

The Perpetual Recital

I have a secret. One that I've never told anyone. She used to be louder, biting and drawing blood. Hissing poison that made my stomach feel warm and my legs cold. She'd drag her nails on any wall that she could reach, purposely never cutting them.

She's quiet now, filling the space in between words, popping up in dreams to remind me she exists, threatening to teleport from my mind whenever my friends make me laugh. She leeches off the space in my brain she occupies, stealing all the tricks she can. She floats around in the file cabinet of my brain until she gets too cold and lonely. She doesn't believe herself anymore when she says it's not that bad, playing hide and seek with herself, forgetting to look after opening her eyes. She sleeps most of the day, quiet when my brain is working. The absence of sound in rest gives her a rhythm to put on her pointe shoes and twirl until she trips on her hair, bringing the rest of the file cabinet down with her.

When the cabinet falls, the papers scatter. They are index cards of old panic, transcripts of arguments from three years ago, and blueprints of scenarios that will never happen. I spend hours putting them back in alphabetical order while she sits on the top drawer, swinging her legs, her silver dress shimmering like static on an old television screen.

"You missed a spot," she whispers. Her voice is dry.

I don't answer her. If you look her directly in the eye, she grows. I learned that in the years when she used to draw blood, back when I thought the only way to survive her was to fight her. Now, we have a truce built on deliberate neglect.

She likes jasmine tea. I can feel her pressing against the back of my throat when I sit in cafes, her phantom fingers reaching for the ceramic mug. She doesn't want to destroy my life anymore; she just wants to live it. She is jealous of the way the sunlight feels on my skin, an experience she can only filter through my nerves. It is a strange type of pity, harboring a ghost that is made of your own living tissue. She is a byproduct of my survival, a creature woven from the defense mechanisms I needed when the world was too loud. Now that the world is quiet, she has nothing to defend me from, so she turns her sharp, uncut nails inward.

Yesterday, my mom hugged me. It was the right kind of hug—the one that smells like laundry detergent and safety. For a second, the lock on the file cabinet clicked open. I felt her rise, surging up, a silver blade ready to pierce the air between us. I had to swallow hard, tasting copper and ash, forcing her back down before she could slip off my tongue and ruin the kitchen's quiet peace.

The secret stayed behind my teeth, vibrating against the metal wire of my retainer. She was weeping down there. Not out of malice, but out of exhaustion. She has been running in these halls for so long, suffocating in her own stale air, waiting for me to either kill her or let her speak.

I walk to the bathroom and look in the mirror. I stare long enough in the right spot, right past my pupils. There she is. She is aging in reverse, looking more like a frightened child every day, even as her presence feels centuries old. But her age shows in her air, long enough to suffocate herself out of existence, long enough to propel herself into the sky and off my tongue. I open my mouth, just a sliver. I let a little bit of her air out into the room. It doesn't hurt. It just tastes a bit like winter.

AI Prompt:

expand on this and create a 650 word story "I have a secret. One that I've never told anyone. She used to be louder, biting and drawing blood. Hissing poison that made my stomach feel warm and my legs cold. She'd drag her nails on any wall that she could reach, purposely never cutting them. She'd live in those same walls, blending in so well, you could only ever see the outlines of her eyes as she blinked if you stared long enough in the right spot. She's a quiet secret now, filling the space in between words, popping up in dreams to remind me she exists, chilling down my spine when someone catches me off guard, knocking at the permanent retainer on my teeth after a glass of wine, threatening to teleport from my mind whenever my friends make me laugh too hard or my mom hugs me the right way. She leeches off the same space in my brain she occupies, stealing all the tricks she can to escape. She doesn't mean to cause me harm, I think. She floats around in the file cabinet of my brain until she gets too cold and lonely. The reflection in her silver dress can't keep her occupied. She yearns for the smells of cinnamon rolls and jasmine tea. She doesn't believe herself anymore when she says it's not that bad, playing hide and seek with herself, forgetting to look after opening her eyes. Her skin is youthful, but her age shows in her air, long enough to suffocate herself out of existence, long enough to propel herself into the sky and off my tongue. She sleeps most of the day, quiet when my brain is working. The absence of sound in rest gives her a rhythm to put on her pointe shoes and twirl away until she gets caught in her hair and trips, bringing the rest of the file cabinet down with her. "