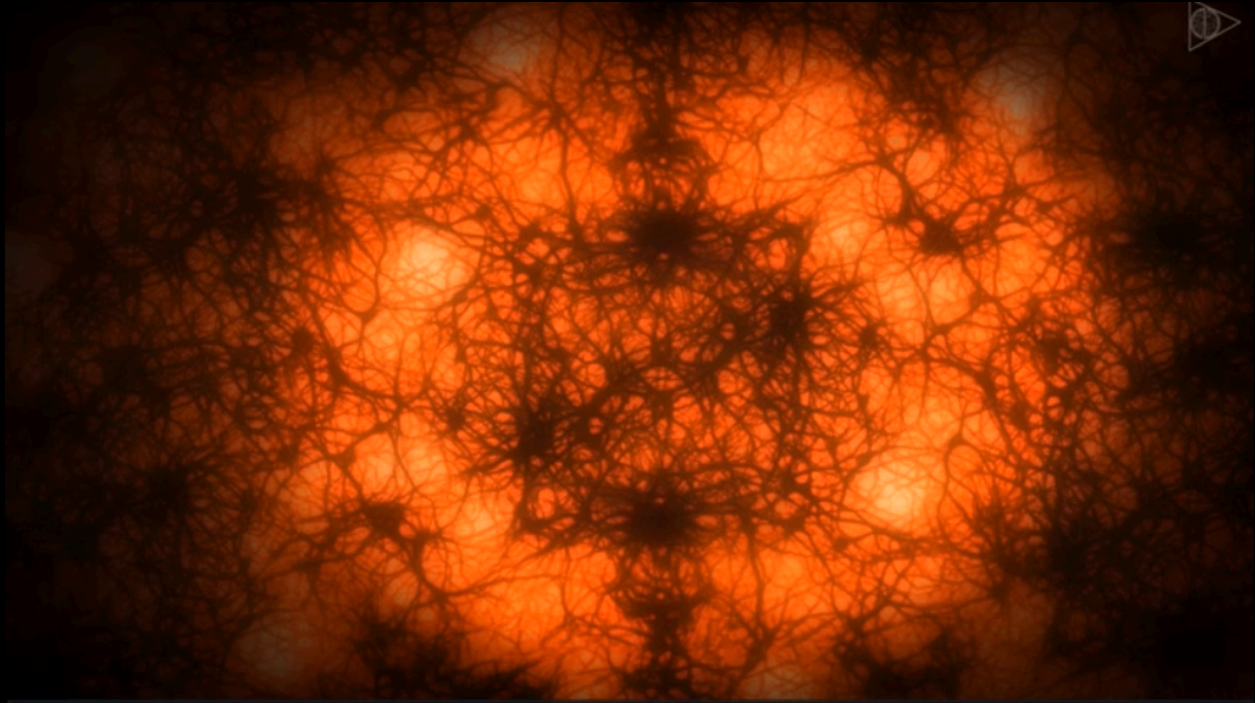


[TRIGGER WARNINGS: death/murder/loss of loved ones, repressed memories, light gore mention, blood mention, fire mention, emotionally abusive dialogue]



The curtain opens on the scene: a doctor's office. An office at the Neurostalgia Institute, where Domi Alabaster sits. The doctor looks through what information was given: friends were concerned about her, particularly her spending habits. While well-off financially, the fact that she turns to shopping and spending as immediate responses to stress worry people around her. They sense that something is not being addressed. The doctor speaks to her now.

DOCTOR: So, Miss Alabaster. In your own words, why are you here today?

DOMI: ... Truth be told, I don't know how well I can answer that question, doctor. [her eyes are... seemingly always closed, but either way, it seems as though she's avoiding the doctor's gaze under her eyelids.]

DOCTOR: You were referred here by others... The neural imprint treatment program deals primarily in trauma, and memories that were forgotten. Do you believe that trauma factors into your life?

DOMI: [bites her lip a little, maybe looking - embarrassed?] Well... Yes, I do. But I can't imagine how I would forget any of it, it was all so horrible. But it's all so far in the past, I-- I believe yes, it still affects me to some extent, but I doubt it can be controlling me in any real way.

DOCTOR: (nods) Mmhmm, I see. Trauma can hide though, and come through unconsciously... that is the point of the program, to find what's been hiding.

DOCTOR: Others have shown concern over your habits, particularly spending.

DOCTOR: Is spending a problem for you?

DOMI: I can't say I believe it is. [she sounds very - taken aback in that kind of Why I Never, proper lady type way] What have others said, exactly? [she crosses her arms and crosses one leg over her other]

DOCTOR: Well... It appears to others that shopping is sort of a stress response. They state that they notice you buy a lot of things when sad or stressed, to the point that it's noticeable and concerning.

DOMI: [that takes her a second to respond to, she just looks... like she really isn't sure what to say. like she's angry, but she can't show it, so she controls herself]

DOMI: ... I... I only like to treat myself nicely when things go wrong in my life. That's all. I didn't realize my friends were people who would see that as a negative thing - I always. I always used to attract the kinds of people who *hated* women who enjoy things like shopping. Apparently I still attract that kind of person.

DOCTOR: (taps their pen against their clipboard) Well, you are here voluntarily... if you wish to *not* go through with the program, if you do feel that you don't need it, you have the right to leave.

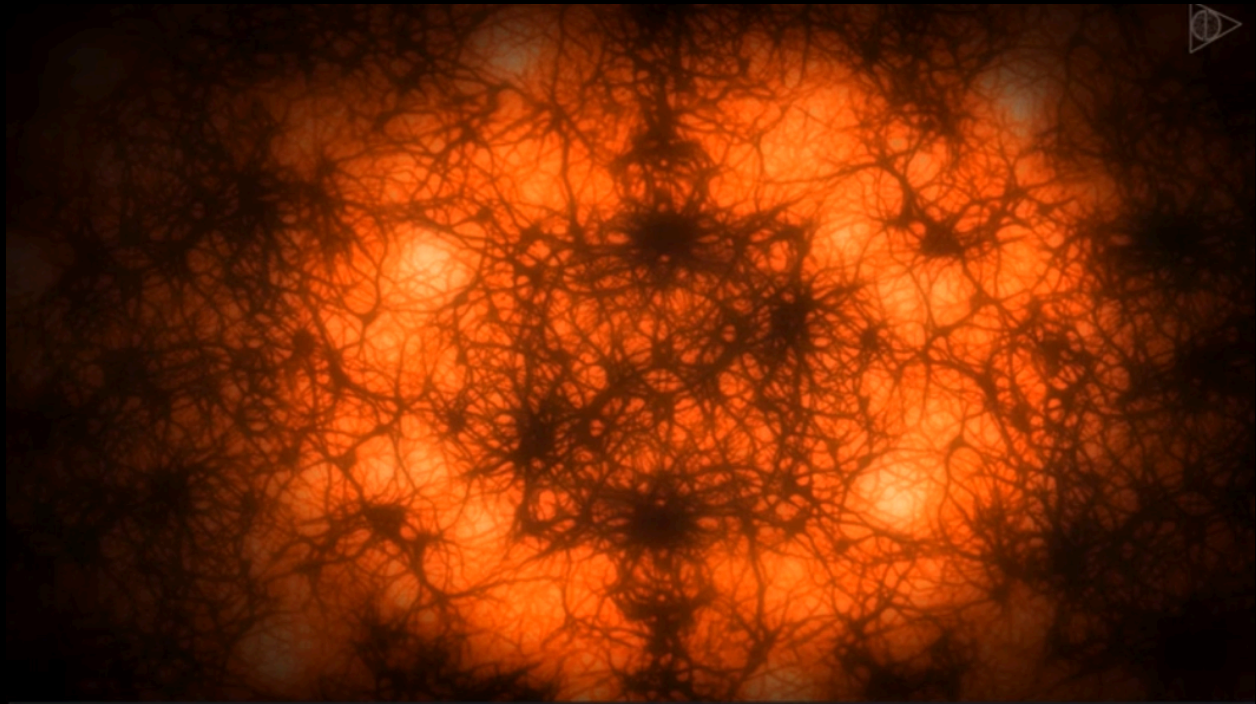
DOCTOR: Do you believe you'll receive something worthwhile from this? Though it'd likely be something you can't think of consciously...

DOMI: ... [sighs, cracking her neck - with a little. squeak in her voice]

DOMI: [she sounds stressed, judging by the sound her neck just made]

DOMI: If nothing else... I. I think I want to give it a try, to show everyone I'm fine.

DOCTOR: Alright, then. We'll get started very soon.



In the neural imprint, you find yourself in the middle of a shopping mall. It's shiny and white; almost blindingly so, with impeccably clean tiled floors and bright lights. You figure this must be a very new shopping complex. A fountain is running nearby, and upon closer inspection you notice that the bottom of it is filled with coins.

Also nearby is a mall directory, with a list of stores.

There's nobody here, you notice. The muzak is very quiet. Looking around, most storefronts are dim and locked.

domi checks in her purse for her phone - she would most likely have her purse, as this is a mall. shes gonna try and check what time it is

You can't read the number its from, for some reason. It's like when you try to read something in a dream, but its all a jumble.

The text says: *"if you're still out if you could pick up a bottle that'd be nice. doesnt have to be too fancy. staying in tonight. hope you come back soon"*

DOMI: [GIANT EYES EMOJI]

domi... yeah she has NO idea who the hell this is, but she doesn't wanna be rude. she... she figures she's. she's in an imprint right now. she's in her OWN imprint. everything must be happening for a reason. it's okay. she breathes for a second, and sends a reply:

DOMI: *Most certainly! I'll be back when I can.*

if shes able to, anyway

she can text back! she gets a quick response.

STRANGER #1: *okay thanks. just be careful because you know its nighttime and people get weird at nighttime and i dont want anything bad to happen*

STRANGER #1: *i probably do need that drink to calm my nerves huh*

;--; a aw. shes charmed by... whoever this caring person is

she sends one final text before venturing on:

DOMI: *I will use utmost caution in my journey, and I will see you soon.* 🌸

AW THE FLOWERS AT THE END

from there, she puts her phone back into her purse so she can focus. she ultimately has no idea what the fuck is going on frankly

shes cute

but... she's intrigued

so i feel like at this point she just... starts walking, trying to see what stores are open! maybe getting something nice for herself will calm her nerves a bit, and no she does NOT have a problem god damn it

Lots of them have already closed up, but there are a few you notice. There's a store that sells long fancy dresses, one that sells trendy hipster fashion, and some sort of wine-and-chocolate focused store titled Wine and Complain. That's kind of an odd name.

