

THIS BED IS NOT MY BED

Joseph Bernardo, Class of 2018

This bed is not my bed. These people are not my mom and dad. I look around the room, which is not my room, and don't see any of my toys. Instead, I see shapes with masks and long plastic gowns hurrying through the door. They say words like "intubation" and "ethanol" and I am scared. Some put cold circles on my front and back and I start crying. I can see their eyes saying sorry, and hear the same words muffled through their masks. But they don't stick around to play with me or read to me or help me find my parents. Just as quickly as they came in, they are gone. Soon after the activity and excitement of all the people wears off, I realize my stomach and throat hurt and I start to cry more, but nobody comes.

They leave the door open for me as I lie in bed. I recognize the eyes of some of the previously masked people as they walk by my open door and smile, but these people are not my mom or dad. There's a tube that goes in my arm and itches, but they taped it up so I would stop pulling at it. Sometimes people come in to attach things to it and it burns my arm. They call it "medicine" and tell me they're sorry. They seem like nice people, but if they were so nice why would they hurt me so much? My mom and dad are not there to tuck me in, and I cry myself to sleep.

The next day, more of the masked people come into my room with their cold circles, but I'm ready for it this time. One brings me an elephant that makes funny noises and I hug it. After everyone leaves, a man in a suit stands in the doorway with a nametag that says DCF. He talks to some of the people with the cold circles and they talk about how I got here. They say I sleep on a pullout bed in a hotel living room, and crawled out of it in the middle of the night and drank my dad's vodka he had left out. They say my dad found me in the middle of the night in a pool of my own vomit. They say nobody has been able to contact my mom who lives far away. The only people I see for the rest of the day give me more medicine, and I hug my elephant to make it hurt less. My stomach and throat still hurt. I can hear kids in other rooms crying, but I can't leave my room with the tube in my arm. I wonder what they did wrong to get here? I cry myself to sleep again.

I wake up early with my room full of the usual cold circle people. Soon after they leave, my dad shows up! He spends a little time with me, playing with my elephant and reading to me. My dad even brought me a little football from home! He spends most of his time talking to the DCF man. He leaves to go back to work and I don't see him for the rest of the day, but one of the cold circle people throws the football with me for a little bit and I laugh, because I usually play this with my dad. But this is only for a little while, and my room is empty until I go back to sleep. I don't cry as much this time, I am getting used to sleeping alone. I fall asleep hoping my dad will come tomorrow, I miss him.

I have gotten used to the mornings here, but afterwards I watch the door for my dad. I hold my football in case he comes to see me and wants to play, but he doesn't come. The people say they still can't contact my mom, and if she doesn't answer her phone soon I will go back to living with my dad. The DCF man doesn't seem very excited about that idea. My stomach and throat are feeling much better, and they take the tube out of my arm. Even though the tube isn't holding onto me anymore, they make me stay in my room and get mad at me if I try to leave. That night my dad comes to pick me up and take me home.

There are lots of the medicine givers who look mad at him, but they all say goodbye to me and rub my back and tell me how good of a boy I have been. If I was so good why did they hurt me and keep me here? As we leave I look into the other rooms where the crying has been coming from at night. They all look like me, trapped in bed by their arm tubes, some have their mom and dad and a few toys, but some don't have anything or anyone. I'm lucky my dad is here to rescue me from this scary place. The people here just want to hurt me. That night my dad tucks me in and I lie in my bed without having to worry about the cold circles or medicine people in the morning. For the first night in a while, I don't cry myself to sleep. ■

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