Taken as a whole, it was no great crime, but for little Petunia, there was no more daring deed than to breech the surface of her mother’s dresser. Entering her parent’s bedroom without permission was an audacious act, in and of itself. But to touch her mother’s dresser took special courage.

In stole Petunia, silently angling the door just so – so noise and sight were blocked to the casual observer. She stepped up to the dresser whose surface was at eye level, keenly observing the placement of every object. Foresight told her she would need to leave no trace of her curiosity.

Curiosity. That was the momentary rule. She glanced the powder puff with its matted, fragrant velvet perched on a slick white powder box. Just behind and to the right, with a lace doily draped over just so, was her mother’s jewelry box. Balancing on her toes, Petunia peered over the dresser’s edge and reached up and over the mirror, the hairbrush, the perfume bottle. Lifting the doily, she saw the key. What lay within the box? Who knew? For Katrina, it was a mystery of her childhood that she had to attempt to solve.

“Kathy Lee!” called her mother... Petunia knew time was ticking. She would have to move fast.

Even a breath might be noticed, so Petunia employed all the stealth a five-year-old could muster. Picking up the key, she stretched to place the key in the hole. It bumped the metal edge of the keyhole and fumbled out of her hands.

Too quickly, Petunia swung her hand left to retrieve it. As she grasped for the key, the worst happened: she knocked over the open powder box. Poof! No escaping its plume. Petunia was covered in a white mask. She picked up the puff and tried to wipe the powder off her face. No good. It only added to the problem. Again, her mother called.
Time stopped. Petunia awaited her fate as her mother’s footsteps neared, beckoned more by the silence than any concrete concern. Petunia froze with fear, all thoughts of the jewelry box gone. Surely, some undreamt of punishment would be hers to bear.

Escape? Not possible. So it was that Petunia began to cry. Silent tears streamed down her face, tracing lines in the powdery mask that was her face. Her mother pushed open the door, gasped and turned and ran away.

Alone Petunia stood, in her shame and confusion. No yanking her out of the room? No spanking? This unexpected response disconcerted Petunia still more. Her lower lip quivered and the tears flowed still faster.

Returning moments later, Petunia’s mother lifted the black box to her eyes. Flash! the moment was caught for posterity: A scene of powdery carnage was all that marked this day’s tragedy. It was time for a good laugh. At Petunia’s expense.

Sympathize?

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Such comedy is the reward of parents everywhere. We work to instill the rules and set the boundaries, knowing they will be breeched. The only question is when, and how serious will the consequences be.

How did I escape this moment, so long ago? I remember the paralysis and confusion. I remember my mother and then my father laughing in such a satisfied way when they found me covered in powder, that I cried even harder. The photograph is part of my lore – evidence of my independent, headstrong ways to come, I suppose. Funny how I can still place this fifty-year-old mind back in that five-year-old’s predicament, still feeling a little sheepish, and still wondering, what exactly was in the jewelry box.