. You stare at him. He looks so small. He's supposed to be older than you, but he looks so small.

Do you look small too? Do you look like him? What do you look like?

You don't remember.

You look at the picture beside your bed. You see your mothers. You see your brother. There are no pictures of you.

What do you look like?

Who are you?

"I need to call, Dr. Jacobs."

He's gone. And you're alone. You stare at the door he had just left through. You're waiting for something. Was it for the tension to come back? Waiting for screaming? You don't know what you're waiting for, but you're waiting and you're standing when Dr. Jacobs comes in.

“Going somewhere?”

You don’t know where you would have gone.

A distant part of you... your heart aches to go home. You don’t know where home is.

This apartment is the only home you’ve only ever known.

You don’t answer.

Dr. Jacobs doesn’t seem to care, “Sit.”

You do.

He pulls up a file and sighs.

It’s a hologram from his handheld. You can see the words backwards.

It talks about the experiment failing. The pills not working. The subject’s psychopathy being too much to be controlled. It talks about humans.

You don’t understand.

Your brother enters the room and you look at him. His eyes are blue swirling with green. You wonder if his eyes look like Earth. They’re rimmed red.

You made him sad again.

Do you care?

Should you?

“I’m sorry. I don’t think upping the dosage will help this time around.”

You look at Dr. Jacobs. He’s talking to your brother.

“We’ve already tried so many times in this trail. We’ll have to start over again.”

“I don’t know if they can handle it, doctor.”

Dr. Jacobs finally looks at you and his eyes are empty. No. There is a blank rage in his eyes. He looks at you like someone who’s seen something fail too many times and has now just become too stubborn to give up on it.

You feel the tension build in you again. You don’t like that look. The tension burns in your chest and you want to attack. You want to tear Dr. Jacobs apart. You want to hear him scream. You want to rip out his tongue and leave him empty.

He stands closing the document on his handheld and uses it to talk with someone else. He talks into it and you don’t understand.

“Prisoner 41165135 needs to be escorted to the lab. The prisoner will be wiped and then re-educated.”

You don’t understand.

But you’ve heard this before. You’ve heard about the prisoner and re-education. Dr. Jacobs looks at you. You realize you’re standing. Your brother looks scared. You’ve done this before.

You’re a prisoner.

What is going on?

“Don’t worry. Soon you’ll forget again, and it won’t matter.”

You’re still tense. But now you feel like you should run.

Your legs are ahead of your brain and you're pushing past Dr. Jacobs and your brother. You're in the hall but there's nowhere to hide and you hear feet pounding after you. You're scared. You know what comes next.

Pain.

It hits you and you go down, then there is nothing.

You jerk awake and you can feel your arms and legs and chest; everything is strapped down. You open your eyes, and everything is blurry. You struggle. You need to get away. You need to...

"Should we sedate them, doctor?"

"No. Re-education only works if it can be felt."

You know what the 'it' is. You know that voice. Dr. Jacobs.

You hear footsteps getting further away and your eyes close as tears slip from them. Where is your brother? Why isn't he helping you?

You just want to go home.

"I feel bad. This probably isn't good for a brain. Re-education should only be done five times, at most. The brain can't handle any more." It's the same voice, not Dr. Jacobs, but the other; a nurse?

"Don't feel bad. This is the best way to deal with criminals. If Dr. Jacobs can perfect this then we can finally have a home outside of this ship again."



“What if he doesn’t?”

“He will.”

Everything falls silent again. You open your eyes and the lights blind you. You stare at it, tears falling from your eyes.

“Start the re-education process.”

“Yessir.”

You hear things going on around you. But you can’t move. You can do nothing, but stare into the white light.

You expect to feel pain. But the mind link opens, and you feel your brother. You expect to remember. But you don’t.

And as soon as you feel him, he’s gone, leaving nothing but the echo of static and sadness.

Then there is pain.

And you scream yourself to sleep.