You notice that all the clothes being sold are black and white. In fact, everything you see around you is monochrome.

at the moment, the clothes dont... IMMEDIATELY catch domi's eye, but she decides maybe she could hit that dress store quickly on her way out. she is a woman with a wission, and she is going straight for wine and complain.

she plans to get a bottle that's plenty fancy and a box of chocolates too ! for. whoever she's apparently in a committed relationship with. but she realizes she doesn't know what kind of chocolate they like, so... well, she'll figure it out. she heads to the wine mom store

You do that! There's a variety of chocolates, all packaged in long, simply wrapped boxes. There's dark, white, milk, all sorts of flavorings... chocolate strawberries... you notice one box full of dark chocolates, shaped like a coffin. How goth. Whatever choice you make, chocolate-wise, there's no one there at the register. Where's all the staff?

Maybe you could poke around in the back.

... hm... this IS tough, maybe she just... mm. she is REALLY into that dark chocolate coffin, but she's not sure if it's her roommate's style? so, to be safe, what she does is grab the coffin and also a box of assorted chocolates, full of dark, white and milk. and -- okay. she wants chocolate strawberries.

for some reason, all this sweetness is making her a little anxious, but - the dark chocolates are sort of comforting. they're bittersweet, and feel more "natural."

but... yeah, with this little basket on her arm, she's started to realize there's no one here.

so... she looks around at the register, probably walks a lap around the whole little shop - it's probably not HUGE - and... setting her basket on the counter, so no one thinks she's stealing if they DO come back, she... she's feeling like a naughty girl. she walks right behind the counter, and tries the door to the back room.

ohh domi...

The back room's door opens, unlocked, and while it's dark in there, you can see that there's a bit of a mess. There's lots of glass shards, and spilled wine all over the floor. There's also something amongst the shards of glass. Some sort of glossy paper object. A photograph?

DOMI: :eyes: [lord knows she is back on her bullshit so shes going - straight as she can over to the mess, certainly curious about the photo but also curious about what the fuckin, mess is]

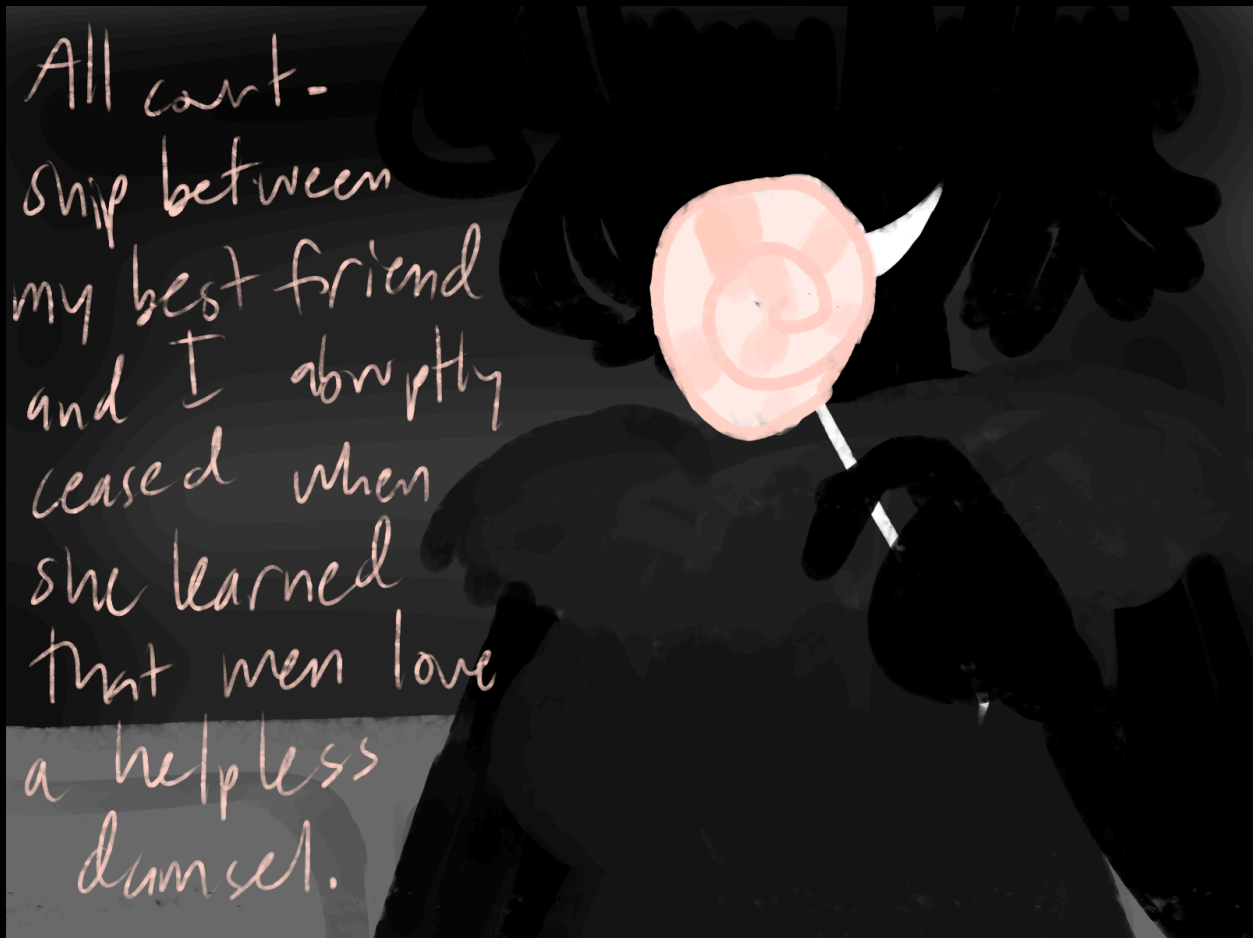
Do a Sneaky roll?

/r 4df + 1

4df + 1 = (+-b-)+1 = 0

Fucking. Pasasable.

You manage to get around all the shards, of which there are many. You brush aside the glass without cutting yourself, and pick up the photo.



[All courtship between my best friend and I abruptly ceased when she learned that men love a helpless damsel.]

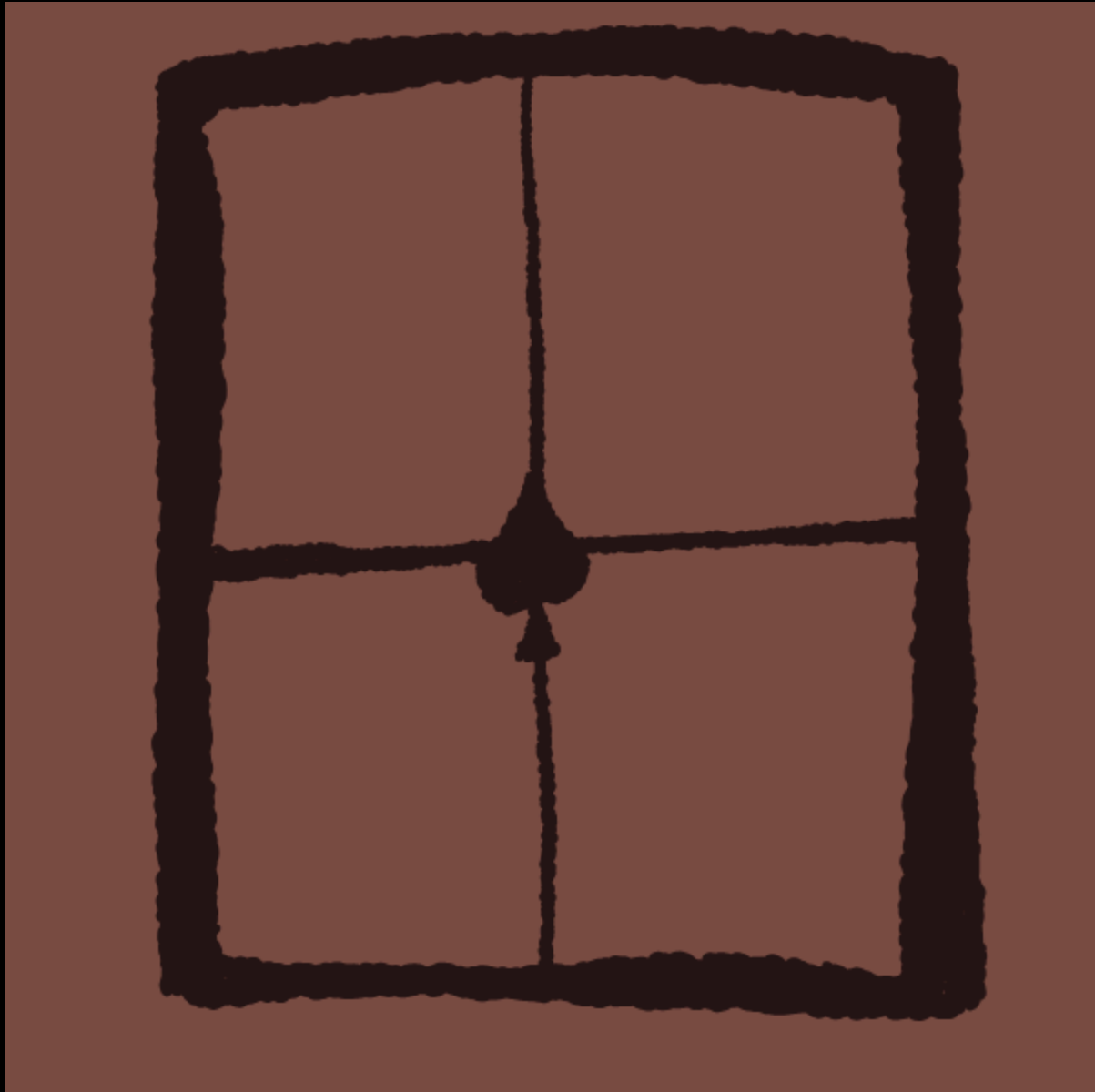
... domi is unhappy looking at this, suddenly feeling very dark inside.
she isn't *sad*, she's just... stony all of a sudden.

:ccat1:

As you pick up the photo, the light in this back room turns back on. The photo vanishes out of your hands-- but you'll find it again later.

