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My thoughts are dictated to me before I even have a chance to think for myself. It's not like a gentle suggestion or a quiet whisper in the back of my mind. It's more like a rapid, instinctive response that happens automatically. I often wonder if my brain is even my own, or if it's being controlled by some external force. I used to think that this was just how everyone's brain worked. I thought that the constant chatter, the self-doubt, and the criticism were just a normal part of being human. But now I realize that's not true. Sometimes, my brain should just be quiet, or at least quieter. But there's this presence, this voice that's always there, telling me what to do, what to say, and what to think. I don't remember when she first showed up, or how she got there. It's as if she just moved in one day and never left. Now, she acts like she's in charge, and that's the worst part. It's like having a squatter in my brain, someone who's overstayed their welcome and refuses to leave. I feel like I'm losing control, like my thoughts and actions are no longer my own. It's a strange, unsettling feeling, like I'm living in a constant state of uncertainty. I'm not sure how to get rid of her, or how to take back control of my own mind. All I know is that I need to find a way to silence her, to quiet the chatter and the criticism, and to learn to think for myself.

Her words don't have a mean tone to them. She doesn't seem to be trying to cause any harm. It doesn't feel like she's out to ruin everything. Honestly, she comes across as really responsible and thoughtful. She seems to know what she's doing and is trying to get me ready for what's ahead. It's like she can see things coming before they happen and is trying to prepare me for them. She sounds smarter than me, like she's always one step ahead. Her intentions seem genuine, and I get the sense that she's really trying to help me out.

“Don’t say that. It is stupid.”

“Fix yourself. You don’t look good.”

“Everyone is going to notice.”

She always talks to me like that, constantly worrying about what others might think. It's like she's trying to prepare me for the worst, always focusing on the negative. And the thing is, I listen to her. I listen to that voice in my head more than I listen to my own gut feeling. To be honest, I'm not even sure who I am without her anymore. She's like the boss of my life, controlling everything I do. She decides what I say, what I wear, what I eat, and even how long I can look someone in the eye before it gets awkward. She's like a puppet master, pulling the strings from behind the scenes. You can't see her, but I can definitely hear her constant criticism and commentary. It's like she's always whispering in my ear, telling me what I'm doing wrong and what I should be doing instead. Sometimes I feel like I'm just a character in a play, and she's the one writing the script. I'm not sure how to break free from her control, but I know I need to start listening to my own voice more. I need to learn to trust myself and my own instincts, rather than always relying on her to tell me what to do. It's time for me to take back control of my life and become the director of my own story.

“Smile. But not like that.”

“Talk. The silence is awkward.”

“Now stop talking, you’re being annoying.”

It’s a constant noise in my head.

There’s no thoughts that don’t get filtered by her first. If I make a mistake or say the wrong thing at the wrong time, she never fails to dangle it over my head.

She has her own set of rules, not the kind you'd find in a manual, but ones that are etched in her mind, guiding her every move. These rules aren't written in black and white, but they're always there, lurking in the background, influencing the way she lives her life. They're the little things, like how she sits, talks, and pauses before responding to a question. There's a delicate balance she tries to maintain, a tightrope she walks every day. Don't be too loud, don't be too quiet, don't say something that might be misinterpreted, don't stare for too long. It's a constant struggle to find that perfect middle ground. The thing is, there's no one "right" way to do things, just different shades of "better". And she's always trying to figure out where she stands on that spectrum, trying to navigate the gray areas between right and wrong. It's a never-ending quest, one that can be frustrating and confusing at times, but it's what makes her, her.

It's like these rules are always changing, depending on my surroundings, my mood, what I'm wearing, or even what I had for breakfast. It's as if I'm being constantly fine-tuned, so I never really feel at ease. Just when I start to feel comfortable in my own skin, she pipes up and points out something that's not quite right, something that needs to be "fixed". It's like I'm walking on eggshells, afraid to let my guard down, because if I do, I might make a mistake. And if I make a mistake, people will notice, and they'll criticize me. When that happens, it feels like my whole world comes crashing down. It's a never-ending cycle, and I'm always on edge, waiting for the other shoe to drop. She's always there, lurking in the background, ready to pounce on any little thing that's not perfect. It's exhausting, trying to keep up with her constant adjustments, and it's hard to ever feel like I'm good enough.

