

Protecting the Pearls from Day One

A child is a person before the world decides what to call their face.

When I was young, other girls sometimes used my face and body as a reference point for what they wanted to change about themselves. I asked them to be grateful for what God had given them. Their answer was that it was easy for someone who looked like me to say. I understood the unfairness in that reply, and I also heard the pain beneath it. They wanted to be at peace in their own skin. So did I.

Beauty can open a door without asking whether the person walking through it is ready. It can also close a door: people assume that a pretty child has no serious worry, or that her future is already settled. I was told I was clever and funny, and that I would marry a rich man and be happy. Those words sounded like praise. They also shrank a whole life into a face and a marriage prospect.

The child who is praised for beauty and the child who is told to improve it deserve the same protection. One can be put on display; the other can be treated as a problem to correct. Neither has been allowed to be simply a child.

The mirror arrives early

Young people have always measured themselves against one another. What has changed is the speed and reach of the measuring. A passing remark can become a camera filter, a trend, a procedure, and an advertisement before a teenager has had time to ask whether the feature being “fixed” was ever wrong. A child can be invited to treat an ordinary stage of growth as a defect that needs urgent attention.

I do not condemn an adult who chooses cosmetic treatment. Their story may be private and thoughtful, and their autonomy deserves respect. My concern is with the child whose sense of self is still forming, and with the commercial system that can make dissatisfaction feel normal and alteration feel inevitable. A needle is not a lesson in self-worth. An operating theatre is not a substitute for being loved.

When the pressure comes from home

Parents and guardians are often a child’s first protectors. Yet their signature cannot always settle the question. An adult may project ambition, embarrassment, or financial interest onto a child’s body. Even a parent who believes they are helping can press a young person to solve the family’s anxiety by changing their appearance. The child must have a private chance to speak to someone whose duty is to the child, with a genuine right to pause or refuse an elective intervention.

Protection must be careful rather than crude. A child may need surgery or other treatment to breathe, eat, move, recover from injury, reduce pain, or address a condition that affects health and function. Those needs should be assessed on their own terms. A blanket “survival only” test would abandon children who need care without being at risk of death. The question is whether the intervention serves this child’s health and welfare, or merely a beauty ideal imposed upon them.

A season to grow

I want childhood to contain a stretch of unclaimed time: time for a face to change, for a shy child to discover a voice, for a body to become familiar to its owner. At eighteen, legal adulthood does not instantly erase the influence of years of comparison. Young adults should be offered clear explanations of risks, alternatives, likely outcomes, and the possibility of doing nothing. They should be able to leave a consultation without a sales pitch following them out the door.

A good society does more than tell children they are beautiful. It refuses to turn their beauty into a commodity and refuses to turn their ordinary differences into defects. It teaches us to see character in conduct, not in the shape of a jaw or the fullness beneath an eye. It gives children safety even when the adults closest to them cannot see clearly.

I believe every child arrives already seen by God. That belief is my reason for speaking; protection in public life belongs to every child, whether or not their family shares my faith. No child needs to earn dignity by becoming lovely to an audience. Each one is a person from day one. Let us give them the years, care, and freedom to discover who that person is.

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