



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

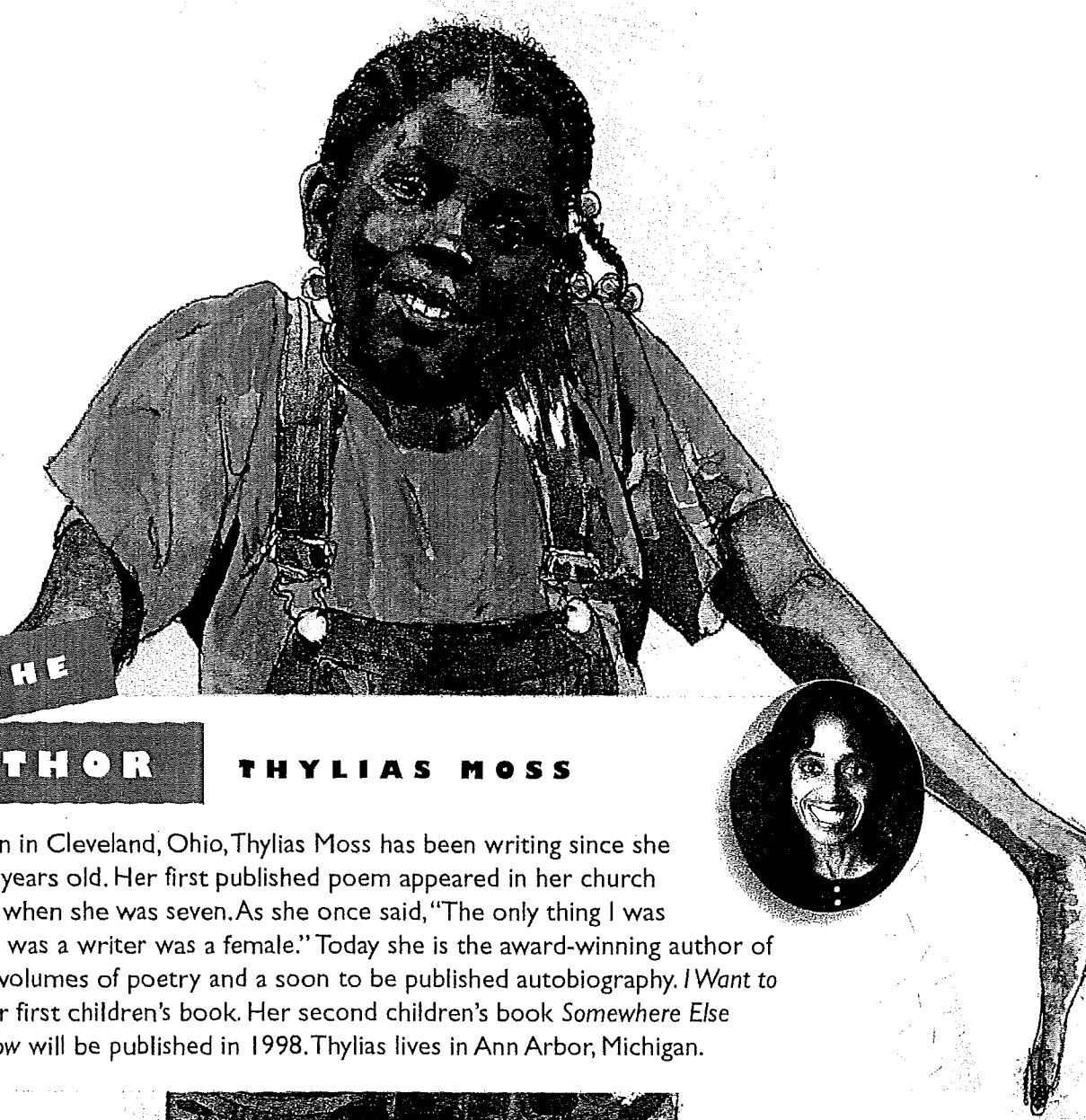


to know more people so I can be them too. Then they can all be me. I want to be a new kind of earthquake, rocking the world as if it's a baby in a cradle.

I want to be eyes looking, looking everywhere.
I want to be ears hearing, hearing everything.
I want to be hands touching, touching everything.

I want to be mouth tasting, tasting everything.
I want to be heart feeling, feeling everything.
I want to be life doing, doing everything.

That's all.



ABOUT THE

AUTHOR

THYLIA MOSS

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Thylia Moss has been writing since she was six years old. Her first published poem appeared in her church bulletin when she was seven. As she once said, "The only thing I was before I was a writer was a female." Today she is the award-winning author of several volumes of poetry and a soon to be published autobiography. *I Want to Be* is her first children's book. Her second children's book *Somewhere Else Right Now* will be published in 1998. Thylia lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

