



YOU CAN

BE YOU



VICTORIA GARRISON



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Walk Together Children Publications

Phoenix, AZ

www.walktogetherchildren.com



For Samara Jean, Benjamin III, and Bryson Jerome...

May you always see yourself the way God sees you-- blessed, chosen, loved.

To my sister, Tamara Thomas, my motivator and best friend, without whom this book would not exist.

To my brother and best friend, Jerome Garrison, Jr., for inspiring me to write this book.

To my brother-in-law, Rev. Benjamin Thomas, Jr., and my sister-in-law, Sydney Garrison, for true sibling love.

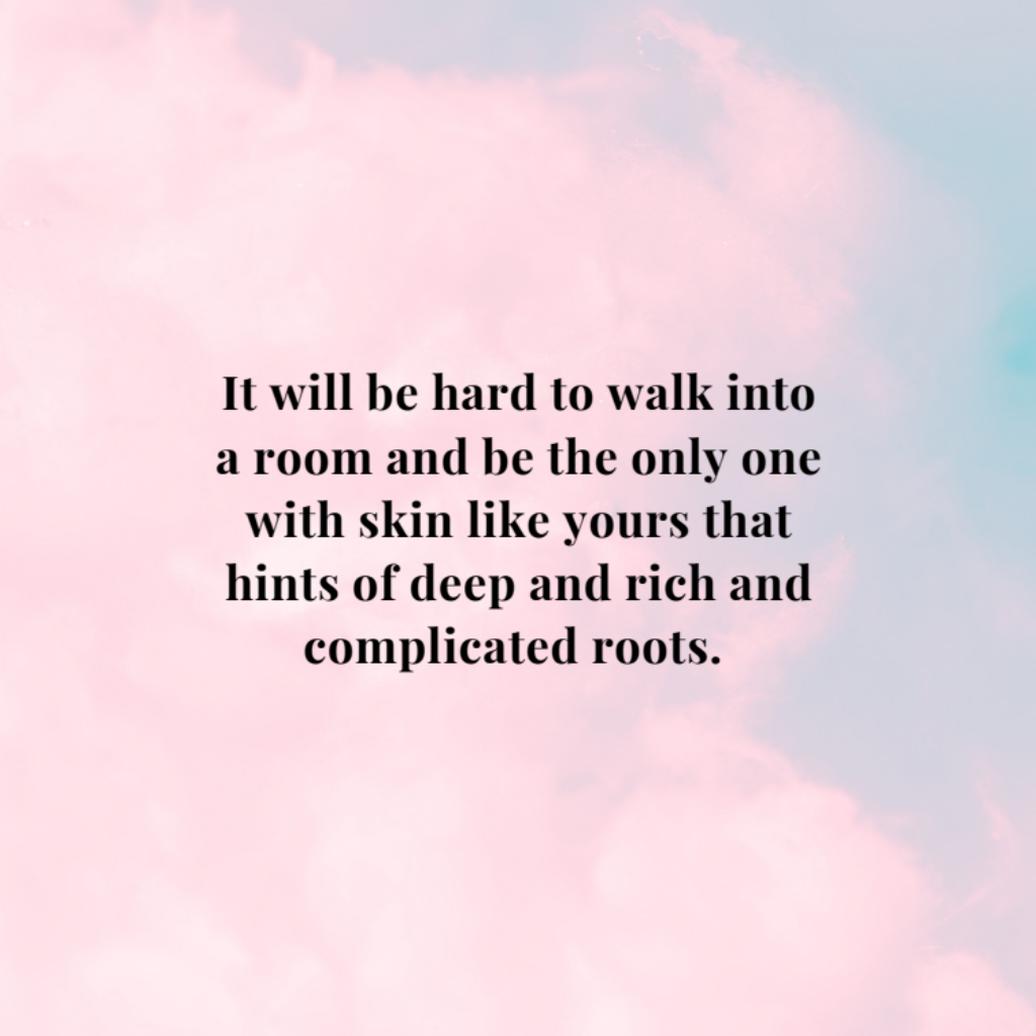
To my mother, Cheryl Garrison, for your support and constant help; and to my father, Dr. Jerome Garrison, Sr., for your unending encouragement and love.

-Psalm 91-



Some days will be hard.