On the wall behind you, there's something hanging. You couldn't see it in the dark before.

It looks like a large picture frame.



domi jumps a little as the photo vanishes, but... she's drawn to the picture frame, she's curious what it's doing here and why.

Turns out there's more to this mess on the ground-- it looks like whatever hung in this frame got torn apart. You could put it back together, the pieces seem neatly separated enough.

and i will PM you those pieces to put together!

ungh put it inside me arin

WPOW THIS IS ACTUALLY KIND OF TRICKY???

im figuring it out tho

i figured out that the pieces arent shaped like a puzzle, im supposed to be assembling it separate from the frame this is so smart

I'M GLAD ITS WORKING OUT....

i feel like im almost done at this point...

this bitch

has cracked the code.



... domi doesn't know what she's looking at.

I'll say!



H
HUH

Something... happens as you put the picture back together, in the frame.
You get a glimpse of the true image, before it warps. Paint leaks onto the wall.

domi is freaked the FUCK out and she backs away a step or two from the portrait

You hear glass crunching underneath your feet. It sounds even louder, in your distressed state.

Someone's voice comes from the doorway: "Hey, what's going on back there?"

DOMI VERY BRIEFLY PANICS AND JUST
CLEARs HER THROAT

DOMI: coming! my apologies, i-i didn't-- [as shes sort of just - leaving the backroom to be as agreeable as possible] no one was-- at the counter, and i didn't want to just

- *grab things and go, haha--* so i... was looking to see if someone who could help me was back there.

now just who the fuck is speaking is what she gets to figure out when she pokes her head out

It's an employee, dressed in a black-and-white uniform. They've got long black hair and dark eyes and pale skin. They match the rest of the monochrome mall.

WINE STORE EMPLOYEE: Oh, that's fine, it's just such a mess back there and it's employees only-- but I can take care of you at the counter.

WINE STORE EMPLOYEE: I was almost about to close shop, actually. Glad I caught ya.

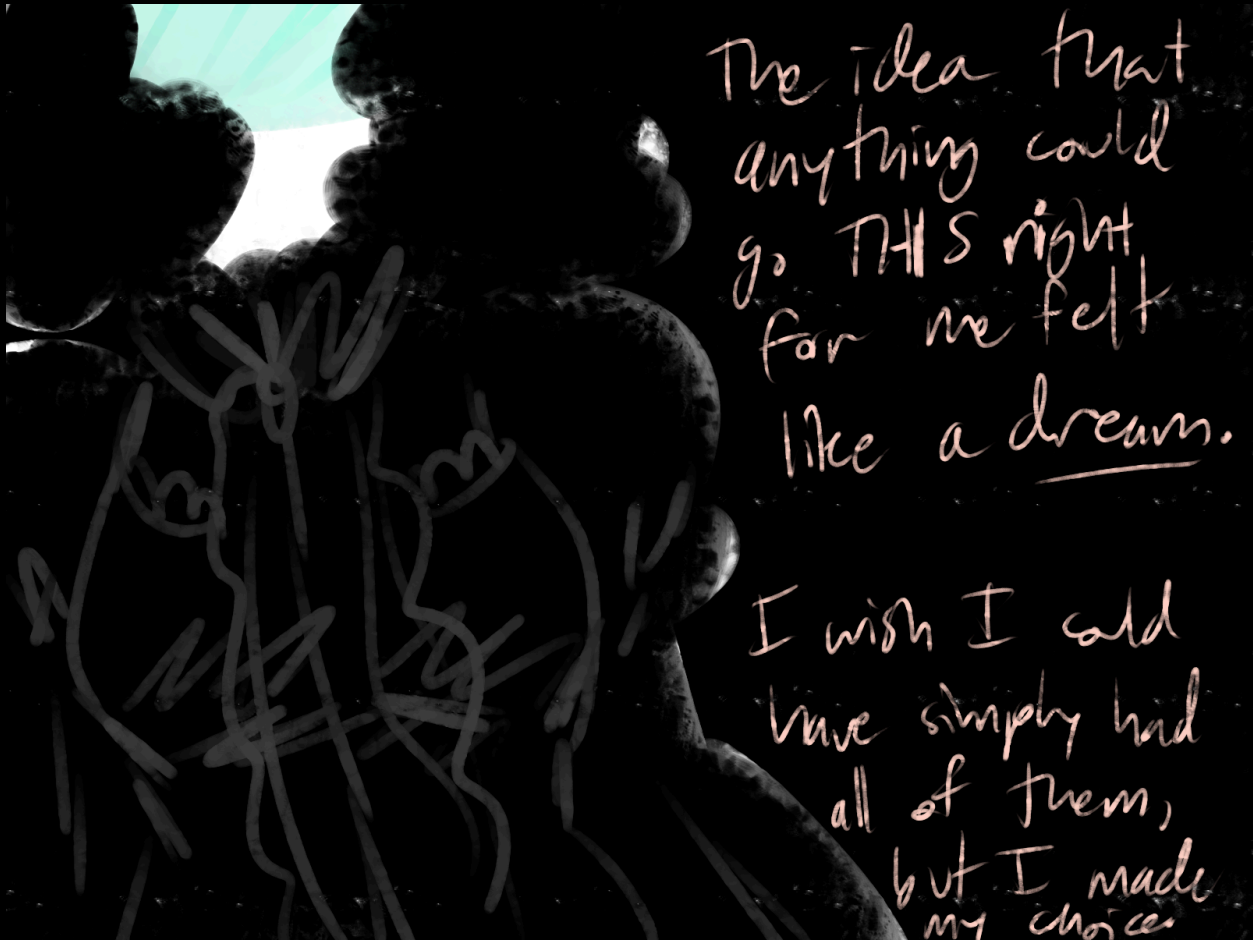
DOMI: ah! o-of course, thank you so much. [she bows her head for a second, trying to be polite - extra-polite, in exchange for her rudeness] i-i won't be long, i just wanted to pick up a few things. [she's just - quickly fumbling with her purse and her wallet, trying to get out her debit card and get the almighty fuck out of here]

DOMI: [... or to the next... store... it's weird that she wants to continue, but she kind of. does? i mean-- this isn't. REAL. she can't, like. get HURT or IN TROUBLE in here. right?]

The transaction goes fine, and the employee is plenty polite, not minding what happened earlier. They carefully put your purchases into a dark chocolate brown bag. You notice something extra slipped in, another photo.

WINE STORE EMPLOYEE: I really gotta close up now, but have a nice night!

DOMI: thank you so much - and you too! [she's polite and sweet on the outside, but... disquieted, and she finds her legs moving faster than they normally would as she strides out of the store in her high heels. she doesn't even want to LOOK at this photo until she's back in the main mall again, and... once she's out of the store and walked a couple stores down, she takes a deep breath and... takes out the photo.]



The idea that
anything could
go THIS right
for me felt
like a dream.

I wish I could
have simply had
all of them,
but I made
my choice.

[The idea that anything could go THIS right for me felt like a dream. I wish I could have simply had all of them, but I made my choice.]

After looking at the photo, you find yourself back at the main hub, near the fountain. The other side of the directory has an advertisement for the mall itself, imploring you to *Spend Your Day Here With Us!*

The advertisement is also covered by some blank spaces. The other photo you found hangs here as well.

The one in your hands materializes out of your hands and onto the board.

DOMI: [VAGUELY STARTLED NOISE as she realizes she's not where she was before]

domi... certainly regards the way the photos sit on this board, and decides - this must be a way of sorting her "supposedly repressed memories" from her regular ones. she guesses. probably. because she certainly doesn't remember being

surrounded by suitors as her newest photo implies, and she DEFINITELY doesn't remember being so happy she thought she was dreaming.
and... well, shit - where is there to go now? are any of the stores still open?
There's still some open, including a jewelry store, shiny and inviting.
Your phone buzzes.

:eyes: domi checks her fuckin phone IMMEDIATELY

You have two unread messages.

The first text, from that same number from before, reads: *i'm glad you didn't have to see **what would have happened**. that would have made me sad*

The second text, from a new number you still can't read properly, says: *Good evening, dear Domi! The moon is unusually bright tonight, it's like a gem! It reminded me of you.*

H Hm

domi replies to the first number with a quick, uh

DOMI: What's happened?

and tries not to assume the worst, feeling a little sick.

but what she's surprised by is the presence of a second number... she responds just the same as she did to the first one, pretending to know who this is and trying not to confuse anyone

DOMI: Good evening, yourself! Aw, that's very sweet...

she looks over to the jewelry shop up ahead and sends another text before putting her phone away again to focus on the task at hand:

DOMI: And it's giving me an idea!

; - ; domi i love you :ccat1: so i presume you just head on over to the jewelry shop?

yeah!! she's fuckin. *mama's buying shit*
her heart is still racing a little

The jewelry store is open and well-lit, and there are display cases of all sorts of shiny pretty things. This is the only store you've seen with multiple people inside. In fact, there's a bundle of people all crowded around *something* near the back.

There's an employee pacing around, not looking particularly busy.

H. Hm! domi doesn't assume that means something good, but. :eyes:
she... definitely scans the other display cases first, but she does make her way to the back after a minute or two, overcome with curiosity

The people are muttering amongst themselves, something about "such a shame" and "had so much waiting for him." These folks are pretty tall, and are blocking the view. They don't seem to notice you.

There's gotta be something you can do to break them up...



well domi's first thought is to gently worm her way past them, muttering "excuse me", which is what she does. (red dhmis voice) i wonder what will happen

Roll Quick?

HM

ok lemme see

/r 4df

4df = (bb-b) = -1

You died.

The group pushes you aside rather harshly.

Looks like you'll have to get rid of them another way. You wanna look around the store?

"harshly" just makes me think she nearly backs into a display dhmsdhjdjh but - she regains her balance, definitely more than a little startled. uhhhh... hm.

well - first off where are they, you said this is near the back of the store? is this smth she can walk behind the counter to see it, or

(trying to think of this in a 3d space) hmm

big valid

i pictured the people surrounding the object, and it would probably not be like at the actual far back

i will say that it's in a display case, on some sort of podium/pedestal thing. that you can probably tell

The employee is still pacing around. They walk by a fire alarm.

:eyes: hmm ok... well. she doesn't. WANT to make a fuss, first thing she does is try to get the employee's attention. but she is very aware that a fire alarm could just be pulled.

DOMI: ah— hello? excuse me...

