

"An inspiration."

—Teen People

Born Blue

by the National Book Award—Winning

Author of DANCING ON THE EDGE

Han Nolan

chapter one

MY FIRST MEMORY of myself I be drowning. I can close my eyes and feel myself getting pushed back under all that heavy water, my legs kicking and straining for the sandy bottom. Alls I find be more water rushing at me and over me, big walls of water hitting me whole and tossing me upside down, and I got no breath left, so I open my mouth and I swallow a gallon of salt water and choke, and more water get up my nose and burn in my head, and I go for a breath again, and the whole time I thinking, *Mama's gonna be mad at me, Mama's gonna be mad.* Then I ain't thinking nothin' and all the struggling stops, and I wake up in a dark room I know ain't mine. I think I be dead, but I scream, anyways, and a lady I never seen come in and holds me till daylight.

That were back when I were four years old. They couldn't find Mama Linda for a long time, and then when they did, they said I couldn't see her 'cause she were sick and needed help. I kept on crying for her and

asking for her and telling all them grown-up people who now in my life that I wanted my mama. When were I gonna see my mama?

I got put in a foster home with Patsy and Pete, my foster parents, and some babies that come and went—there was always some babies in the home—and a foster brother named Harmon Finch.

I remember the house that Pete and Patsy lived in like I just moved out yesterday. I don't think after all these years I yet got the smell of that place outta me. It were in a town just outside of Mobile, Alabama, a little poky town. The house were a big old nasty with yellow paint and brown trim and mostly just fallin' down ugly. It had more puke smells in it than a toilet bowl, and all of them some kind of sour, like sour feet and sour cheese and wet sour and fart and BO. Most of them come from Pete, and the rest come from Pasty's cooking or the way she didn't never keep a house. Them smells just flooded the place, and weren't a spot you could go to get away from it but outside when the wind were blowing just right.

Only thing good about living in that home were knowing Harmon. It didn't take me any time to figure out that Patsy and Pete had no use for either of us 'cept to boss us round and make our lives miserable. All their attention went to the babies, so me and Harmon got to be best friends fast. Back then he a shy boy, seven years old and walking round with a shoe box everywhere. He

carried it under his skinny black arm, and anybody got too close, anybody ask to see what he got in the box, he bring it round and hug it tight to his chest with both arms and twist side to side—sayin' *No!* with his body. Always when he said no 'bout something, he used his whole body. He were physical like that, and soon as we 'come friends he were huggin' me all the time, and I huggin' back, and never since have I felt safe and sure with a hug the way I done Harmon's.

Harmon were three years older than me, and when he little he were a skinny runty thing you wouldn't imagine could ever grow up to be much, but he grew up tall and round—not fat, just beefy. He got the friendliest face I ever seen in a person, too, with a big smile so full of goodwill it could melt anybody's heart, and it turns his own face so soft and good you fall in love with him right away; everybody do. He got happy round eyes, and eyelashes so long he got to cut them to look a man, and chubby cheeks that make him look too young and sweet for any kind of hell raisin', but he say that be fine by him.

In the foster home those babies come and went so fast, weren't worth it to bother looking at them and learning their faces, but me and Harmon stayed on and stayed so close you knew if you saw one of us coming you saw the other. Patsy and Pete, thinking they was bein' cute, called us chocolate and vanilla 'cause of our skin, and it just burned me up to hear it. I didn't like bein' called vanilla or anything to do with white. White

By the author of *Dancing on the Edge*, winner of the National Book Award,
and *Send Me Down a Miracle*, a National Book Award finalist

She has no last name. She has no real home.
But she has a dream....

Janie ... Leshaya ... whatever she's called ... she's a survivor. Rescued from the brink of death, this child of a heroin addict has seen it all: revolving foster homes, physical abuse, an unwanted pregnancy. Now her childhood is coming to an end, and she is determined to make a life for herself by doing the only thing that makes her feel whole ... singing.

Can this girl, born to a life of hardship, find the strength and courage to break away from her past and become the legend she is meant to be?

An ALA Best Book for Young Adults • A Junior Library Guild Selection
A New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age
A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year

★ "The writing is superb; like the blues, it bores down through the soul. ... Readers will be absorbed in this intimate and painful voyage."

—*School Library Journal* (starred review)

★ "Absolutely riveting ... Leshaya captivates with her strength and determination. ... Unforgettable." —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"Genuinely moving." —*The Bulletin*

Reader Chat Page and Author Interview Inside

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