

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *YOU SHOULD SEE ME IN A CROWN*

LEAH JOHNSON

"A sweet, funny, and effervescent gem of a book." —Nicola Yoon

RISE TO THE SUN



PRAISE FOR *RISE TO THE SUN*

“*Rise to the Sun* is a novel that will show Black girls just how brightly they can shine, and that love, like music, is a True Thing.” —**Ashley Woodfolk**, author of *The Beauty That Remains* and *When You Were Everything*

“Leah Johnson seamlessly harmonizes fear with hope, tragedy with healing, and betrayal with redemption. This book is an anthem for every queer Black teen who’s ever been told they’re undeserving of their happy ending.”

—Julian Winters, award-winning author of *Running with Lions*

PRAISE FOR *YOU SHOULD SEE ME IN A CROWN*

A *TIME* magazine Best YA Book of All Time

A Stonewall Honor Book

A Reese’s Book Club YA Pick

A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of 2020

A *Cosmopolitan* Best Young Adult Book of 2020

“A rare treasure.” —*Glamour*

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“With characters I adore and a romance that brought tears to my eyes, *You Should See Me in a Crown* absolutely stole my heart.” —Kacen Callender, author of *This Is Kind of an Epic Love Story* and *Felix Ever After*

“Filled with humor, heart, and swoon-worthy romance.” —Kristina Forest, author of *The Neighbor Favor* and *I Wanna Be Where You Are*



**RISE TO
THE SUN**
LEAH JOHNSON

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**TO THE BLACK GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN
TOLD THEY'RE TOO MUCH AND TO THE ONES
WHO DON'T BELIEVE THEY'RE ENOUGH:
YOU ARE THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL SONG.**

Rise to the Sun is a novel that celebrates the communal joy of live music spaces and the ferocious vibrance of first love. To get full enjoyment from what I hope will be an uplifting reading experience, some readers may prefer to know ahead of time that this book does include references to parental loss, panic attacks, gun violence, and nonconsensual image sharing.

Love,

Leah

FARMLAND

MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL

FRIDAY



**“This is our kingdom.
Out here, nobody can tell us
we’re not the greatest.”**

**–Pop Top (née Jackie Anderson)
at the Coachella Valley Music
and Arts Festival, April 2018**

OLIVIA

FRIDAY MORNING

My best friend has always been the first person I run to when it's time to blow up my life.

The radio is cranked up as loud as it can go in Imani's SUV, and both of our heads are tilted back, shouting lyrics at the roof of the car. This feeling isn't the explosion I came to her begging for at the beginning of summer three months ago—when I was sad and frustrated and heartbroken *again*—but it feels right. It feels the way things only feel when you're with your best friend in the world, on your way to your first music festival, with the rubble of a disastrous junior year behind you.

Feels like possibility.

“I’m not saying love isn’t real! I’m just saying, statistically, there’s no way every time you claim to have been in love it actually *was love*,” she shouts during the drum solo of the song currently blasting over the speakers.

She opens her mouth for a Twizzler and leans toward me without taking her eyes off the road as she creeps forward in the line of cars. She’s wearing one of her many pairs of designer sunglasses, her only real fashion indulgence, but I can see her carefully threaded eyebrows raise expectantly behind them. I do my due diligence as an A1 passenger and feed it to her.

She chews and swallows before waving a hand around to emphasize her point.

“I read a study about it. On average, you’d have to have at least two long-term relationships, one long-distance relationship, four one-night stands, and one live-in relationship before falling in love even once. You haven’t run the necessary trials yet. The odds of any of your relationships having been real love are pretty low, given the data.”

Imani Garrett and her odds. Imani and her *data*. Sometimes her brain works too hard for her to see what I see—that there’s no way you can math your way into finding love. Like every great love song has ever taught me, it takes trial and error. And if you’re me, it takes more trials than I can count and more errors than should be humanly possible.

It’s hot outside, I can tell by the way the volunteers who wave us forward are sweating through their bright orange FARMLAND

VOLUNTEER T-shirts, but inside the car it's perfect. The air conditioner is humming and the bass is pounding and we're thrumming with anticipation—the best kind of nerves. The kind of nerves that promise a weekend big enough to change something, change *everything*. And despite the fact that Imani is trying to use her pesky logic to convince me that my heart isn't actually working overtime, this is exactly what I need right now.

The frontwoman of the band, Teela Conrad, starts belting, and for the moment, all talk of my catastrophic romantic history and my most recent failed relationship is forgotten.

I live for moments like these. As Imani shouts along to the lyrics and beats her hands against the steering wheel in time with the music, I can almost convince myself that she's as out of control as I am. That somewhere deep down in that brilliant, refined brain, is the same type of restlessness just screaming to get out that exists in mine. Those moments are always fleeting though. Because she will always turn off the radio and become herself once more.

I'm still looking for my off switch.

"Hey, Farmers!" One of the volunteers says as we pull into the check-in station. She smiles brightly at me and I beam my widest smile. I can already tell that these are my people. "You girls look ready for a good time!"