They look like they've been brought back from spacing out.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: Oh, hello! Do you need help with anything?

DOMI: ah- yes, thank you, i was just - (glances over back at the crowd of people around the display) i was... wondering what was in that display case, and when i tried to see for myself, i was rather rudely pushed, ahaha;;

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: Oh dear... People do love a tragedy.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: It really did make us all so sad, it was a lovely ring... but when *that* happened, we had to take it back. No one was going to use it anymore.

DOMI: (looks a little concerned, and would go pale if she wasn't snow white) ... what happened?

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: (shakes their head) The whole household burned. That old house lit up like it was made of paper.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: People thought it must have been arson, but no one was left behind to tell the truth. Only some of the family's possessions remained. Including the ring.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: The young heir was so eager to put that ring on someone's hand.

DOMI: ... (she feels tears pricking at her eyes for reasons she doesn't quite understand) ... oh.

DOMI: i see. ah... (glances at the display case again - or what she can make out of it) ... do you suppose i could. take a look at it? it doesn't feel quite right to let someone else have it, it *should* have been given to the bride, or — buried with him.

DOMI: (goes a little minty, embarrassed) i-i don't know who. either of them were, i suppose i simply believe in curses, fate, things of that sort. i feel as if it were to fall to someone else... perhaps he would be unhappy, wherever he is.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: Mmm... I suppose you could take a look, yes.

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: Come with me.

The employee walks towards the case, saying *excuse me, pardon me* as they part the crowd. The display is visible now. Inside is an engagement ring, elegant but not ostentatious. There's also a photo inside the case.



[The happiest days of my life were spent inside a mall, getting to know those four men.]

DOMI: ...

DOMI: ... it's beautiful.

DOMI: (she's definitely started crying a little. she's sad, for whoever this man was - in such a strangely intimate way - but she is so, so scared. those are the exact railings that are in this mall on the upper floor. who are 'those four men'? she doesn't know what's going on.)

DOMI: how, um— (she gathers herself up, wiping the corner of her eye with one nail) how much exactly are you asking for it? (she seems REALLY set on buying it. it's clearly on sale.)

JEWELRY STORE EMPLOYEE: Oh, off the top of my head, I don't remember exactly... I can check, but would you like to try it on before you decide?

DOMI: (she's horrified by how quickly this comes out) yes.

DOMI: ah — it's. i'm— i'm giving it t-. it doesn't. matter if. (sighs) yes— yes. i do. thank you.

The employee opens the case and takes the ring. The photo disappears, going back to that collection at the directory. They offer it to you, gesturing for you to put your hand out.

DOMI: (domi's heart is aching so hard she thinks it might crack any moment. her lips are tight - trying not to openly cry. and she puts her hand out, scared of what she thinks might happen.)

The ring fits you perfectly. And it looks absolutely lovely.

As you look at the ring on your finger, the fire alarm is set off and startles the crowd with its loud ringing. Everyone dashes out of the store, including the employee who was just in front of you. After they cross the store's entry, you can't see them anymore.

DOMI: (before she can start crying - which she knows she will once the air is calm again) what— wait— mx.— i— (she, too, panics a bit, but— is there a fire? can she smell smoke?)

No smoke or flames to be seen, just the ringing alarm. But there's still an ashy look to the floor and displays, as though a fire came and went within half a second.

In the rush, there was another photo left behind, at the entrance.

... understanding there's no real danger, domi tears up again, softly sniffing and whimpering to herself as she wraps her arms around herself, slowly walking out. she stops by the photo, bending her knees to pick it up.

(uuuuuuu :ccat1:)

The photo doesn't quite fit the scene you just saw. After you inspect it, it too fades away.



[My parents were as different as night and day.]

... welp! once she's crossed the threshold of this store and has exited, she needs a second to sit down and cry.

she takes that second the moment she finds a bench, which probably - isn't too far away.

what's so frightening about this is she's starting to realize what's going on. but it doesn't feel like it happened to her. it feels like the institute is playing a trick on her, or mixed up imprints, but...

this is definitely the mall she frequents. she's definitely been here many, many times. this... this has to be her imprint. but it doesn't... she just...

still crying, but calming down just a bit, she pulls out her phone to see if there are any messages.

You have a few. Some replies from earlier.

STRANGER #1: *please don't worry about it. i don't want you to get sad either.
please be happy, somewhere*

STRANGER #2: *Not as sweet as you are! And I don't suppose you'll tell me what
this idea is?*

A passage of time between this message and a new one.

STRANGER #2: *I always knew that would fit you well. I'm glad I chose it. Enjoy it,
dear.*

... domi's body crumples over and she lets out such a ragged wail that she doesn't
know where it came from.

she needs more than a second.

(i'm so [five thousand Oof noises] im so sad)

she takes more than a second. probably, it's a good five, ten minutes that pass.
she has to put her phone back in her purse, because what happened is she kept
looking at her texts and breaking down harder and harder and harder.
this can't have happened to her. this can't be her life. this didn't happen.
it didn't happen.

(AAa....)

it's okay. it's not real. it isn't real. this didn't happen.
theres no WAY she would forget not one, but TWO dead partners.
there's no way. she doesn't forget pain. she holds onto it too hard, it's taken a lot of
therapy for her to teach herself to be able to handle it more healthily.
she wouldn't forget something like this.
if this really happened, she wouldn't be living the life she's living now. she wouldn't
live in such a nice apartment, she wouldn't have such a nice job, she.
she wouldn't.
she takes a deep, shaky breath.
this isn't real. this didn't happen.
if it DID happen, it certainly didn't happen to her. maybe this is— maybe her. maybe
her. mom. or something. or her dad. she takes more after her dad, with her
appearance.

she knows her dad was fond of men as well as women, he — this could.
she just.
anything could be true as long as it meant this didn't happen.

(clutching chest)

... the second that thought crosses her mind, her heart stops and her tears stop too, cold turkey, and she gets up, wiping her tears. she gets out her little compact mirror, and her tube of pink mascara, fixing her lashes.

she decides, concretely, to stop thinking about his.

her lashes are naturally pink. they're lovely. it's amazing that she's managed to find a tube that fit her color.

hell - while she's at it, she fixes her whole face. her blush, matching her freckles and blood almost perfectly. her lipstick, same color as her mascara.

she's fine. she's fixed now. she's not cracked anymore.

she breathes.

she. she can do this.
(UUUUUUUU....)

From where you're sitting, you can see an open bookstore on the second floor. Brainstorm Books, it's called. That sounds like a quiet place where you could spend some time. Read a distraction.

... yeah. she certainly could. something about the idea of a bookstore seems nice and comforting.
she heads over there, gripping at her purse.

You head over to the escalator, up to the second floor. As you do, your phone buzzes again. You could check it now, or wait...
In any case, the bookstore is right in front of you now. It looks cozy and quiet in there.

... she checks her phone before heading in, with a sad smile on her face.

Another new number you don't recognize, with a series of texts.

STRANGER #3: *it's another late night. you'd think that they wouldn't want residents to be so sleep deprived... it makes it harder to treat people.*

STRANGER #3: *At least we're both awake at the same time tonight, right? assuming you haven't gone to sleep yet*

STRANGER #3: *i SWEAR this weekend will be clear. as long as the skies are.*

DOMI: *I'm wide awake, my dear. And I am so happy to hear from you.*

she has no idea who this guy is, but she means that. she thinks she's gonna text a bit more often in here. really spend some time with this guy before he has to go.

because he has to go. she knows he does.

DOMI: *I'm so sorry they're working you this hard... Be sure to get some coffee in you if you can! Make it extra sweet for me. ❤️*

she means that heart. she FEELS it.

(waahhh)

STRANGER #3: *oh there you are ❤️ i'll be sure to stop by the coffee machine, then.*

STRANGER #3: *and hey, the work is worth it. i didn't spend all that time in school to sit around, you know?*

STRANGER #3: *i do feel bad, though. i don't like skipping out on you. i don't wanna be a flake all the time*

DOMI: *I understand completely. It's busy work, being a miracle worker. It doesn't mean I'm any less in awe of you, though.*

she walks into the book store, her attention partly on her phone.

STRANGER #3: *aw, i don't know about that... you're gonna get me all flustered in front of people*

STRANGER #3: *I'll make the weekend extra special, alright? you deserve it*

A white rat scurries across the floor, in front of you. It runs off, vanishing behind some bookshelves.

domi: :eyes:

DOMI: *That would be lovely, if we can manage it. I would love to do something with you.*

and she rushes to follow the rat...

STRANGER #3: *i'll see you soon, then.*

You follow the rat as it scurries around the walls of bookshelves, and it stops in front of the Romance section. There's pulpy thriftstore romance, Austen romances, and even some sort of... relationship self-help book? Safety and Security in Relationships, it's called.

