

THE EYES

Alysha Wilson

I was scrolling through Instagram one day when I noticed a comment about keeping your hands out of your pockets while you walk up or down stairs. Simply because if you fall, your arms will be stuck in your jacket or pants, and you won't be able to save yourself. Now, whenever I walk upstairs, I think about it, always making sure I don't put my hands in my pockets for any reason. I was terrified of hurting myself. It is almost as if I could see myself tripping, falling because I didn't put my shoe on the stair correctly. I could almost feel my hands desperately tugging on the fabric of my uniform, begging to break free. The stairs growing steadily closer to my face. That is until my head is cracked open from the force of the descent. I could see my body grinding against the rough floor, skin ripping off like I had been pushed up against a cheese grater. Blood pouring down the Tower stairwell, staining the pristine white walls like red dye. It seems unnatural, in a way, to imagine one's death over and over. Death is one of the most natural things on this Earth, so it seems incompetent to ignore the concept while you live. Everything dies eventually. Yet just the thought of it is discombobulating, but also curiously comforting. Natural, if you will. Weird.

I think about this, about death, as I walk up the staircase and into my classroom. My hands are at my sides (not in my pockets), as usual. I am immediately hit with the Eyes as soon as I step into the room. I didn't expect any different; this is always what happens. I imagine myself bigger than them, I am doing exactly what she told me to do. This will help. I am bigger than them. I am stronger than them. I take a seat and start scribbling, I am still thinking about death, but I decide against writing about it. Instead, I begin telling the story of a young girl in a fake land. A world which is unlike our own. Instead of being unforgiving and cruel, it is a place where all your wishes come true. The Eyes do not exist there, so it is calm. I intensely stare down at my page. I am okay, the Eyes cannot reach me in this realm I have created. My dreamland. "Alright girls, I'm going to choose someone to read aloud to the class."

It's okay, she won't ask me to speak. She won't. She can't. Please do not say my name. I stare at my papers as if it is the most exciting thing in the world, trying to look at anything but my teacher's face. Or the Eyes. I cannot look at the Eyes. I feel my chest tighten around my ribs. Breathe, breathe, breathe. Do what she told you to do. The Eyes cannot reach you, they cannot hurt you. I sense them shrinking under my words. Thank God.

I feel taps on my shoulder from someone sitting next to me. I look up, and shit. Shit. I have to read. Everyone is looking at me. The Eyes appear from behind their heads, their massive pupils burning holes into my face. They are staring me down, waiting. Their presence provides the room with a supernatural atmosphere, their taunting gazes frightening me. They know I cannot help myself. They are always observing after all. The Eyes grow in size, taking up more space in this already suffocating room. Quickly, just read what you have. Pretend you are in your dreamland. I read the two sentences that are on my page, and look up, tears clouding my vision ever so slightly. Embarrassing.

I don't even hear what the teacher is saying, and it's not like I care when grotesque eyeballs are glaring at me. How come the others are not afraid? Why can't they see the Eyes? I don't know what's more intimidating, the fact there are Eyes in the first place or the fact that only I can see them. I am alone. I have to escape, I can hear them talking, gossiping about how pathetic I am. I don't know if it was the Eyes or my classmates whispering.

"I have to go."

I practically run out of the room, throwing the door open as I go. I'm almost free. I don't turn back, I know the Eyes are consuming the room. I know I can't do anything more than run. I can't let people see me like this. Wheezing, I try to steady myself, but it feels as if I am breathing through a straw. Am I dying?

I rush into the nearest bathroom. Open, close, lock. I am breathing through my mask, so my breath sounds are muffled. Even so, every heave of my chest sings back to me, an eerie lullaby. It sounds metallic, the sound waves ricocheting off the concrete walls. Although I put myself here, it does not feel safe. A prisoner, trapped in a cell made of sweating concrete and metal locks. I don't hear the Eyes but I know they are coming. The walls seem as if they are closing in, slowly waiting to capture me in their grasp. Five things you can see. Five things you can see. Quickly, before the Eyes get you. I feel my back slide down the bathroom wall, gross as it is, covered in graffiti and gum. Collapsing into a heap on the floor, I look up hoping to find some sort of saviour. An angel, or maybe even a god, come to save me from the wrath of the Eyes.

Wait. Was that an eyelash? Coming from the vent in the roof? No, no, they don't know where I am, there's no way. Sweat is dripping down every inch of my body. I feel like I have just run a marathon, my arms and legs exhausted and overworked. The sensation of regret flows through my veins, a feeling just as familiar as the movement of my own blood. I do the only

thing I can; close my eyes and cry. I hope something will appear to take me away from this world. Take me away to my dreamland.

Half an hour passes. At least I think it is half an hour. It feels like an eternity. Cramped on the floor, mucus filling my mouth because of my cries. Gross. I stand up, slowly, holding onto the toilet roll dispenser for balance. They didn't get me, not this time. The Eyes have never managed to catch me, actually. It's some sort of sick game they play, tormenting me over and over and over again for their entertainment. I gather myself, still breathing heavily, and unlock the door. I inch my way to the sink, dowsing my face in cold water. I'm still weary of the Eyes. They will be there when I return to the classroom, and I must be prepared.

I hear the swing of a door. The door behind me. I look up into the mirror, expecting to see them. Instead, my gaze falls on a girl with black hair, wearing the same uniform as me.

"Did it happen again?" She queries.

"Yes."

When you are walking up one of the Brook stairwells, hands out of your pockets, of course, and you get to the top of the platform connecting the staircases, you can see a window. You can barely see out of it. It is covered in dust and most people who walk by day to day don't even notice it. But when you first come to the school you see it, and you can look out of it, even though it is old and dirty. In front of it are some metal bars, blocking more than half the view. We don't talk about why they are there, but we all know. It's the only reason there would be metal bars on a window on the third floor. It's certainly not for keeping people out.

I pass the window, stopping for a minute. I can't help but wonder if anyone would do it. If anyone has enough courage. I doubt it. Even if it was exam season, I couldn't imagine anyone actually willing to cross the bars and jump. Would I be brave enough? I don't know. What if my dreamland was there, waiting for me, and I just needed to be brave? If I just needed to take the chance, without running away? No, that's stupid. I shouldn't give everything away just for the thought of a better world, should I? I walk back up the staircase, back to class, with my hands deep in my pockets. Back to the Eyes.