"Yeah, some of us more than others." Imani presses pause on the screen in her dash that's currently controlling the Spotify playlist, and just like that, she's cranky again. As if I could forget

that the Farmland Music and Arts Festival is most certainly not her idea of a good time.

She puts the car in park so we can hop out as the volunteers scour the car for the festival's no-no's: no pets, no weapons, no drugs. As we wait, my loose-fitting mini dress immediately starts sticking to my skin thanks to the humidity of northern Georgia in August, but I keep smiling anyway. Nothing can bring me down today, not even a reluctant best friend and a lifetime of ruined romances and a phone buzzing with text messages from a mom who thinks I'm currently at a weekend youth retreat with Imani's nonexistent church.

I can't even bring myself to feel guilty about the ridiculous, borderline-blasphemous lie I had to tell her to get here.

I'm not religious in the way my mom is, obviously. Her church is in a sanctuary with pews and ministers and a collection plate that goes around for the offering. My church is the press of bodies together in a crowd, the pulse of a bass guitar vibrating under our feet, and a lead singer preaching the gospel of rebellion and revolution and love through beautiful harmonies and perfect chord progressions. Some people find salvation in a stained-glass building, other people find it in a basement punk show.

"This is a bad idea, Liv," Imani says, leaning forward like she's going to put her elbows on the hood of the car, but deciding against it when she remembers how hot the surface of it must be. It's almost like she's reading my mind. "There are so many other things you should be worrying about this weekend. Like, I don't

know, the judicial hearing, perhaps?” Her voice takes on that exasperated and still somehow fond tone it always takes when she’s slipping into mother-hen mode. “It’s taking you forever to decide what to say—you can’t just wing something like this.”

I can’t see her eyes behind her tinted lenses, but I know she’s narrowing them. I don’t want to talk about the hearing. I don’t want to so much as think about it. And I refuse to.

“We’re not talking about that.” My voice comes out quicker and with more edge than I intend for it to. I immediately try to lighten the mood. “We should be talking about the fact that my best friend is a literal genius who is practically being handed early decision to U Chicago on a silver platter!”

I might want the attention off me, but I mean it. Imani spent all summer doing research with a doctor at the University of Chicago, and she’s got a pretty solid in there next fall. She’s brilliant, and beautiful—brown-skinned and self-assured. She’s got it all together. Too bad her big brain hasn’t figured out how to fix mine.

Imani blushes, embarrassed suddenly by my compliment, and says, “Whatever. Don’t try to change the subject. You have to—”

And because the Farmland volunteers are my people, my comrades, my buddies in arms, Imani doesn’t get to finish that statement before we’re getting the all-clear and being directed toward where our campsite is going to be. As much as I love Imani and value her opinion, I’m almost always grateful when her train of thought gets derailed.

Imani hadn't wanted to come to this festival at all. And like so many other times before, had to be persuaded by the very real, extremely dire stakes of my most recent heartbreak. It was still fall, but already my junior year had been a series of relationship-related catastrophes, the last of which rendered me both a social outcast at school and a complete shame to my mom's parentage at home.

In the immediate fallout, I'd done what any logical girl would do: I called my best friend and asked her to pick me up so we could hit the McDonald's drive thru and I could cry into an Oreo McFlurry in the parking lot as God intended. "Imani, please please *please* let's do something this summer. Something good. Something far away from here," I had begged through tears. I was already thinking months into the future. I needed something to get me through the rest of the school year, otherwise I might not survive it with my sanity intact.

"Olivia, okay, come on." Her voice took on her soothing post-breakup tone. The kind of tone people use on scared woodland creatures and, apparently, sixteen-year-old girls whose hearts have been ripped out and run over by their ex-boyfriend's stupid Dodge Charger. "You're so much better off without this one-ply toilet paper equivalent of a human being in your life."

"But, I"—hiccup—"wanted him"—hiccup—"to be"—blows nose into fancy aloe-infused tissues—"the oneeeeeeeeeee!"

"I know," she said, her eyes never leaving mine. I wiped my nose on my sleeve and she reached for her family-size hand sanitizer.

She held it out at me until I opened my palm. She squirted some and then continued. “I know you did.”

I am very good at getting my heart broken. Some might even call me an impeccable *heartbreakee*. But my real secret talent seems to be getting my heart broken while en route to ruining someone’s life. Loving me—or more often than not, having *me* love *you*—is a surefire blueprint for disaster.

Imagine me as the Fab Five from *Queer Eye’s* unknowingly evil twin. Instead of sweeping into your life and fixing your split ends, making your condo *Architectural Digest* ready, and revamping your wardrobe, I say the wrong things and do the wrong things and have been the mayor of the city of Too Much, Too Soon since the day I was born.

But not Imani. By some stroke of luck, I got the kind of best friend whose magical power is finding solutions when mine seems to be creating problems. She’s one of the few people in the universe I have yet to chase off. There are a lot of reasons to love her, obviously, but the fact that she stays by my side is right there at the top of the list. Next to her impeccable taste in music.

