

‘All right, everyone, now I’m going to show you a picture.’



The professor, Dr Tomiko Hagio, fixed a sheet of paper onto the classroom's blackboard.

She pointed at the drawing on it as she spoke.

'As you well know, I now dedicate my time to teaching, but before I started lecturing young people like yourselves, I cut my teeth as a practising psychologist. I offered therapy to quite a number of patients over the course of my career. This picture is a copy of a drawing done by a patient I treated early on. A young girl. Let's refer to her as "Little A" for now. When Little A was eleven years old, she was arrested for the murder of her mother.'

Her words sent a ripple of shock through the students.

'I decided to administer a drawing test when undertaking her analysis. A drawing test requires that we have the patient follow a drawing prompt and use the results to analyse the patient's mental state. Like they say, "Painting is a mirror of the soul," and a drawing can often offer valuable insight into the mind of its artist. In particular, drawings of houses, trees and people tend to be remarkably revealing. Now, does anyone find anything about this picture strange?'

Dr Hagio surveyed the classroom.

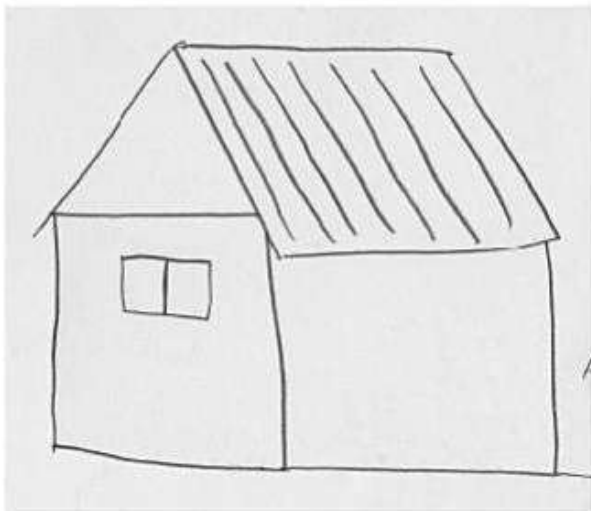
The students only stared intently at the picture on the blackboard, wearing puzzled expressions.

‘Does nothing stand out? At first glance, yes, it probably looks rather ordinary. But here and there pop up some very unusual points indeed. First, look closely at the girl in the centre of the drawing. Her mouth, in particular.’



Dr Hagio pointed at it. ‘It’s somewhat messy and smudged. Little A had difficulty getting the mouth right, having to redraw it many times. She managed to get the other features down in a single go, so why did she keep making mistakes at the mouth? This offers us a clue to understanding her state of mind.

‘Little A was abused by her mother,’ Dr Hagio elaborated. ‘It seems that whenever she was home, she always had to force herself to smile and act happy, so as not to anger her mother. Inside she was frightened, but her face said otherwise. Even if it was a lie. She reasoned, “If I don’t smile right, she’ll beat me.” While drawing the mouth, the feeling reawakened, and it disturbed her. Her hands trembled, and she couldn’t draw well. This same pain also arises in the drawing of the house next to the girl.’ Again, she pointed at the picture.

