

I Want to Be

by Thylas Moss

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

I walked home slowly. I kicked up rocks and dirt that filled the air like tiny butterflies.

I held a handful of river water. Then I let go of it above my head like rain.

I licked a patch of sunlight on my arm.

I played hopscotch in footprints after I made them.

I made a grass mustache, a dandelion beard, and a bird nest toupee.

The wind was a magician and it turned me into a dancer. I danced until I was dizzy and the sky turned into a lake so I stood on my head and was a fish swimming in it.

I double-dutched with strands of rainbow. Then I fastened the strands to my hair and my toes and became a fiddle that sunbeams played. Then I sang with the oxygen choir.

At sunset I was a firefighter and I squirted water at the sun until it turned into the moon and until it was so dark the stars couldn't play hide-and-seek anymore.

"All home free," I said.

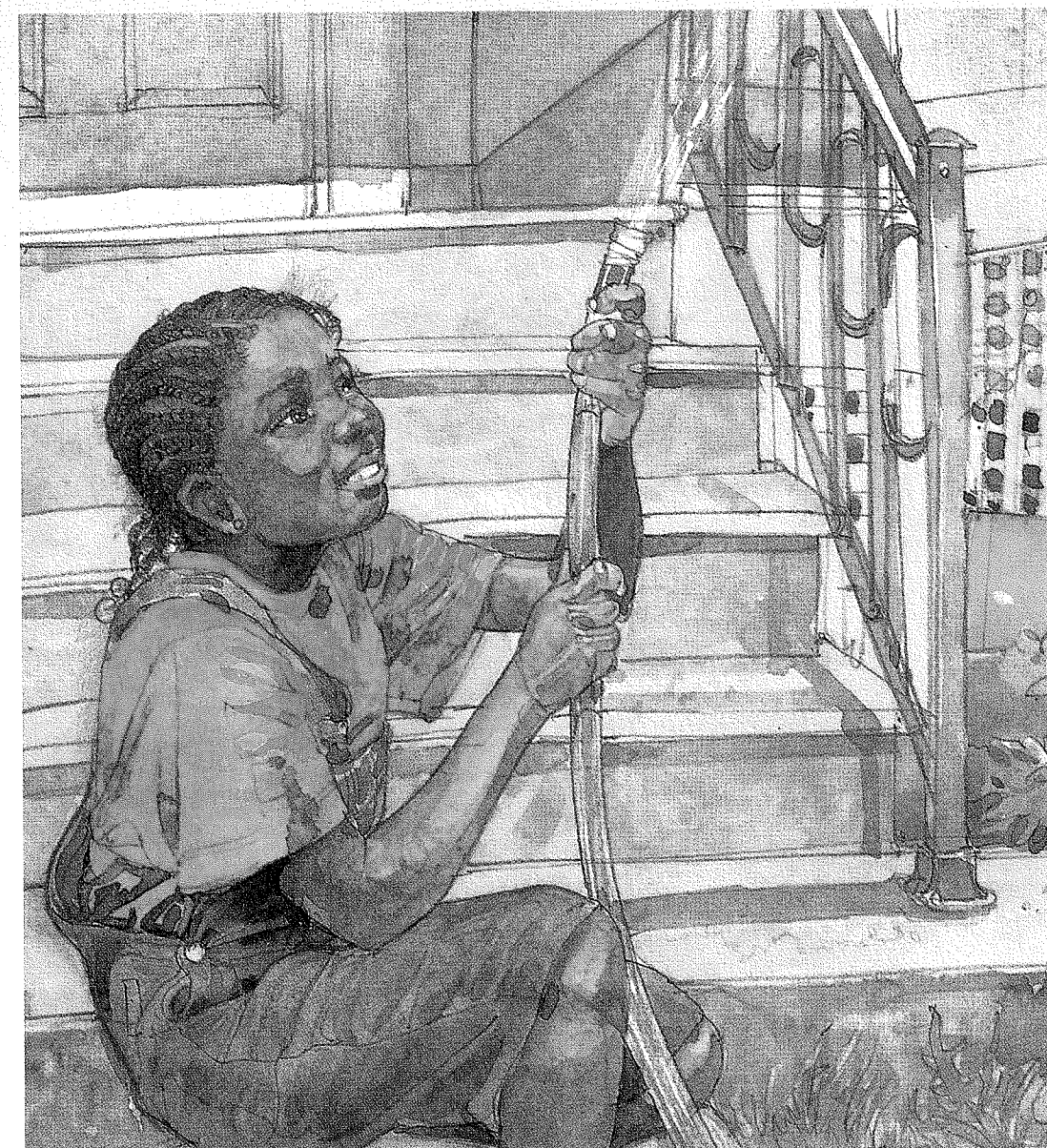
By the time I got home, I knew what I wanted to be.

I want to be big but not so big that a mountain or a mosque or a synagogue seems small.

I want to be strong but not so strong that a kite seems weak.

I want to be old but not so old that Mars and Jupiter and redwoods seem young.

I want to be fast but not so fast that lightning seems slow.



I want to be wise but not so wise that I can't learn anything.

I want to be beautiful but not so beautiful that a train moving in the sun like a metal peacock's flowing feathers on tracks that are like stilts a thousand kilometres long laid down like a ladder up a flat mountain (wow!) seems dull.

I want to be green but not so green that I can't also be purple.

I want to be tall but not so tall that nothing is above me. Up must still be somewhere, with clouds and sky.

I want to be quiet but not so quiet that nobody can hear me. I also want to be sound, a whole orchestra with two bassoons and an army of cellos.

Sometimes I want to be just the triangle, a tinkle that sounds like an itch.

I want to be still but not so still that I turn into a mannequin or get mistaken for a tree.

I want to be in motion but I want the ants in my pants to sometimes take a vacation.

Sometimes I want to be slow but not so slow that everything passes me by.

Sometimes I want to be small but not so small that I am easy to miss. About the size of the thought of a bud before it opens and becomes a universe in which bees orbit like planets.

Sometimes I want to be invisible but not gone.

Sometimes I want to be weightless and floating on air, able to fly when I want to and able to stay on the ground when I feel like it. I want to be a leaf that is part canoe riding the water as if it's a liquid horse. I want to be comfortable in all the elements.

I want to be a language, a way to share thoughts. What my grandmother says when she speaks in tongues. That's also music. I want to be my other grandmother's hands, when she signs, when she seems to be blessing everything.

I want to be all the people I know, then I want

