



## Leisha's Song

**Lynn Slaughter**

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*Leisha's Song is a compelling coming-of-age novel with a confident, passionate lead.*

In Lynn Slaughter's young adult novel *Leisha's Song*, a talented teenager investigates her teacher's disappearance.

Raised by her grandfather in the Bronx, Leisha is one of the few Black scholarship students at her New England preparatory school. While her grandfather hopes that she will become a doctor, Leisha's singing mentor, Ms. Wells, encourages her to follow her talent and become a singer.

When Ms. Wells disappears, Leisha searches for her, recruiting friends and making enemies in the process. Meanwhile, she struggles to keep up with her classwork and spend enough time in the studio to improve her singing. She's also being wooed by a rich classmate, Cody. Leisha feels torn between her desires and her grandfather's admonition to never date white men, because falling for a white man ruined her mother's life. Pushed by her grandfather, Leisha finds her voice and stands her ground.

Determined and confident, Leisha blunders while looking for Ms. Wells. She learns caution over easy trust, and her aggressive investigation costs her weekend mornings in detention. As the story progresses, she changes her mind about Cody, going from stereotyping him to accepting that his feelings for her are real. Cody soon becomes her confidante, assisting her with her investigation and driving her to Boston to interview Ms. Wells's reclusive parents.

Leisha narrates the daily dramas of high school life in concrete, witty terms, complaining about needing to cram for tests even as she plots out a series of lies to allow her to investigate Ms. Wells's disappearance. Her yearning for good food is matched by Cody's willingness to woo her with mochas and baked goods at their favorite diner, and is also a reminder that Leisha comes from a lower socioeconomic status than he does. The writing is brisk and smart, with Leisha packing in retorts to almost every conversation. And Leisha's growth is satisfyingly believable, bolstered by her spirited voice and rock-solid sense of self. The thrill she feels when she takes the stage to sing brings ecstatic moments to her life, though these moments are tempered by the lows of fearing that her career will be over before it begins.

As the search for Leisha's mentor becomes desperate, she learns that secrets and lies, even when well intended, can be just as harmful as the overt racism that she has experienced. The adults in the novel display bigotry and ignorance, as when Cody's father tries to bribe Leisha to stay away from Cody, or when Leisha's grandfather forbids her from competing in an important singing event. Even as young adults, Leisha and Cody evince a stronger moral compass than the people charged with their care.

*Leisha's Song* is a compelling coming-of-age novel with a confident lead whose passion for music and dedication to discovering the truth provide solid entertainment while raising ethical questions.

JEANA JORGENSEN (April 20, 2021)

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