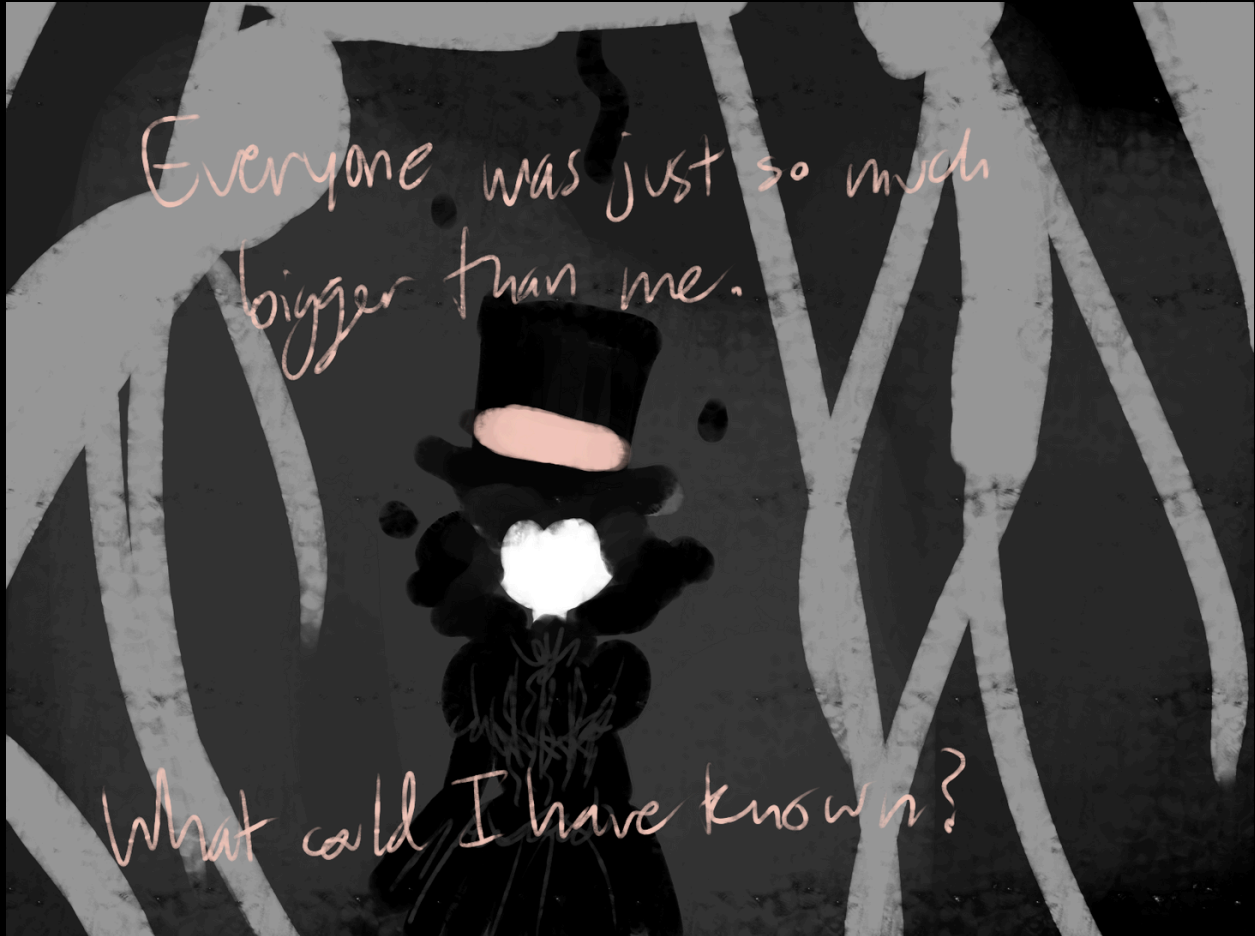
... she picks that up immediately and flips open to the first page.

she mutters, "very kind of you, little one," to the rat.

The rat rubs its face with its little paws.

The book's first chapter explains love as a concept. It describes love as an action, rather than a feeling. Or rather, a mixture of both. Actions reflect the feelings. A relationship requires mutual actions on all parts, that ensure trust and safety with each other.

A photo falls out of the book.



[Everyone was just so much bigger than me. What could I have known?]

domi certainly remembers that.

but... it makes her heart ache just a little as she picks up the photo. people haven't historically put in work like that for her. this book might be something to buy.

After you inspect it, the photo vanishes back to that directory board.
The rat squeaks. It must be trying to get your attention.

domi lifts her head, smiling in the rat's direction.

"what is it, my dear?" she asks, closing the book and holding it gently to her chest.

The rat paws at its face again and then turns to scurry off in another direction, heading to another part of the bookstore.

domi follows, and while she walks - carefully watching the ground - she texts real quick to the newest number:

DOMI: *I want you to know that I love you so much.*

and puts her phone away again.

where has the rat led her?

You get an immediate response.

STRANGER #3: *i love you too. i really do*

The rat has led you to the Mystery/Thriller section of the store, and there's something interesting on the ground.



It's some sort of safe, with a combination made up of words. Each slot has three choices.

It looks like someone left behind their glasses, and they got stepped on.

OH GUESS WHOS HORNY

ME

:ahe:

HM... lemme see
a couple of takes:

- 1.) love trust touch
- 2.) lose safety touch

Those two don't work. Think about the things you've seen here.

here as in the bookstore?

yeah!

UHHH love safety sight?

That gets the door to the safe open!

There's a couple things inside the safe. A letter, and a photo. What do you take first?

she takes the photo, glancing down at it almost... hatefully



He was my
true love,
and he
couldn't even
tell me he
was too
busy for a
date, one night.

*[He was my true love, and he couldn't even tell me he was too busy for our date,
one night.]*

...

she takes a deep breath.

and finally, she takes the letter.

"First of all, I am so sorry. I'm sorry I wasn't there that night. I'm sorry that I couldn't stop him. I'm sorry that before I left, all I could say was sorry. I didn't even get to ask for a last "I love you."

*I don't think **he** would have done that for me*

I hope he isn't looking at you right now

*I'm sorry about something else
I'm sorry you have to **find me** again"*

Something falls with a thud behind the bookshelf.

... domi folds the letter up neatly, inhaling through her nose as she stows it away in her purse. she turns over the apologies in her head - mostly, she.

who's looking at her right now?

who does she have to find, and again?

... she wonders if that noise has something to do with it.
she can't completely put to words the feelings in her gut right now. it's not quite 'numb' - she knows, somehow, her reaction to whatever that thing that fell was will not be numb.
the only word she can think of is "prepared."

she walks around to the back of that shelf.

You think it's a mannequin at first. But why would a mannequin be in a bookstore?
Its arms, fallen over its chest, are stiff but the artificial, articulated joints of a mannequin are missing.

The rat's scurried back into a hole in the wall.

the rat must feel so embarrassed.
are there any other details about the mannequin that domi should notice?

The outfit it's wearing looks familiar. Like the one in the photo. A dark blue rain jacket, a light yellow shirt.

The neck ends so abruptly. The neatness of it is hard to look at.

... she looks right at the neck. she can't stop staring.

the neck MUST be nothing but skin-colored material, right? nothing... internal showing, because it's just a mannequin. of course. right?

see - what she hates about this the most is. she feels like she almost remembers something about this.

If you stare hard enough, you swear you see a flash of red. But as you look at it now, it's clean material. Someone should pick this thing up.

Your phone buzzes. Loudly. You can actually feel it from inside the purse.

well she is most certainly checking the shit out of that— maybe rumbling against the key is making it buzz louder?

she unlocks her phone and looks at what's going on, feeling a sort of... numb terror rise in her cheeks.

she doesn't — like being near this mannequin, but feels somehow like she should stay for a second anyway.

You check your texts, while the mannequin lies still. Well, gravity pulls one of its arms to the floor.

STRANGER #4: *so are you like dead or something???? (° □ ° ||)*

STRANGER #4: *because that's the only reason i can think of why you havent texted me at all (×_×)*

STRANGER #4: *i mean i really really hope that's not the case!! ;;;;*

domi just screams, stumbling back away from the mannequin, hearing its arm fall to the floor - she. she's. between that and the new texts, she's starting to feel so anxious she could just— she could start tearing her hair out. she needs to get out of this bookstore. she gathers her things as quickly as possible, and - her heart tugs a little at the sight of the mannequin on the floor, despite herself. she...

god, though she can't BEAR to be close to it for a second longer, she tries to place its hand back over its chest.

once she's got that - or fumbled with it for as long as she could - she's speedwalking out of the store, feeling the beginnings of tears pricking at her eyes again.

it feels almost like this happened to her. but she's still not 100% convinced.

she responds to her texts:

DOMI: *My apologies, love!*

DOMI: *It's been a very difficult day.*

this person is just another one of her partners, right? that one photo DID say there were four men.

so why does she feel coerced rather than compelled to reply?

The hand is warm.

It stays in place, at least as long as you're there, before you leave the mannequin behind.

fuck dude she sure did!

ow!!!

well that makes her sick to her stomach so that's just adding to her current Mood

STRANGER #4: *oh there you are!!! (^▽^)/ so you didn't die horribly you just forgot thats ok ok*

STRANGER #4: *aw im sorry your day was hard ;;;; (◡‿◡) i've just been sitting around waiting for you. i got worried!!!*

STRANGER #4: *you're coming back right now, right? (@^_^)*

well first before she replies - are there any more shops open?

she feels like whatever she says, it should be true. so she's not gonna say Yes if there's like, one more store or anything

As you walk outside, the mall's lights have gone dim. Every store you see has shut down and locked their doors. In fact, the bookstore goes dark the second you leave.

There's just one shop open that you can see. It's a bright and bubbly storefront for a candy store named Sugar Crush.

... hm.

DOMI: *I'm just about on my way out.*

DOMI: *I'm going to pick up something nice for us first, though.* 🍷

STRANGER #4: *aww how sweet (> w<) 🍷 i'm excited!!!!*

STRANGER #4: *(ノ◡◡)ノ:° ✨ **

STRANGER #4: *but seriously hurry*

DOMI: *I'll be home soon.*

she doesn't like this man's tone, so she... puts her phone back in her purse. it feels safer that way, somehow.

not that she's sure why she would feel unsafe with a romantic partner.

and, given all this, she heads into the candy store.

The second you do, you hear someone loudly chirp a "HI WELCOME TO SUGAR CRUSH" right next to you. A wide-eyed energetic employee, oblivious to how late it is, holds a tray of candy samples. "DO YOU WANT ONE?"

Cheery bubblegum pop plays over the speakers.

DOMI COUGHS A BIT - but fuck yeah she wants a sample :D that's one good thing about tonight. she asks politely what the different samples are

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #1: They're gourmet candies from our test kitchen!! Try them!!

