

the tree in the bathroom | Karen Pilson

Around the age of ten, I became obsessed with the idea of having green eyes. In books on my shelves were stories upon stories of women with dark hair and eyes as bright as spring grass. I wanted that look to be my own; I wanted to be mysterious and flirty. One Sunday morning, I resolved to do something about it.

I pulled out my box of art supplies and began the search. I tossed aside scraps of paper, glue bottles, glitter, paint, pipe cleaners, and stickers until I saw what I was looking for—the green, thick tipped marker. A warm feeling grew inside my belly as I held it close to my chest, guarding it with my fist.

I crept into the bathroom, closing the door behind me. I lifted a leg up on the toilet, steadied my free hand on the sink and pulled myself toward the medicine cabinet. I planted my feet atop the lid, positioning myself directly in front of the mirror. I leaned in until I was head on with my own face, my bangs brushing my reflection. I opened my eyes as wide as they could go. Centimeter by centimeter, I brought the tip of the marker closer and closer to my dark iris. On the first try, I flinched and drew back, twisting my feet slightly, almost slipping off the edge. I repositioned myself, this time concentrating on the goal: my beautiful green eyes.

When the tip was nearly to my right eye, a fist pounded on the door. I jumped back and crashed to the floor, my arm falling behind me, dragging the marker down the wall. Hot pain singed my shoulders, and tears filled my eyes. I blinked, and a few fell. I looked up to see a long green blade sprouting from the middle of the cream paint, right below the beige hand towel.

“What are you doing, young lady? I heard a crash!”

“N-n-n-nothing,” I stammered.

I sat up, my back against the wall. I stretched up my arm, snagging the hand towel, rubbing it along the green streak on the way down. Instead of the ink coming off, it only spread, growing from a tiny line to giant bubbles like oversized leaves; if I had a brown marker, I could’ve easily drawn a trunk.

My heart raced when the doorknob turned and my mother’s

head burst into the bathroom. Her mouth gaped like an open bear trap; I could see her crowns *and* fillings. Then her lips, almost magnetically, snapped shut and pursed. Her face flushed scarlet, and her every wrinkle *wrinkled* before my eyes. She drew in a deep breath through her nose and narrowed her eyes.

“What did you do? *My wall! This was just painted! What in God’s name were you thinking?!*”

I crouched, scooted back a few inches and put my back against the tub. I brought my knees to my chest and my forehead to my knees. I remained immobile; it was possible that if I didn’t move, she wouldn’t see me.

She pushed the door completely open, hitting the wall with a smack. I peeked through the slits of my fingers to see the doorknob had left a mark. Her nostrils drew in again. A cool silence drifted over the bathroom; we were in the eye of the storm. My breath was hot on my legs, but the back of my neck prickled with goosebumps.

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you lately, but this is unacceptable! Wait until your father gets home! It’ll be the belt! This was just painted! We’re not made of money! You can’t go ruining everything! Don’t just sit there! Explain yourself!”

I said nothing.

“*Answer me!*”

I rose slowly, not quite sure what to do next. Then my face lemoned and body tightened.

“You don’t understand anything!” I spat, throwing the towel at her chest.

I stomped past my mother back into my room. I slammed the door and sat in the middle of the floor, marker clutched in my fist, heart pumping. I could hear her muttering from the bathroom. I opened my hand and saw green vines growing over my sweaty palm.

She really didn’t understand. Her eyes were blue.