

*Surviving the White Gate* pgs. 32-33

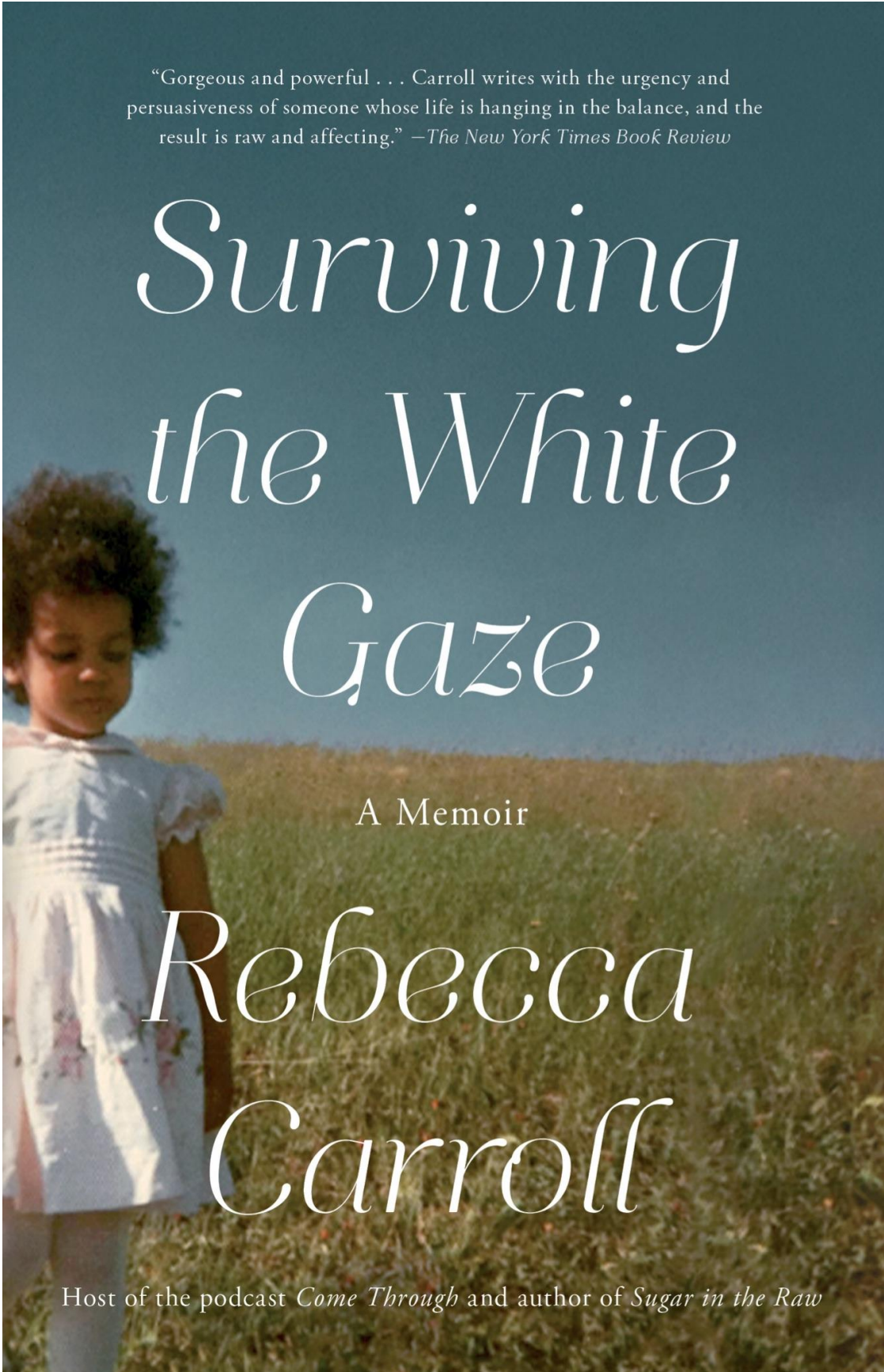
“Gorgeous and powerful . . . Carroll writes with the urgency and persuasiveness of someone whose life is hanging in the balance, and the result is raw and affecting.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

# *Surviving the White Gaze*

A Memoir

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She appeared suddenly, like a stencil cutout in the left corner of my eye. A one-dimensional, dark silhouette bending and arching without a face. An abstract image, gradually taking the shape of a head, attached to a long, giraffe-like neck and body. This inky-colored figure from afar didn't look like anything or anyone in the books I read, the dolls I played with, the people in my school, or the people in my family. And yet there was something familiar about her. It felt momentarily like being in a fog, but soon I could make out the tight curls of her afro, like tiny black jewels embedded in an even blacker crown.

When she turned toward me, the white of her eyes was dazzling, almost fluorescent set against the bare, brown-skinned beauty of her face. Her smile seemed as wide as my six-year-old wingspan, the full vision of her now walking across the studio floor.

“And who is this?” she said, extending her large graceful hand.

“I'm Becky,” I said, giving her a good shake.

“What a firm grip! Welcome to class, Becky,” she said. “I'm Dede Rowland.”

My ballet teacher was black. The first black person I had ever seen in real life. Was she real? Did she know Easy Reader from *The Electric Company*? Did she go home at night to live inside the TV with him and the words and letters he carried around with him in the pockets of his jacket?