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #1: These are like Skittles and Gushers, but fancier!!!

god she wants a tiny little ketchup cup of fancy gushers. she thanks the employee with a smile - a little nervous as she takes the sample, stepping a bit further into the store. what the FUCK have we got in here

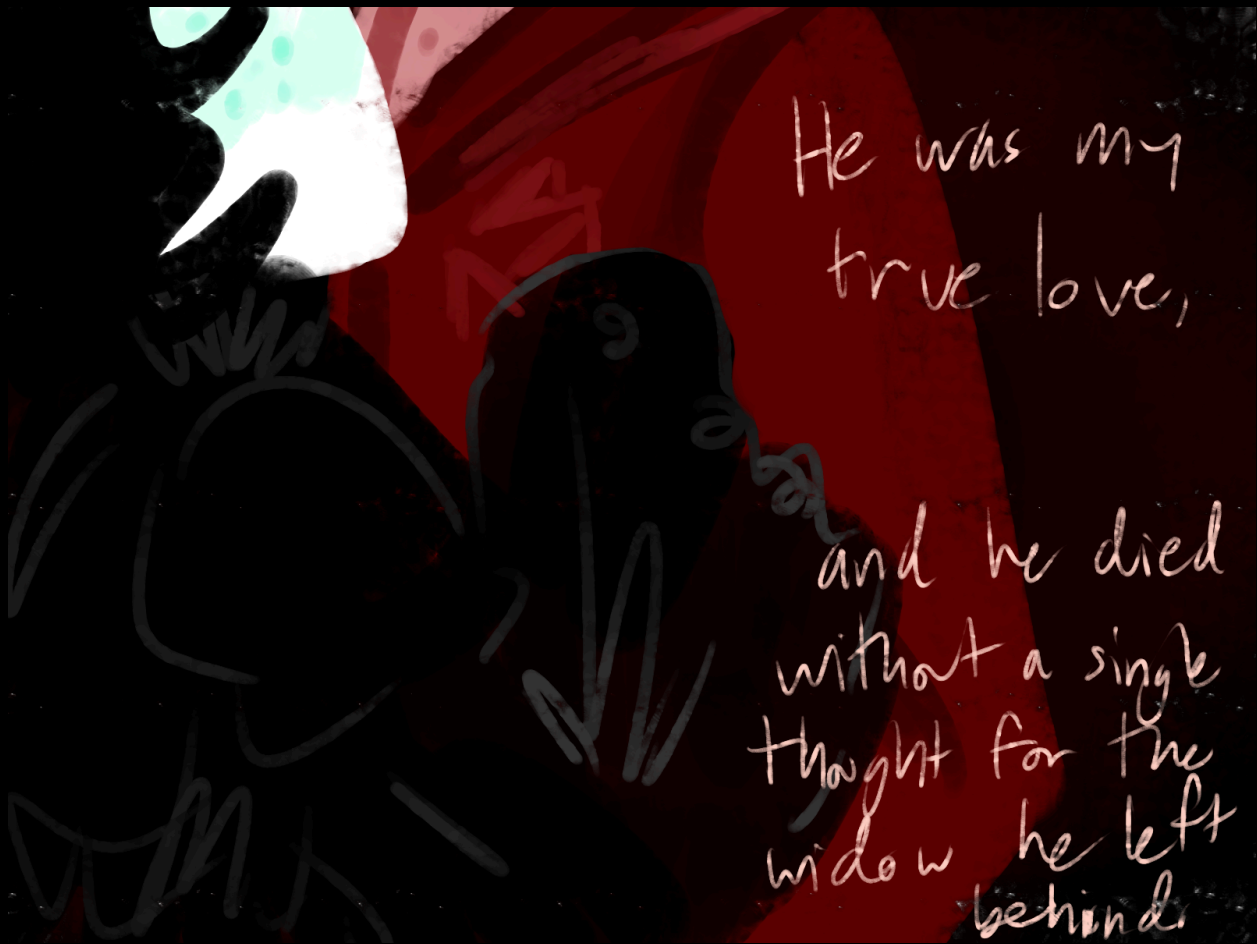
The fancy gushers are pretty good, and have a more fruity flavor. They "gush" more than a real one would.

There's all sorts of teeth-rotting goodness here. You can take a bag and fill it up with different candies, all in their little compartments with serving utensils. Cinnamon candies, licorice, gummies, chocolates, gumdrops.... you notice a photo shoved in among the gummy worms.

HM.

YEP SHES GRABBIN THAT SHIT FIRST tbh what she wants to do after that is just get a bunch of different shit, assuming this place charges by weight

You scoop out the photo. A worm comes out with it.



[He was my true love, and he died without a single thought for the widow he left behind.]

The worm falls to the ground and squirms away.

... she barely even notices the worm, because she remembers *this*. her gaze grows cold and hateful, and she wants to be done with this shopping trip as soon as possible.

assuming nothing else grabs her attention, she starts shoveling little portions of just about everything into her bag, as much as she can fit, awaiting a pretty expensive candy bill but not caring much at the moment. it'll be worth it.

You look around for the register, but don't see it. You have to go further in.

This store is weirdly big. Bigger than it looks from outside.

Another employee appears.

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #2: Got everything you need?? Anything else?? Did you try the samples??

DOMI: (nearly screams again, but — controls herself) yes, no and yes - thank you so much, mx. (she seems... so tired. and she hopes this is the end of it so she never has to figure out why the fuck all this happened in her own imprint.)

But this was not the end.

oh, good

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #2: Okaaaay~ The register's that way! (points to the far end of the store, which seems... less bright and cheery than this end.)

DOMI: (... she hesitates a moment, but remembers this employee is looking at her) — ah. thank you so much. (her smile is worn thin as she bows her head a bit, walking as quickly as she can without attracting further attention, over to the register.)

The cheery bubblegum pop continues playing, but the lights get dimmer. The candy on display starts looking more rotten. Syrup coats the floor, making your shoes stick. Caramel apples on a tray have turned to mush.

There's another employee, with the same grin as the others, at the register waiting for you.

well - domi... slows down, because she knows she's going to trip if she keeps speedwalking. she... looks behind her at the other employees for a moment before carefully making her way over to the register, gripping at the strap of her purse with one hand and holding her tied up bag of candy from the bottom with the other.

The employee smiles, and weighs the bag.

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #3: Oh, you'll get the special!

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #3: You get a gift with your purchase. It's super special!

They place a box on the counter. Your phone buzzes loudly again.

DOMI: oh! how. special! ah— thank you. (she flinches the second she feels her phone buzz, but thinks it might be best to ignore it right this second - she fishes her wallet out of her purse, hurriedly handing the employee her card as quick as she can. she feels like this is probably something she wants to open when she's out of the store. right? or will the employee just make her open it right here?)

The transaction goes through fine. And then the employee looks at you expectantly.

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #3: Well, go on. Open it!

It's a plain, brown box. And it's waiting for you to open it. Your phone buzzes again.

...

DOMI: oh— one moment, i think someone might be calling me— uh - (she fumbles with her phone quickly, sort of - opening the box at the same time, not really focusing on it right now - just sort of using her long nails. what do her texts say?)

STRANGER #4: *YOU'RE TAKING TOO LONG*

STRANGER #3: *i know i don't have a lot of time left. i'm sorry i left you. i'm sorry you got caught in the middle of this. i'll do it right next time. it'll be all right in the end.*

domi shudders a little, looking instead at the box she's absent mindedly opened. she's more scared of her phone right now - and what's the worst a box could be hiding inside it?

It's a bouquet! Dark red roses, with little yellow and blue flowers.

Do you pick up the box?

yep. that can't be it. with how weird tonight has been, that can't be it. it can't be. shes started laughing nervously, muttering to herself, "thought you could fool me, didn't you?"

The employee smiles vacantly.

CANDY STORE EMPLOYEE #3: Please take your gift.

she's looking at every edge of the box she can, the sides, the corners, the bottom - not quite the inside yet, murmuring "youuuu thought you could make me look like an idiot."

The bottom of the box is wet. It's got a dark spot.

... domi shoots the employee a wild look.

"you thou— you thought i was going to take this home with me. you think i was going to take this into my car—" she rather abruptly rips the bouquet out of the box, and

... what's that?

The dark red spot grows at the bottom of the box. The bouquet is heavy in your hands.

You're not in the candy store anymore. You're back on the bottom floor of the mall but-- this isn't the same mall. This place is worn down, old, abandoned. And you're surrounded by clothing racks.

There's a photo on the ground.



[He was perfect. He was handsome, funny, smart, kind, and he respected me. But, being a doctor... He was busy, and sometimes slow to communicate.]

domi picks it up, every inch of her body on fire.

she's almost not afraid - almost. but before she proceeds in the maze, she has a couple texts to send to the most recent 'gentleman' blowing up her phone.

DOMI: *SHUT UP.*

DOMI: *SHUT UP. YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT I'M GOING THROUGH RIGHT NOW.*

DOMI: *I'LL BE HOME WHEN AND IF I DECIDE TO COME HOME.*

she somehow knows that's going to blow up in her face. she has never had thoughts this hateful before.

but she puts her phone away, walking forward. wherever the clothes racks lead.

You see two different paths: do you go left or right?

Your phone does start buzzing wildly as soon as you put it away.

she's gonna look at her phone later.

right now, she goes left.

There's another photo on the ground.



[None of them took me seriously, though they "loved" me.]

There's also another forked path: left or right?

right. why not.

the photo only makes domi's hands shake - because she remembers this. she remembers this.

what doesn't she remember? what's the last piece she's-- she can TASTE it, it's JUST on the tip of her tongue, but it feels for some reason like it didn't happen at a mall.

what is she going to find?

You go right, and find a dead end. From the clothing racks, identical blue rain jackets hang.

domi is -- GREATLY startled by this, so much so that she nearly loses her balance.

she decides this is a great time to check her phone. what was she just sent?

STRANGER #4: *are you kidding me????*

STRANGER #4: *ARE YOU ACTUALLY SAYING THIS TO ME*

STRANGER #4: *what's wrong with you? do you not care about me at all? ;;;;;;*

STRANGER #4: *IS IT BECAUSE OF SOMEONE ELSE*

oh, good. she needs to blow off a little steam.

she barely understands the words she's typing, but they feel so real that she has to wonder a little about them.

DOMI: *This is NO way to speak to a grieving woman, you are unbelievable. What do you really want? It can't be me if you're talking to me like this, like I'm your daughter and you get to boss me around. What do you want? Is it sex? Is it my money? Is that what I am to you? A rich blow-up doll?*

DOMI: *You will learn to RESPECT a woman before you start running your mouth about how she's "out too late" or "too loose" or "taking too long." Your NAME is not PRINTED on my BODY ANYWHERE. You do not OWN ME. I am with you because I CHOSE TO BE.*

DOMI: *Though I don't have even the slightest clue why I picked you.*

and she puts her phone away. she's got more to say, but they're still in the womb of her mind, too nonsensical - dangerous to give birth to early.

she turns around and goes back to where she was, this time going left.

More wild phone buzzing. You go left, and the identical rain jackets keep appearing. Some ripped and tattered. But now there's three paths: left, middle, and right. Maybe check that last text from your other suitor. The one who wanted a parting message.

ah -- right. now that she stands in the middle of these three roads, she closes her eyes as she swipes out of her text window with Fuckhead, instead tapping the one right below it. that's the other suitor. the most recent one, right?

mmhm, the last text that read:

XXXXXX: *i know i don't have a lot of time left. i'm sorry i left you. i'm sorry you got caught in the middle of this. i'll do it right next time. it'll be all right in the end. There's something interesting about the word choice.*

... she can't even begin to imagine what "next time" means. she...

can she still text him? she doesn't-- she doesn't know.

