

Little Black Girl, Little Yellow Bows **J Hunt**

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I walked into the fluorescently lit room of my outpatient clinic and was greeted by a row of mismatched and missing teeth peeking out from the small, melanated face of a four-year-old girl. A sense of familiarity flows through me when I see a little Black girl as my next patient. Her tightly coiled hair pulled into neat sections, adorned with beads and sun-colored bobbles that clicked together with each subtle head movement, filled me with warmth and reminiscence. The familiar smell of *Pink* lotion permeated the small 8x8' room, time traveling me back to my own childhood—sitting between my cousin's legs (my mother didn't know how to braid), riffling through the never ending hair accessory box to carefully select the bows and barrettes to match my outfits for the week. I smiled to myself, remembering how difficult it was to lie on the pillow at night with the bobbles snapping.

This four-year-old, Brianna, was undoubtedly adorable. Upon entering the room, a knowing look from her mother brought her play to a stop, her tiny leg halting mid-run. She used the stool to clamber onto the examination table, her legs still bouncing in the air with unrestrained energy.

“Hi there, Brianna,” I said, waving as I closed the door behind me. “I’m J. I am a medical student working with the doctor today.”

She gave a small, shy wave in return.

“I love your yellow bows.” I said, hoping to coax her into conversation, and provide reassurance that this place was not so scary. “Is yellow your favorite color?”

The girl shook her head with a giggle. “No, it’s mine.” Her mother said, smiling. I returned her smile. “Well,” I said, turning my attention back to Brianna, “your hair looks very beautiful.”

“Thank you!” She grinned.

I settled into the stool across from them and started the HPI. Her chief complaint was that her ‘tummy hurt.’ Her mother provided most of the timeline details and associated symptoms. *Onset 2-3 days ago, a few episodes of non-bloody non-bilious vomiting, no diarrhea. No fevers at home. No sick symptoms. Eating well, drinking well. Voiding and stooling as normal.* In my head, I was parsing through the differential.

At times, Brianna, struck by excitement, would interject to add details from the last few days.

“I went to a Moana party yesterday at my friend’s house!” She announced.

“Wow, that’s so cool!” I said.

“We had pizza and cupcakes and—” she paused, eyes widening as if she just remembered the most important part, “And I got this bracelet!” She held up a purple floral bracelet, the kind that came in a goodie bag from a child’s birthday party.

“That’s very pretty.” I said, smiling. Her mother shook her head amusedly from the corner of the room.

Her eyes gleamed with a sudden thought. “I want *you* to have it.”

“Are you sure? We just met each other.” I hesitated, touched by the gesture. I did not want any parts in a “take-sies back-sies war or any sad late-night regrets on my behalf.

She let out an exaggerated sigh, rolling her eyes in a confident, but self-assured way. “Of course!”

Slowly, I placed the bracelet in my white coat pocket. “Thank you,” I said sincerely.

After finishing the history with her mother, I stepped out to present this patient to my preceptor. Something about the brief interaction lingered and left an unexpected, barely restrained well of tears behind my eyes.

Brianna reminded me of me—a little Black girl with slicked, done-up hair adorned with beads that sung when I jumped. The child who was not too much older than Brianna when I sat by my grandmother and helped sort my great aunt’s medications for the first time, carefully placing brightly colored pills into their daily compartments. The Black girl who did not fully understand schizophrenia, dementia, or why her great-aunt was different from most other adults but who, from a young age, felt a sense of responsibility in her care. The child who watched the small acts of service that my grandmother fulfilled every day to take care of her sister and decided somewhere along the way: *I want to be a doctor.*

And yet, if I’m honest, there have been times during clerkships when I’ve doubted that choice.

The warmth of a child's innocent generosity felt worlds away from the preceptor's eyes that focused on me like a microscope. I struggled to feel joy, and the sting of feeling out of place became much more familiar.

Words echoed in my head, empty and hollow.

"I can tell this is your first inpatient rotation."

Words that knocked the wind out of my sails and made me want to disappear into the white concrete walls of the wards where we rounded. It is not my first, I thought to myself, it is my last. And what does he mean by this?

"You should be a pathologist," I was told, as I watched other medical students be effortlessly praised for their aptitude. When I looked around for someone to amplify my voice, it instead was dampened. *"Will you always react this way to constructive feedback?"* I felt *othered*. I questioned whether I belonged. My spirit ached to be understood and valued.

And yet, this young girl with her bright bows and boundless energy, did not see me as an outsider. She saw someone familiar with our matching brown skin—someone she wanted to accept her gifted purple plastic bracelet.

It is moments like this that remind me who I am in this field for. For little Black girls like Brianna. Little Black girls like younger J.

And maybe, just maybe, that is enough.

about | author

HUNT

Jocelyn “J” Hunt is a fourth-year medical student at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. They received a Bachelor of Science in psychology, with minors in chemistry and medical anthropology, from the University of North Carolina in 2019. At UNC, they currently serve as a co-Executive Editor for *Iris* and as a scholar in the Howard Holderness Distinguished Medical Scholars Program. Their passion lies in advancing diversity in medical education at both local and national levels. Their research interests include patient-reported outcomes in burn care, cancer reconstruction, and gender-affirming surgery. Although J has written for many years for catharsis and reflection, this is their first submission to *Iris*—and certainly not their last.



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