BIG



Vashti Harrison

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON

ONCE there was a girl

with a big laugh and a big heart

and very big dreams.



She learned her *ABC*s and 123s.

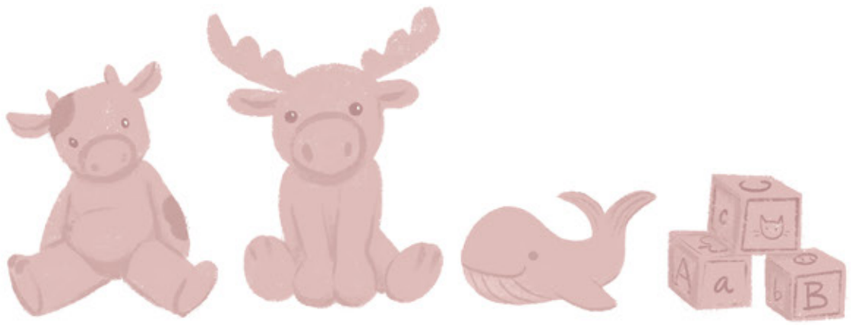
She always said *please* and *thank you*

and even put away all her toys.

At dinner she ate all her food.

“What a big girl you are!” the adults would say.

And it was good.





She grew and learned and laughed and dreamed



and grew and grew and grew.



And it was good . . .

until it wasn't.





AUTHOR'S NOTE

In childhood, big is good. Big is impressive, aspirational. But somewhere along the way, the world begins to tell us something different: That big is bad. That being big is undesirable.

I was never a dancer, but I did get stuck in a swing when I was younger. Some of the older kids and I were playing on the baby swings and I couldn't get out. I was the only one to get into trouble. My size indicated to adults that I was big enough to know better, even though I was still just a kid. I learned that day that my body did not fit. It did not belong. And adults no longer saw me as a little girl who could make innocent mistakes.

While my experience was far less overt than the one in this book, the thoughts and words at work are the same. A child sits in the crosshairs of adultification bias and anti-fat bias. She is subjected to judgments and prejudices that are harmful and have lasting effects. Still, she finds enough self-love to return the words that were unkind and unhelpful. I hope she will stand as a guide to all who need to see her journey, especially to those of us who are Black girls in big bodies.

I remember thinking I couldn't wear pink, that it was too bright a color and might make me stand out. From an early age I'd developed insecurities that told me it was safer to shrink into the background and try not to call attention to myself. I chose the color palette for this book to reject that old thinking. In color psychology pink is associated with gentle love, tenderness, and nurturing. Pink flowers symbolize innocence, joy, playfulness, and happiness. These are all things this girl deserves. Her body is not a problem that needs fixing, and neither did mine that day on the playground. What needs fixing are the implicit biases we all hold. I wish I could give the girl a hug—the part of her that is me and the part of her that might be you—and tell her that she is deserving of all the care and joy in the world, no matter what.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

The illustrations for this book were done in Procreate and chalk pastel. This book was edited by Farrin Jacobs, art directed by David Caplan, and designed by Prashansa Thapa. The production was supervised by Nyamekye Waliyaya, and the production editor was Jen Graham. The text was set in Didot LP, and the display type was hand lettered.

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