

The Shape of Silence

Silence. It can be the best thing in the world if used carefully. But it can also be used as a weapon, or worse, it can make a person disappear. And I was shaped by the silence around me. You'll see.

They used to say I was easy to get along with, as if it were a compliment. And for a long time, I thought it was. I learned early that people like reflections of themselves, so I became one. If I heard the loud, I was louder. Around the quiet, I was softer. I mirrored their moods like glass with light, never really understanding how little light was mine to begin with.

Every day felt like standing in front of an invisible mirror, watching me rearrange to be like whoever stood next to me. With friends, I was the confident, funny one. With family, the obedient one. Even to strangers, people whom I had never met before, I was polite and agreeable. I could shift tone, language, and even humor to fit the room. I believed it was adaptability or a survival skill. But survival can sometimes look like erasing yourself. I wondered if they knew how hard I tried to get them to like me.

It wasn't until one day that my "friend" Jenna, asked me, "What do you even like to do, Ava?" I thought I knew, thinking it was an easy question. But my mind went blank, like a canvas ready to be painted with someone else's colors. My mind was full of other people's interests, borrowed ideas and opinions, and rehearsed hobbies. I heard the silence stretch between us like something breaking. I smiled and pretended to think, but inside I felt the sharp ache of emptiness. It was a pause in reality that I didn't even know about.

In those next weeks, I noticed how often my words weren't mine. Little phrases stolen, gestures that belonged to people I wanted to be. I became a person of borrowed

traits, a person made of echoes. Reality came to me at the most random moment. I was out with friends, nodding along to a conversation I didn't care about, laughing on cue when it hit me: I don't know who I am when no one's watching. The idea felt like a secret too heavy to hold.

I never wanted to see a mirror because I hated my fake reflection. And one day, I decided to stop pretending. I wanted to be free, and I started small, saying no to things I didn't want to do. I didn't rehearse my opinions before. I just listened quietly, waiting for anything. Silence feels really loud when you've built your life around others' noise.

But one morning, as sunlight spilled across my desk, I saw my reflection unguarded. It didn't feel like a performance. I was less agreeable and less practiced.

And in that stillness, I realized something simple: "Blending in had kept me safe. But disappearing has never been the same thing as belonging."

Until I noticed the borrowed phrases ideas, and opinions creeping up. And I fell into the hands of silence again.