She never really explains what that "something" is. She doesn't have to. The sensation in my body speaks for itself. It shows up physically, the uneasy feeling down my spine. Then, followed by the tightness in my chest that drops down into my stomach like I'm about to fall while I'm

standing still. It doesn't sprout from a specific fear, but it feels real anyway, like something is always just about to happen. Due to that, it feels easier to just give in to her. Easier to let her take over than to risk finding out what happens if I don't.

She got louder when my parents got divorced.

It didn't happen overnight, to be honest. It was a slow process, like something was quietly taking root in my mind. Before, even when things were tough, I had this idea that everything would eventually go back to normal. I thought that no matter how bad the arguments got or how thick the tension felt, things would somehow work themselves out. In my mind, I had this fantasy of a future where everything would be okay again. But that's not what happened. My dad ended up moving out and the papers were signed. What I once considered normal would never be my life again. It was a hard reality to face, but it was my new normal now.

I had grown to resent anything that reminded me of happy families. Whether it was a mom's brunch or a dad's barbecue, I'd feel a spark of excitement, but anything that rubbed in the fact that other people had loving parents was just too much to handle. My life was a constant juggling act - two homes, two sets of opinions, and two completely different worlds depending on where I was and who I was with. It felt like my childhood had come to a screeching halt when I turned seventeen. Some days were heavier than others, but no one could seem to explain why. I felt like I was expected to just suck it up and deal with it, like it was my job as the older sibling to be strong and figure everything out on my own. That's when the voices in my head started to chime in. "Don't break down in front of your brother," "be strong for your mom" - it was a constant mantra that I couldn't shake. I remember the thoughts that swirled through my head like it was yesterday. I thought that if I just acted "right," things wouldn't get any worse. I wouldn't add to the tension, I'd stay quiet, and maybe, just maybe, everything around me would stabilize. Maybe

I could even prevent things from falling apart more than they already had. It was a heavy burden to carry, but I felt like it was mine to bear.

She liked that. I was giving into what she wanted.

Her voice was always there, echoing in my mind, making it hard to think clearly. It was like she had become a part of me, whispering thoughts that weren't mine, but felt like they were. I tried to keep everything under control, to not make waves, to just be okay with whatever was happening.

But the truth is, I was losing myself in the process. I felt like I was drowning in my own thoughts, and her voice was the anchor that was holding me back. I thought I was doing the right thing by keeping quiet, by not rocking the boat. But really, I was just making things worse.

Everything was falling apart, and I couldn't do anything to stop it. She had this power over me, this control that made me believe I wasn't strong enough to fix things on my own. And when I finally gave in, when I let her take over, she just stayed there, lingering in my mind like a ghost.

It's weird, but I started to feel like I needed her approval, like it was the only thing that could make me feel whole. I was addicted to the idea of being good enough for her, of being what she wanted me to be. And that's when it hit me - I had lost control of my own life. I was living for her, for her validation, instead of living for myself. It was a scary realization, but it was also kind of freeing. I knew I had to take back control, to silence her voice and find my own again. But it wasn't going to be easy.

I felt like I was shrinking, overwhelmed by this nagging feeling in my stomach. Everything seemed amplified, even the smallest things. In class, the sound of pencils scratching against paper, the number of times my classmates erased their work, and the clock ticking away - it all got to me. That clock became my worst enemy. I think it's because every time the teacher handed

out a test, time seemed to speed up. It felt like the clock was moving at double the speed. I'd start the test, writing my name and answering a few questions, but before I knew it, the bell would ring. I'd waste half the test just staring at the clock, watching the hands move so fast. I'd look at the first question, knowing I could do it, but the clock would intimidate me. I couldn't even focus on the test without her annoying voice in my head, distracting me. It's funny, the clock didn't bother me that much. But now, it's like it's constantly ticking away, reminding me that time is running out. I feel like I'm in a rush, like I need to hurry up and answer the questions before the bell rings. It's hard to explain, but it's like my mind is racing, and the clock is just making it worse. I try to calm myself down, to focus on the test, but it's no use. The clock is always there, looming over me, making me feel anxious and stressed. I wish I could just ignore it, but it's hard. The clock seems to be everywhere, even when I'm not in class. I'll be sitting at home, trying to do my homework, and I'll hear the clock ticking away in my head. It's like it's haunting me, reminding me that time is passing, and I need to get things done. I know it sounds silly, but it's really getting to me. I just wish I could find a way to make it stop, to make the clock go away and let me focus on my work.

