

## **How can medical education be improved for the benefit of the patient? Rahad Rahimi**

In a quiet part of the forest, surrounded by tall trees and long-forgotten paths, lay the village of Medicora. It was small, but special. Unlike most places, this one was built around care. Every animal here played a part in keeping the village well.

**Elara** the elephant helped others feel heard. She never interrupted. When someone spoke, she listened with her whole body — heavy, calm, and present. Her gentle tone made even the most anxious heart slow down.

**Orin** the owl was the mind of the village. His tree was stacked with scrolls, notes, charts. If you had a question, Orin would find an answer — though not always quickly. He liked to be certain.

**Thane** the wolf was movement, connection, and urgency. He could rally ten others with a single howl. He reminded everyone that healing wasn't one person's job. It was a shared responsibility.

**Borin** the beaver built and rebuilt — clinics, recovery huts, even walkways for the frail. He noticed what might go wrong before it did. Safety, to Borin, was the quiet framework behind good care.

**Mira** the octopus was the explorer. She left often diving into lakes, drifting into caves. She came back with new ideas, some odd, but always worth trying. She was curious, always asking, "What if?"

And then there was **Hue**, the chameleon, who had no title. He lived at the edge of the village, on a branch that bent slightly over the path. He didn't draw attention, not because he feared it, but because he was used to being passed by.

Hue changed colours with the light, the season, the weather, the conversation. Some assumed he liked being unseen. Some simply forgot he was there.

Then came the **Colourless Plague**.

It arrived without sound, without warning. One morning, Mira's arms had lost their shimmer, dulling like stones underwater. Later that week, the deep gray in Orin's feathers looked more like ash than slate. Even Elara's skin, once a warm, earthen hue, seemed faded at the edges — as if something had quietly drained the warmth from her. The brightness of Medicora — once felt in every step, every greeting, every colour — began to dim.

At first, no one worried. The symptoms seemed cosmetic. But soon came exhaustion. Confusion. Restlessness. Not in everyone, and never in the same way. For some, it was sleep. For others, irritability. For many, it was something they couldn't name — just a fog.

The Five Pillars began their work.

Elara made herself more available, sitting with the tired and dim. Orin reviewed forest records — plagues, famines, patterns of behaviour. Thane organized tasks, believing activity would clear the malaise. Borin reinforced shelters. Mira collected herbs and samples, looking for toxins in the soil or water.

Still, the fading spread.

Hue, who had always adjusted to his surroundings, now adjusted to the forest's muted tones. He grew paler, cooler, softer. But no one noticed. He looked, as always, like part of the background.

One morning, Orin spoke quietly in the roundhouse. "Hue hasn't shown symptoms."

"He blends in," Thane said. "Maybe too well."

Borin frowned. "You think he's hiding it?"

Orin hesitated. "Or maybe... spreading it."

Mira looked sharply at him. "He's not contagious just because he doesn't look sick."

"No, I just mean," Orin said, "we don't know. And not knowing makes me nervous."

Elara spoke last. "Let's not forget — just because we haven't seen something, doesn't mean it's not there."

No one followed up after that. There were other tasks. Sicker animals. More visible cases. Hue could wait.

And so, Hue faded, unnoticed. Not because he was unaffected, but because his illness wore the same colours as his skin. He had no fever, no limp, no rash — only a growing heaviness he couldn't name.

He tried to keep up his routines. He watched. Listened. Blended. He heard the worry in Elara's voice. The questions behind Orin's calm. The strain in Thane's planning. He heard Mira sigh more often now. Even Borin's hammer strikes seemed unsure.

Hue didn't interrupt. He never had.

But one afternoon, after a long week of grey skies and quieter paths, Hue walked into the village square.

Not many noticed. A few glanced up. But Hue didn't raise his voice or clear his throat. He simply stood there.

Mira saw him first.

"You alright?" she asked, walking over.

"I'm not sure," Hue said.

She paused. "You... don't look any different."

"I think that's the problem," Hue said, blinking slowly. "I never looked very different. So, no one notices when I change."

Mira studied him. "Are you saying you're sick?"

Hue hesitated. "I think I've been sick for a while. But not in a way that shows up on a chart. Not in a way that anyone thought to ask about."

By now, the others had drawn near — Elara, Orin, Thane, Borin.

Elara spoke gently. "Can you tell us what you've been feeling?"

Hue nodded, slowly. “Like I’m disappearing — not suddenly, but a little more each day. Not just in colour. In thought. In presence. It’s like being in a room that no one sees you in. You want to speak, but you’re not sure what you’d say, or if it would matter.”

No one responded at first.

Then Orin said, “But why didn’t you say anything earlier?”

Hue looked at him. “Who would I say it to? Everyone’s busy with things they can measure.”

Elara lowered her eyes. Borin looked away.

Hue continued. “You’re trying to solve the plague with tools meant for broken bones. But what if this illness isn’t in the body? What if it’s in the way we live? The way we see — or don’t see — each other?”

“I don’t think I’m the only one who feels this way,” he added. “I just might be the only one you didn’t expect to.”

There was silence, but not uncomfortable. Not this time.

Thane broke it. “So, what do we do?”

Hue shrugged. “Maybe start with noticing. Noticing who’s quiet. Who avoids the clinic. Who’s always fine. Not because they are, but because no one’s asked.”

Mira nodded slowly. “We’ve been looking for signs. But we’ve only been looking where we’re used to finding them.”

That night, they didn’t fix anything. No one found a cure. But something shifted. The Five Pillars began to speak differently. They slowed down. Listened in new ways.

Elara still held space, but now for those who said, “I don’t know what’s wrong.” Orin added a new section to his notes: things that can’t be proven. Thane started checking in, not just for work, but for state of mind. Borin began building small corners in the clinic for quiet rest, no explanation required. Mira spent more time watching, listening — not searching for ingredients, but for tone.

And Hue? He kept his place at the village edge. Still quiet. Still shifting with the light.

But now, others came to him sometimes — not with questions, but with presence. To sit. To talk. Or to say nothing at all.

The Colourless Plague didn’t vanish. It was never that simple. Some animals still faded. Some days were heavier than others.

But the village had changed. Not by curing the illness, but by recognizing it wasn’t always in the blood or lungs. Sometimes, it was in the **feeling of being unseen**. In the slow fading of attention. In the assumption that silence means health.

Hue never claimed to have solved anything. But in helping them look — really look — he’d started something that no medicine had yet managed.

And in that, there was colour again.

### Author's Note

This story was written in response to the question: *How can medical education be improved for the benefit of the patient?*

Rather than a traditional essay, I chose to explore this through a fictional lens — a fable that reflects real challenges within healthcare. **Hue's experience represents the often-overlooked reality of mental illness:** that what's invisible is often dismissed, misunderstood, or even feared.

The **Colourless Plague** is not just about disease — it's about how **bias, silence, and systems built around visible symptoms** can leave people behind. I believe medical education must go beyond diagnosis and treatment. It must teach practitioners to listen differently, to notice what's not obvious, and to understand that stigma can be as damaging as any virus.

This story is a small reflection of that concern.

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