... she figures it's worth a try - she responds, or at least tries to:

DOMI: *Oh god. You don't have to apologize. Everything is forgiven, I promise. I'm not upset with you. I won't ever be upset with you.*

DOMI: *Next time?*

and, fuck it, in the meantime, she checks on fuckhead tool

*TOO BUT TOOL WORKS

FUCKHEAD TOOL. that's his new contact name

it'll calm her nerves after sending a text to -- well, she has no idea.

it's funny that reading texts from a clearly abusive boyfriend is calming.

she doesn't know why she's so scared of that last one - or... scared of talking to him. scared of getting attached.

anyway. anyway. anyway. time to stop thinking. what does fuckhead say - if anything

STRANGER #4: *you don't really think i'm that shallow, do you???? that hurts ;;*

(_)

STRANGER #4: *wait, "grieving?????" is THAT what this is about lololololol*

STRANGER #4: *god, i thought i already explained it to you \('—`) 𐀀*

STRANGER #4: *THEY WEREN'T GOOD ENOUGH*

DOMI: *I'm*

DOMI: *I'm sorry what?*

STRANGER #4: *the good doctor was just the one who got in the way the most (© ©)*

STRANGER #4: *you don't remember how that went????*

STRANGER #4: *lemme remind you then!!!!*

Another buzz.

XXXXXX: *hey i'm SO sorry i stood you up last night*

XXXXXX: *i just forgot!!! i'm just SO busy, you know.....*

XXXXXX: *but it's okay!!! i'll make it up to you* 💕

XXXXXX: *i have a gift for you* 💕

to fuckhead:

DOMI: *How did you do that*

she knows RIGHT away this isn't the doctor.

she knows, deep down - the doctor wouldn't say "it's okay" FOR her. he wouldn't forgive himself for her.

she knows the doctor but she's never seen him before this bizarre experiment.

in the meantime - she's strolling forward into the middle path

The clothing racks get tighter around you-- but you're on the correct path. It opens up into two paths: right and left. Empty love letter envelopes scatter across the floor.

STRANGER #4: *he's here with me*

STRANGER #4: *he looked so sad. he looked sad because he knew that you wouldn't be his anymore.*

STRANGER #4: *it was kinda funny. i wish he stayed looking that way the whole way through*

STRANGER #4: *but he didn't (´••••´) ♡*

domi goes right.

with freezing, shaking fingers, she types:

DOMI: *I know why I picked you, now.*

STRANGER #4: *and why's that, sweetheart???? (´•ω•`) tell me*

As you go right, you see the white rat. It runs away from you. It's scared. Not of you. It just wishes you wouldn't look at it like that.

A final decision of right or left.

domi tears up before she picks her direction, sending a couple texts, one right after the other.

DOMI: *You were at the very, very, very bottom of the barrel. And you're all that was there.*

DOMI: *You were my last choice in the entire world.*

she starts actually shedding tears, one falling onto her screen - she wipes it away with her sleeve.

DOMI: *You know how, when you go grocery shopping, you try to avoid the bruised bananas? Well - that's all that was left. That's all that was in the store. Bruised, over-ripe fruit.*

DOMI: *If I didn't pick those bananas, I would have starved.*

she goes left.

Left is a dead end. A wall, on which I LOVE YOU MOST is written with dripping red.... paint?

STRANGER #4: *so cold.*

STRANGER #4: *i tried to be so warm to you. i loved you so much. so much i wanted to be one with you. so much that i wanted to eat you whole.*

STRANGER #4: *i love you. i love you. i love you. i love you.*

STRANGER #4: *don't you understand?*

domi is about ready to throw her phone to the ground and stomp on it until it breaks, irreparably.

but she's not about to buy a new phone because of this fucker.

DOMI: *You don't love me, or anyone.*

DOMI: *They loved me. They were gentlemen.*

DOMI: *You weren't in love with me. You lusted for me. There is such a deep, profound difference that it frightens me that you can't see it.*

DOMI: *What's my favorite movie? My favorite book? My favorite song? My three favorite foods? What was my father's name? My mother's name?*

DOMI: *What do I want in a man? What do I want in a woman?*

DOMI: *... You probably can't even answer those things. You don't even know who I am, and you decided this was best for me.*

she lets out a sob she didn't know she was holding back, her throat in horrible pain.


DOMI: *You decided this was best for YOU, is what you did. You decided you deserved to have what you want, at the expense of my happiness.*

she heads back to that fork, and goes right.

DOMI: *What you are is a sexist demon. You are every woman's worst nightmare, you are entitlement, you are masculinity at its most toxic, you are what every woman thinks about every second she's walking alone at night, you are what we think about, pacing back and forth, waiting for our husbands -or wives- to get home. You are what we think about when we look out the window and notice that the same unfamiliar car has been parked in front of our houses for the past week.*

of course, she has no idea how accurate "demon" is

STRANGER #4: *woooow, that's a lot of mean words.*

STRANGER #4: *"demon" is kind of cute though* 

XXXX: *it's sad that you made it happen like this*

XXXX: *because if i don't have you, the others won't either. it's all over, love.*

You're in your own house. Your bedroom.

... domi feels an anxiety so strong that she can't just fight it off with insisting she's going to stop thinking about it. she feels - fear, and it's making her shoulders hunch up. she doesn't like this.

The box is back. And the final photo rests on top.

I received a package
the following day
that ate my
brain,
and now I can
never get married

[I received a package the following day that ate my brain, and now I can never get married.]

...

domi remembers that.

she remembers that and she feels so sick that she thinks she's going to throw up if she's not careful - she remembers that.

every inch of her remembers it too, her numb face, her trembling lips, her shaky hands, her cold legs, her churning stomach, her-- she

she remembers that

she remembers **that**

she remembers that-- she was-- it was -- it was the day after **brian** stood her up at that--

she remembers that.

(AUUUUUGHHH ;;)

The directory board has appeared in your room, with all the other photos.
You can arrange them now.

... in a moment of -- who knows what she could call what she's feeling right now, she opens up the box in which her "bouquet" was set.
what's in the box?

.....

He looks the same as he did that day.
You could almost pretend he's sleeping.

He lost his glasses.

Your phone buzzes. It's the lighter tone. Not the harsh one that preceded your demon suitor's texts.

BRIAN: i'm not gone. please remember that i'm not gone.

BRIAN: please remember that i'm with you in the rain. i'm with you when you can't sleep.

BRIAN: i'm with you when you're making breakfast and when you're reading something you love.

BRIAN: i'm sorry. i love you.

well.

yeah. domi still has tears in her.

she figures that out, just - slowly lowering to the floor, falling to her knees, and - starts. flat out sobbing into the side of her bed. holding onto it for dear life.

this isn't like how she was crying when she was receiving those texts from suitors one and two. there's nothing ragged or loud about this.

this is pathetic. this is tired. this is small, and weak, and pitiful, and helpless.

There's nothing weak about her. There's nothing pathetic about this.
She has all the time in the world to cry, and sit there at her bed.

still crying, but - calming down enough to focus on anything other than burying her face in her bed and pressing so hard into it that she sees stars, she sends a text.

to fuckhead.

because he's the only one still alive, after all. he's the only one she can actually have a conversation with.

DOMI: *I would have noticed you eventually is the sad part about this*

DOMI: *Do you understand that? Do you understand anything about anything*

DOMI: *If you had just acted like a normal person I would have eventually looked your way and probably given you at least a chance*

DOMI: *What am I saying you're a monster*

DOMI: *You're not a normal person the best you ever could have done WAS "act"*

DOMI: *Just like you did, period. You just acted and acted and acted until you didn't have to act anymore, you just*

DOMI: *You wore the mask of a normal person in love in front of me. That's never what you were. You were never a sweet boy with an aching heart*

DOMI: *You were always a monster who would have been happy to have me in any way he could, no matter how hard I would kick and scream*

DOMI: *Do you actually feel anything reading me say that about you? Other than anger, hurt pride, whatever two or three emotions you actually do experience*

CXXX: *huh. it just makes me wish i had been more careful.*

COXX: *but you're right.*

COLX: *i would have done anything and everything to have you. all of you.*

COLE: *your monster's name has come back to you. you've got your memories. you can wake up now.*

... domi just rolls her eyes, even - flinching a little bit, hating the almost fond throb she feels in her chest. she puts her phone back in her purse, and gets back to her feet, face sort of - dry, cracked, with tears.

she stands in front of the board... and experiments, first and foremost.

What sort of experiment?

this is what she tries first.



she knows it can't possibly be the answer. she knows.

but she's curious what's gonna happen.

... she remembers all this, and always has. she remembered this long before she ever came here.

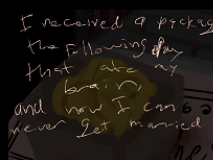
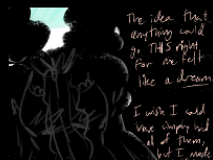
The room goes gray for a second and the board shakes. The photos reset to their original position.

They're not *wrong* memories, but they're not the ones you need.

... yeah. alright. okay.