“You don’t actually know this”.

“Time is ticking”.

"Come on, everyone's submitting their work, can you speed it up?"

I find myself gripping my pencil tighter, like that's the force bringing the answer out of my brain. I read the question over and over again. And again. The words lose their meaning, becoming a mumble jumble of information running through my head. Suddenly all the concepts on the page feel distant, as if I never learned them in the first place.

“You’re wasting time.”

“You’re already behind.”

When the exam finally comes to an end, I'm not hit with a wave of relief like I thought I would be. Instead, I'm bombarded by the chatter of my classmates, all of whom seem to be comparing answers or joking about how tough the test was. Their laughter and conversations only serve to heighten my stress levels, making it impossible for me to join in. My brain is still in emergency mode, like I've just rescued someone from a burning building, not simply sat through a math test. I keep replaying every question, every answer, every moment of hesitation in my head, and I just can't seem to shake it off. She's still in my head, reliving every moment of the exam, and I'm stuck in this state of anxiety, unable to move on.

“That one was probably incorrect.”

“I shouldn’t have changed that answer.”

“What if what I chose was right the first time.”

These thoughts keep playing over and over in my head. Looking back, the outcome doesn't even matter anymore - she's already made up her mind about what happened. She's planted this negative idea of failure in my mind, and now it's stuck. I just can't seem to shake it off. It's like it's lingering in the back of my mind, and I keep thinking about it. The more I think about it, the more it bothers me. I wish I could just forget about it and move on, but it's hard to do that when it's always on my mind.

The mirror is a place of pure terror. There's nothing else to focus on besides myself. No distractions, no one to talk to, no external noise to distract me. Just me, and her filling in every gap of thought I can process. I stare at my reflection, trying to see what she sees, even though I know it's bad for me. We see two different people in the mirror which creates a challenge for my brain to comprehend.

“You look off.”

“Your face looks puffy.”

I step closer to the mirror and investigate why these thoughts are protruding through my head. I start to examine my skin searching for blemishes. My hair looks greasy. And did I gain any weight? Everything feels off, despite not being able to describe the feeling. I catch myself repositioning my feet forcing a thigh gap in between my legs. I put my hands above my hips to “snatch” my waist. Nothing will ever be good enough for her, that's why she never goes away. I know this doesn't make sense to anyone outside of my brain. Realistically, I'm aware this doesn't really make sense. No one is truly analyzing me as much as her. But when her voice is present in my head, logic doesn't matter. When I look away, I can still feel her presence, her critiquing me, making sure I understand what she sees.

I used to think that the only way to regain control was to quiet the voice in my head. But now I realize that's not the answer. Maybe the goal is to understand what that voice really is - a voice that mistakes control for safety and fear for being prepared. It's still there, popping up in my daily thoughts, but it's not the monster that used to take over my mind. These days, when I hear it, I don't always listen. I take a step back, ask questions, and decide whether or not to let it get to me. I'm not perfect, but I'm strong enough to know that I'm in charge of my own life, separate from that voice, and capable of making my own choices. For the first time, I feel like I'm the one calling the shots, not her. I've finally taken back my life from her grasp. It's funny, I used to think that getting rid of her voice was the key to happiness. But now I see that it's not about making her disappear, it's about learning to live with her, to recognize when she's talking and to choose how I respond. It's a strange kind of freedom, but it's mine, and I'm grateful for it. I still have moments when she gets loud, when she tries to take over, but I know how to handle her now. I know how

to pause, to breathe, and to remind myself that I'm in control. It's a feeling that's hard to describe, but it's like I've finally found my own voice, my own sense of self, and I'm not going to let anyone - or anything - take that away from me.