**It will be hard to walk into
a room and be the only one
with skin like yours that
hints of deep and rich and
complicated roots.**





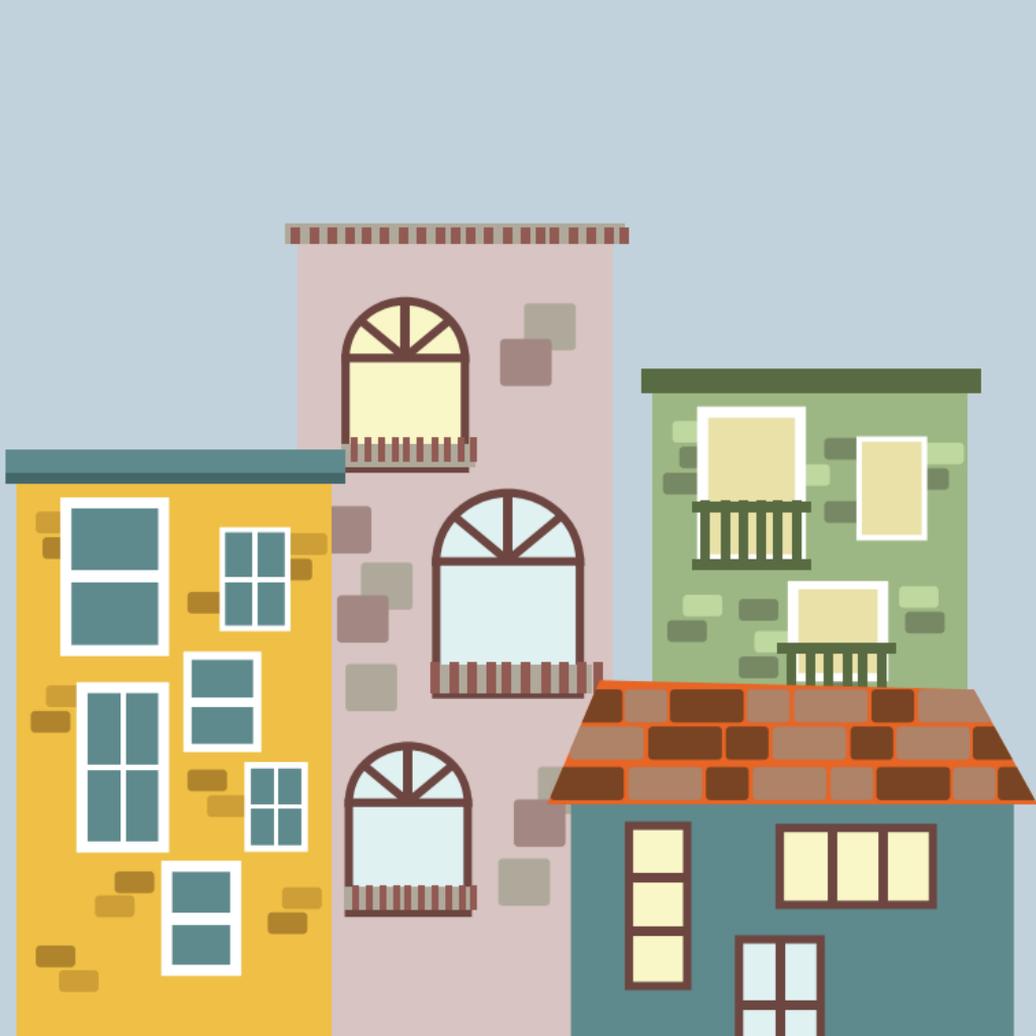
**It will be hard to spend all Sunday
night
washing,
pressing,
braiding,
twisting,
crocheting,
or weaving your hair.**

**So it will be calm and tame.
So you can be you, but still them.**





It will be hard.



**It will be hard when the way
words curve in your mouth
suddenly feels wrong. You are
proud of where you come from,
but secretly you wonder— why do
you feel so different, and why
does different feel so wrong?**



**It will be hard to
reshape those
words so they will
be acceptable; to be
aware of what you
say, and how you
say it, and where
you say it. So you
can be you, but still
them.**





**Some days,
you may get angry.**

You may get angry when you are doing your best, and someone still wonders if you're up to no good. A store clerk may follow you with his eyes, watching you while you shop. A teacher may assume it's you who made that noise in class.

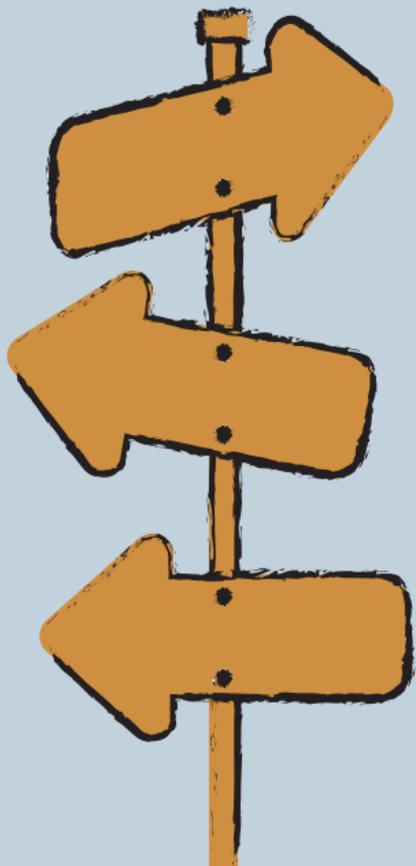




You may get angry.