I hate that it always ends up like this, that *I* always end up like this. But at least I have Imani to help pull me out of every grave I dig for myself.

“Let’s just go somewhere! Anywhere, it doesn’t matter.” I could feel that telltale prickle of urgency at the base of my neck that I get sometimes when I need to do something major: cut my hair,

jump headfirst into a new relationship, try to sign up for the Peace Corps at fourteen by “borrowing” my older sister’s ID and claiming it as my own. “What about a road trip? We could see, like, monuments and stuff.”

Imani snorted. “You hate monuments.”

I leaned my forehead against the dash and groaned. Part of the problem here has always been the fact that Imani is the one with the car, so she is ultimately the decider of all heartbreak-healing excursions. This was yet another occasion where the lack of four-wheeled mobility really limited my options.

“Yeah, okay, so I think they’re mostly boring and a poor use of taxpayer dollars.” I blew my nose into the tissue. “So, we go see something else, then.”

“I think you’re forgetting a few crucial details. One: Your mom will never let you go. Two: You’re broke.”

“Counterpoint: My mom hates me anyway so another notch on that belt won’t hurt much. And I have a few hundred saved up from the car fund, remember?” It’s not like I wasn’t working on the car thing. It was just taking a while. Like my entire high school career, a while.

The radio was turned way down, but even through my tears, I could identify the low hum of Imani’s favorite band playing in the background. Kittredge was pretty much a constant staple when riding in her car. Her favorite band in part because of their music, but mostly for Davey Mack, their scraggly redheaded bassist and

Teela Conrad's more eccentric co-lead singer—the only person on the planet Imani had ever admitted any type of attraction to.

Imani opened her mouth to respond but stopped immediately when she caught the melody that was playing from the speakers. She reached for the volume and turned it up to full blast. "I'm just a girl who rose to the bait, and you're still the boy who tempted my fate!"

She belted the entire verse before relaxing back into her seat with a sigh and turning the volume back down.

"Ugh, I can't believe I'm missing their entire tour this summer."

This conversation was familiar too. Imani had missed Kittredge on their last two summer tours because of the early college program she did at the University of Chicago, and the tour before that because she said the tickets she bought ended up being fakes. Which was perfect for me because I ended up needing her to hold my hand through a heartbreak that night anyway.

And now, as soon as they finished the European leg of their tour, they were rumored to be going on hiatus.

In that moment, I thought back to poring over their tour schedule with her when it was announced months before, and like a cartoon light bulb practically appearing over my head, I suddenly knew what to do. The last date on their tour was headlining a massive music festival in Georgia at the end of August. It was a few days after Imani got back from Chicago, and a week before our senior year started. I could get my road trip, Imani could get to see the love of her life, and for one brief weekend before going

back to school and the hellscape of what that would mean for me, we could have the time of our lives.

“Music festivals are dangerous,” she hedged. “Heat stroke? Dehydration? A deranged gunman shooting up the place? Don’t look at me like that. Don’t you remember what happened at that festival in Las Vegas?”

“I think you worry too much,” I said. Imani’s always been a stickler about anything that involves even the slightest chance of danger. I blame the fact that she’s been listening to BBC World Service on NPR with her dad since before she knew how to talk. Too much news makes a person paranoid.

“Well one of us has to.”

It hadn’t been an easy sell, not even with the convincing pitch. She pushed back with statistic after statistic about everything that could go wrong, but if I know how to do anything, it’s figure out ways to make people cave. And her love of Davey Mack will always win out over her better logic. I can’t say I’m not grateful for having found her one weak point.

Before she agreed, she had one stipulation.

“You can’t do what you always do,” she said, hesitating over the order button when we were buying our tickets on our phones. The dull yellow-ish light from the McDonald’s sign streamed through the window and illuminated the inside of the car. “When we get there, you have to promise me you won’t decide to spend the weekend hooking up with someone new.”

She looked at me with the type of openness Imani only ever

allows herself when the two of us are together, and I knew what came next was going to be important. “This has to be a me-and-you thing, okay? A best friend weekend.” She held out her pinky and I linked mine through it. We kissed our thumbs to seal the promise, the same way we’d done since we became best friends. She bought her ticket, and immediately began searching the rest of the Farmland website. “And I want to ride the Ferris wheel while we’re there. According to the website they have one. So we can’t miss it.”

She ducked her head as she said it, like she was embarrassed to have such a mundane thing on her bucket list, like the only thing she was allowed to hope for was a Nobel Prize and a Fields Medal or whatever.

I thought back to all the times Imani had shown up somewhere just because I asked, and how much I loved her for that. After everything Imani had done for me, keeping this promise would be the least I could do. One epic weekend where the two of us could see our favorite bands, get heinous tan lines, and have an experience so fun it would sustain me through the miserable senior year I have ahead of me.

“Deal.” I nodded.

Because that’s what best friends do.

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