

Reflections on Child Psychiatry

Category: Loss

written by Anonymous | November 8, 2025

There is a specific kind of devastation in seeing a child failed by the world.

Today, I saw a fourteen-year-old girl who had taken glass to her skin. She came because she had been scratching away at her arm, at her eye. She had been banging her head against the wall. She had been screaming.

When I met her, though, she was smiling. Her chestnut curls had been delicately braided into dutch plaits. Her voice was gentle and her eyes were kind, subdued. I couldn't see the trauma behind them, the pain bottled up inside of her.

She showed me her paintings. One was of a sunset, orange against a hazy pink sky over tranquil water. Another was of a vague dark silhouette reminiscent of a cross looming over auburn hills. The third was red and splotchy and imprinted with the words "HELP ME" in a bold black. Her own bloody handprints were splayed below her unheard cry.

From the ages of four to thirteen, this girl had been sexually assaulted by her father. At age five, she was admitted to a private religious hospital. At the top of a nearby hill, there is a graveyard with a 70-foot statue of Christ that looms over the city. One can see his open arms and stony gaze from the hospital window. It is not unlike the cross from her paintings.

She visited that hospital with a third-degree vaginal laceration. She had been alive for only sixty months and already she had been violated so deeply. The family insisted that it was a foreign body that had caused the tear; an accident. Whatever investigation was done in the eyes of the Lord at that hospital was fruitless. They returned the child home, to be abused for another eight years. There are no words for this injustice.

Today, I saw a fourteen-year-old girl who has been failed by the world. Her father is now in prison, and she lives at a psychiatric residential treatment facility. There, she plays soccer with her sister and cards with her brother. Occasionally, when the security guard grabs at her pants, she screams and bangs her head. What more is she to do? Her trauma remains internalized, insidiously living inside of her and erupting in response to triggers she cannot identify.

She is a child, unable to yet process the damage done to her. She is a child, at the mercy of adults that were meant to protect her and serve her and support her.

She is a child, failed by the world.

Anonymous