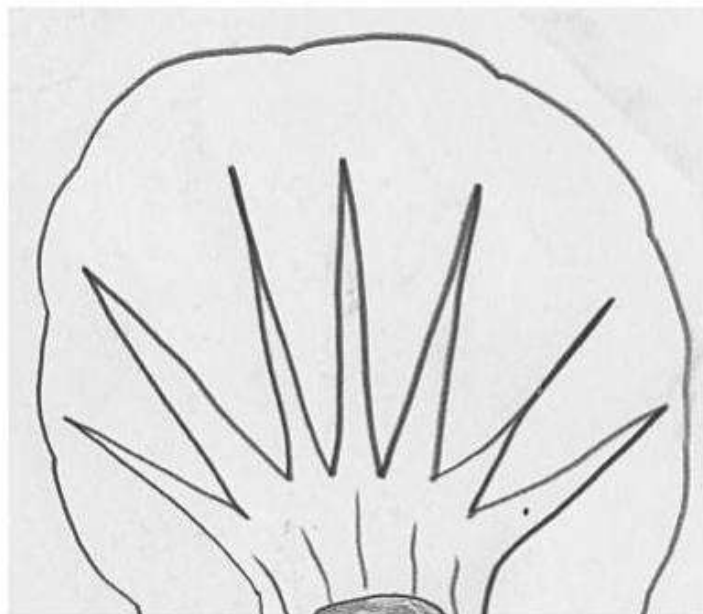


‘The house has no door. Without a door, you can’t get inside, right? This house mirrors the girl’s interior life. “No one is allowed inside.” “I want to be alone in here.” It illustrates her desire for a refuge from the outside world.

‘Now, finally, I’d like you all

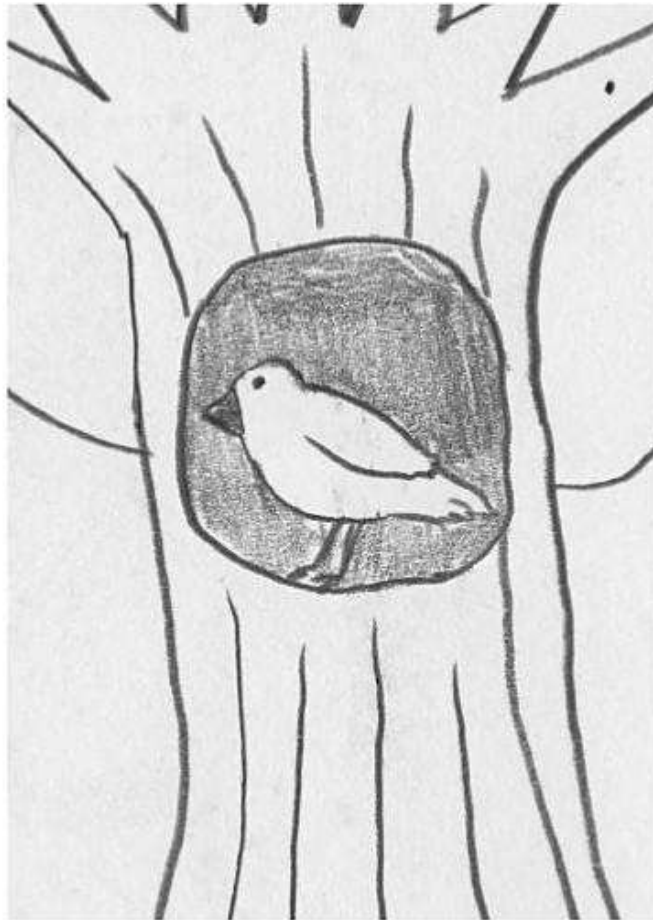
to look at the drawing of the tree.

‘The ends of the branches are sharp and pointed, like thorns. We sometimes see this pattern in drawings by criminals. It seems to express a defiant, aggressive nature. It says, “I will hurt you,” or “I will prick you.” Now, as a psychologist, I had to consider all this information together to diagnose the subject.’



Dr Hagio looked into the eyes of her students as she spoke, slowly and with careful deliberation.

‘After looking at this picture, I concluded that Little A had a strong chance at rehabilitation. Can you see why? Look again at the tree. This time, look past the branches, and focus on the trunk. There is a little bird living in a hollow there.



People who draw pictures like this display a desire to protect, and a tendency towards strong nurturing love. It expresses the desire to defend the weak, and to create a safe haven for them to live in.

‘Deep inside Little A’s thorny, aggressive exterior beat a kind heart. If we gave her a chance to interact with animals or small children, we could foster that kindness and possibly overcome her aggressive spirit. That is what I surmised then, and, to this day, I remain confident in that diagnosis and recommended course of treatment. I understand that Little A is now living happily as a mother.’

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