

Perfectionist

Holly Smith

There's another me who sits on the end of my bed. She likes to watch me when I'm doing homework. It's not the thoughtful kind of watching you do when you're leaning on your best friend's shoulder and they're playing video games. Nor is it the curious kind of watching you do when there's a stranger with an interesting haircut on the bus. It's a stony kind of watching that feels like CCTV. It targets me, follows me, with an intensity so focused I can almost hear her breaths as I move. Sighing in aggravation whenever I do the wrong thing.

She likes to follow me around in the morning. She doesn't talk but her eyes are always hard. She'll look pointedly at me, then the clock, then back, as if to remind me of every second I waste. She has this plan, you see. She and I, we do things to the minute. And if we don't? Her eyes say it all: I've failed.

Some evenings she's kinder. If I've done everything well. Not perfectly, never perfectly – no one's perfect, people say, though it doesn't stop me trying – but well enough to satisfy her short-term. She and I will reflect on all the things I've done since waking up and then she'll smile at me fondly. Like a parent that's just watched her child win an egg-and-spoon race (something I never did). Together, we'll make our plan for tomorrow. Then it all resets.

I don't know where the other me came from but I really want her to leave. She's a terrible roommate. Ignoring the eyes – which are impossible to ignore really, but let's pretend they aren't – she has so many nightmarish habits. She won't let me sleep until I've adjusted the rug in my room to exactly the right spot. She takes my hands and uses them to write lists of tasks, often things I don't have time to do, then looks at me with such rage when I can't complete them. She makes me check my wardrobe for monsters too.

It's silly, though. There are no monsters in the wardrobe.

There's only her.