You may get angry when your voice is muted, when someone interrupts you or looks away from you when you speak. As if your words are not important, as if your thoughts are not good enough.



You may get tired.

**You may get tired of hearing
about injustice, of seeing people
mistreated, and wondering if it
will ever really change.**





**You may get tired of seeing
a life violently ended in
public, on the air,
on social media.
Everywhere.**

**You may get tired of being quiet,
of accepting, of making others
comfortable. In these moments,
you may feel confused, because
you want to be you but still them.**



**When it feels too hard,
when you feel angry,
when you are tired...**





Remember that you are not alone.

**You are accompanied in spirit by
generations of descendants who worked
and waited and marched and fought and
died. They did that so you would not have
to live in anger or fear.**

So you would not run from the hard things.

So you would appreciate who you are.

**So you could be you.
And just you.**



That skin of yours— that deep and rich and complicated skin— it tells a thousand stories of tribulation and defeat, of triumph and favor. Who else could tell that story, could weave the tale in the traces of your history like your skin?



That hair of yours— the hair that causes you to toil and fret— it's dense with shape and texture that coils and curls with depth. It's natural and precious, like gold deposits in a deep river.



Those words you speak— the ones that come out sounding wrong or loud or angry— they are a reflection of your power. Words are power, a mighty force greater than weapons or money. Let those words flow from your tongue with boldness and wisdom and grace. So you can be you. And just you.



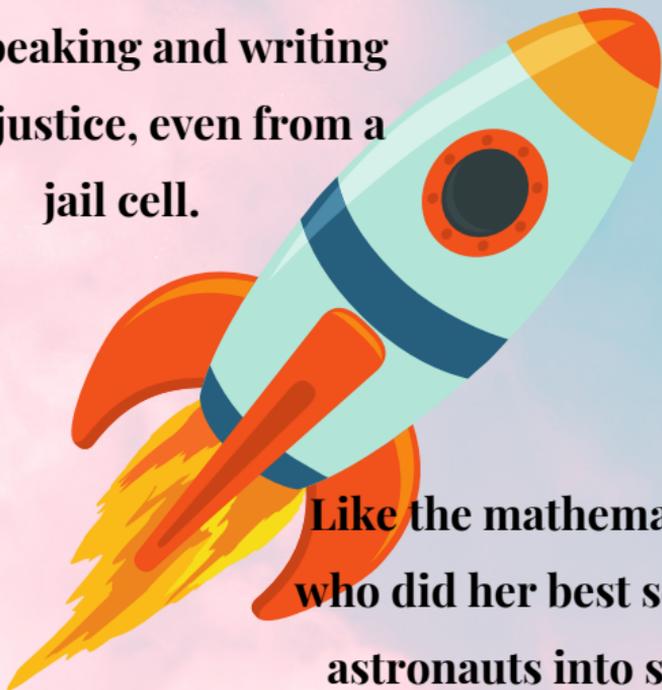


Keep doing your best,

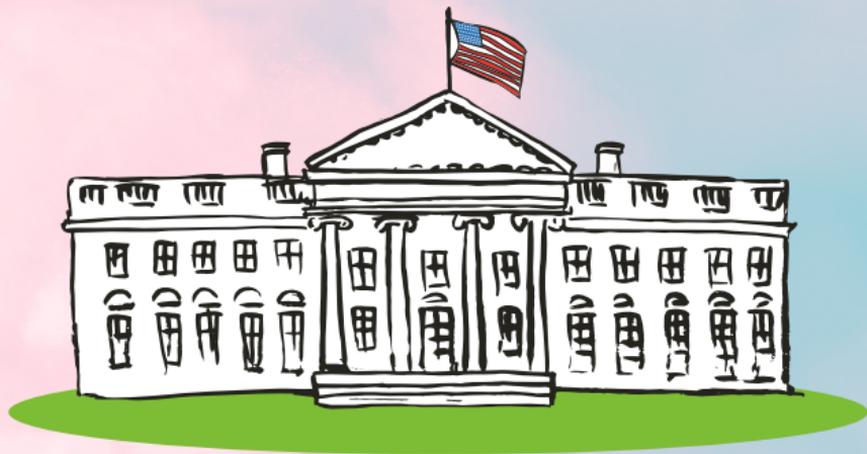


even if it goes unnoticed.

**Like the pastor who did his
best speaking and writing
about justice, even from a
jail cell.**



**Like the mathematician
who did her best sending
astronauts into space,
invisible and unnoticed
for decades.**



Like the attorney and notable first wife who did her best when faced with the challenge of becoming “the first” at so many things.

**When you feel like your voice is muted,
channel your ancestors who raised their voices
-lift every voice and sing-
until people listen.**



**Follow the path of the ones
who came before you while
carving your very own
path for your very own life.
Through the hard and
angry and tiring days,
follow that path as far as it
can take you.**



Because it's safe to be you.



It's good to be you.



You can be you.





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