

UNBOUND

A NOVEL IN VERSE

BY ANN E. BURG

SCHOLASTIC INC.



FOR
MARC, ALEX,
CELIA, AND BEN,
AND FOR VOICES
UNHEARD OR
FORGOTTEN

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When Mama tells me
I'm goin
to the Big House,
she makes me promise
to always be good,
to listen to the Missus
n never talk back,
to lower my eyes
n say, *Yes, ma'am,*
no, ma'am,
n to not speak
less spoken to first.

She tells me bout
the new dress
I'm sure to get—
n sweet muffins
every mornin,
she says,
pullin the thread
from Thomas's
old baby gown.

I wind the limp thread
round a stick, slow
n careful so not to break it.
I like soft clothes
n sweet muffins,
but not if it means
leavin Mama.



Since I was little,
Mama's been tellin me,
*You keep those eyes
lookin up—
that's where the good Lord
n His angels live.*

So how come now
she's changin her mind?

*Promise you'll keep
your eyes down,* she says.

I promise.

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*Promise you'll keep
your mouth closed.*

I promise.

*Promise you won't
talk back.*

*Promise you'll
keep your
thoughts n questions
bou—*

n suddenly,
like a clap of thunder
in a sweet blue sky,
all my promisin

starts feelin like
a fistful of thorns
is scratchin my brain.

I promise. I promise—
n then
CRACK!

I drop to the dirt floor
n crunch into a ball.

I won't go! I say.
I want to stay with you!



Aunt Sara stands
in the cabin doorway.
Willy's playin with the hem
of her dress,
n she's holdin Thomas
in her arms.
Mama shoos em away
n kneels down.
She tugs me apart
n takes me into her arms.
I pull away.

I won't go, I cry.
I won't leave Uncle Jim
n his night stories,
or the sound
of his soft singin
when he tends
our moonlight garden.

I won't go. I kick.
I won't leave
little Thomas n Willy.
Aunt Sara's old.
She can sing to em
when Mama works
in the fields, but
who'll stand over em
wavin a dried leaf
to give em a breeze
when they nap?

Who'll play with em
n chase em
into a lump of giggles
when they wake?

I won't go! I won't go!

I pound n thrash,
scream n stomp.

*I WON'T GO!
I WANT TO STAY
WITH YOU!*



Mama wraps
her arms
tight round mine.

My sweet baby child,
she whispers.
My sweet baby child.

The wetness on her face
mingles with my tears—
n tastes like blood.