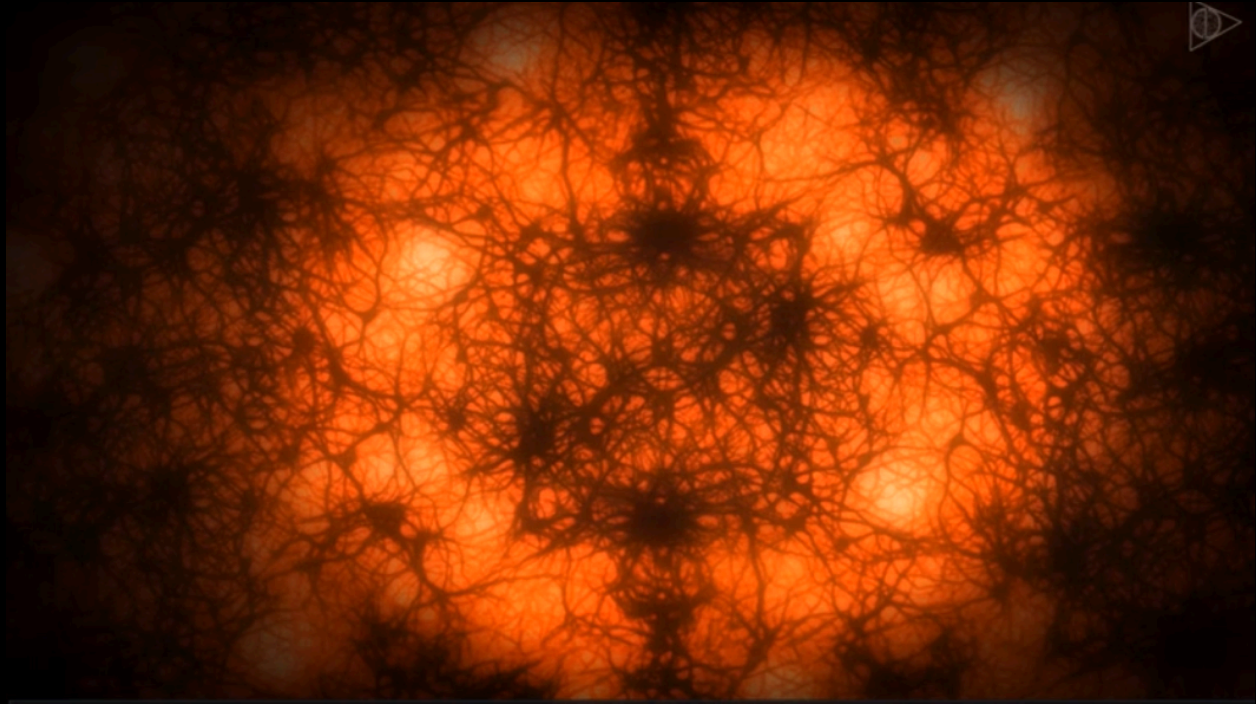
she wasn't sure what she was expecting.

... by the time she gets the fourth picture up on the board, she's tearing up again.



As soon as you put up the final photo, the room becomes alight with clarity. The light passes through you, and you feel yourself waking up. The imprint fades away.

It's time to tell the doctor what you remember now. What you feel.



DOMI: ... [she's pursing her lips] ... It hurts. So deeply to admit this.

DOMI: You understand-- I had talked so big about proving everyone wrong, that this was just - sexism cloaked in - [chuckles, weakly] "new age concerns", and...

DOMI: ... And then all this happens.

DOMI: ... After... Being completely abandoned and rejected by friends and potential romantic interests as a child -- I. Bloomed very quickly, I was a very mature little girl - And as a teenager, I...

DOMI: I was. So deeply shocked to find that as an adult woman, in a completely new place, I was suddenly *surrounded* by men who wanted to be with me.

DOMI: That had never happened to me before. *Nothing* like that had ever happened to me before, I was starting to believe there was just something biologically unlovable about me, and all of a sudden, here were four gorgeous men who wanted to be my--. My. Best friend and more. [laughs again, a little more fondly]

DOMI: ... It felt like a dream. I couldn't believe it was happening. I- I remember, somehow, having been very close to all of them... As if we were all. Dating at the same time. I can't imagine that, goodness - but I remember strange things about them all - particularly three of them - that I just wouldn't know as a casual friend.

DOMI: But, out of all of them, I believe what happened was that I was *especially* close to one. The. The doctor.

DOMI: ... [her voice chokes up] ... Brian.

DOMI: ... He, um. [she continues, voice shaking a little, crumpled up] He. He was always. Very busy. We didn't have a lot of time to spend together, he was always exhausted when he came home from work - and coming home at all wasn't always a guaranteed... Fact. Every single night. That's how hard that hospital worked him.

DOMI: [sighs] ... He always wanted to be available some weekend, so we could spend time together. Every now and again, he was - but there were... A lot that simply fell through because he was called in unexpectedly, or they expected overtime from him without telling him beforehand, and... It was just.

DOMI: It hurt. It was disappointing. It felt like the dream was just returning to my normal, awful reality - that I could never be *truly* happy. I could never have it all like other girls could. I could never be loved and paid attention to and valued the same way other girls could, and the best I could hope for was... Being loved at a distance, or - someone who physically was not allowed to show me how much he cared.

DOMI: ... I wanted - so *badly* for everything to just be okay, to be happy again, I-I felt like. I felt like it would never get any better, and I was faced with two seemingly impossible choices. Stay and be miserable, or leave and be miserable.

DOMI: He, um. He said he knew *for sure* he was going to be available one weekend, he -- he said it as though it was a fact that nothing could change, but I knew not to get too excited. I hoped, I-- I hoped so much that it would happen the way he promised, but I knew it probably wouldn't.

DOMI: ... I sat at that restaurant that Friday night for *three hours*.

DOMI: He... He didn't even *text me*.

DOMI: He didn't even warn me that he was going to be late, he didn't even tell me that they called him in again, or that he had overtime again, he just--. Silence. Nothing.

DOMI: ... I thought he had just abandoned me again, and I just got angry. I didn't feel sad or lost anymore, I felt angry and mistreated. I. I left eventually, I got myself a nice dinner - that *he* was supposed to buy for the both of us, and -- don't take that the wrong way, I am NOT materialistic in that sense, but... [sighs, sniffing a little] ... When. When you're a woman, and a man promises to provide for you, and he... *Doesn't?*

DOMI: That makes you feel like. Dirt.

DOMI: ... It makes you feel like you don't deserve a man who would do things like that for you - every girl fantasizes about playing keepaway with checks, and letting the man win eventually. Every single girl wants that.

DOMI: And I couldn't have it. Because I wasn't like other girls. I was different, and no one could really love me.

DOMI: ... He didn't text me before I fell asleep. He didn't text me *all night*. The last text I received from him was him telling me where we would meet and when.

DOMI: So I never responded beyond that. Why would I have? I. I was angry at him. I was hurt that he would just leave me like that.

DOMI: Sure, I planned to talk to him again in the morning, but I just... I cried -- I hate admitting that, but I cried into my pillow and just fell asleep, miserable like that.

DOMI: ... He didn't reply to the text I sent him that morning. It was so *angry*, so *bitter* - I... I didn't insult him, it was just this tone of...

DOMI: *Hatred*, almost.

DOMI: ... He. Didn't, um.

DOMI: He didn't reply to any text I ever sent after that.

DOMI: And - quite literally, it was that morning. First thing I went outside - I... I didn't plan to really leave the house, but I decided not to let myself be destroyed by this, I wanted to go out and treat myself if he was so set on not treating me.

DOMI: ... There was a cardboard box on my welcome mat.

DOMI: It was... Taped shut, like it was delivered here, but-- I hadn't ordered anything and I certainly wasn't expecting any gifts.

DOMI: The tape was... This purplish-pink color, with white polka dots.

DOMI: And... When I, opened. It, I...

DOMI: [... she's trying to keep talking, but she just stutters for a couple seconds, eventually choking up and starting to cry again.]

DOMI: [after a second or two - nothing more, she keeps talking despite the tears, despite the pain in her throat]

DOMI: ... Someone. *Sent*-- me. His.

DOMI: There was just his.

DOMI: His .

DOMI: Head.

DOMI: In a box.

DOMI: [she looks... *terrified*, holding herself and gently rocking back and forth as she sniffles]

DOMI: ... He-- He texted me *that night*.

DOMI: This-- Someone.

DOMI: They didn't even *send it* to me, they *knew where I lived*.

DOMI: He. He, not they - He knew where I lived.

DOMI: ... I don't even... Remember what I did after that. I'm. [she stops to focus for a second] ...

DOMI: ... No, I. I... Stayed inside a lot after that.

DOMI: ... For... Days on end, I wouldn't leave the house - I think weeks, a couple months even, I started getting groceries delivered.

DOMI: As long as I was inside, I could make sure everything was locked tight so no one else could get in.

DOMI: ... I think I... Left the house at some point, barely even caring what would happen. I think-- I think my thinking was, if he gets in, what would it matter? He would just kill me. Or maybe I'd just go ahead and... Anyway.

DOMI: I don't remember if I even locked the front door.

DOMI: And I... Went to the same mall I met them all at. They all had these little favorite stores, and-- the same stores were all open. And it was so -- different, it was like someone went in and redesigned it, there were actually people in there. The mall used to be practically dead all the time, I was shocked it wasn't getting shut down.

DOMI: ... But the same stores were still there.

DOMI: They -- they added to it, removed a couple, but those four stayed the same.

DOMI: ... God, I don't know how I forgot. I was going there whenever I had time off.

DOMI: I don't know how I forgot if I was there every week, but I just...

DOMI: ... I got a job again, o-- of course I got fired during my... Several-month sick leave.

DOMI: So I got a new job again, and I met new friends at that job, and I just...

DOMI: ... I just got so wrapped up in everything, I-- I. I just kept buying new things to refurnish my apartment completely, new clothes, new decorations, new furniture, new EVERYTHING - that I just...

DOMI: ... I covered it all up with new things.

DOMI: I replaced my old doormat.

DOMI: I just -- Every time I started remembering little inklings of everything that happened, I would just assume I had a bad dream, or some kind of ridiculous daydream. I had a pretty big imagination as a child, so it didn't... Seem *unbelievable* that my subconscious had just made it all up.

DOMI: ... I don't feel... Strong.

DOMI: After doing this.

DOMI: I don't feel like I've aired out a dusty room, or anything like that - I feel like I've just destroyed everything I've built to get where I am today, and I...

DOMI: ... It would have been so much easier to not do this. It would have been so much easier to never think about them ever, ever again.

DOMI: I don't feel like I was lost, and now found, I feel like. I feel like the opposite. I was found and now I'm lost again.

DOMI: ... I don't... I don't know where to start. Now that I know these four holes are here in my heart, and that I can't just fill them with dresses and fancy decorations anymore, I don't know what to do. I don't know how to live without them.

DOMI: ... I... I-I have to ask if you do normal therapy too, because I--I. I can't tell someone else this. I don't know if I can live through this a *third time*.

DOMI: I...

DOMI: Or if you could just... Transfer all this information to someone who does normal therapy, I don't know-- I just. I... I need help. I need serious help.

DOMI: ... I guess... The closest I can come to some... Heartwarming conclusion, is that if I never did this, I would have just kept piling all this up higher and higher, until I had some kind of -- serious explosion one day. You know what they say, the deeper you bury something, the harder it tries to come back, so I...

DOMI: I guess I'm... Glad I was able to catch it before anything else happened.

