



Long Way Down

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Clive Barnes](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Teenage Will believes he should play by the rules, and the rules require that he should kill someone. It's not a story set in some dystopian future, but today in the gang dominated streets of a city in the United States. And just as likely, maybe, in some cities in the U.K. Will's big brother Shawn has been shot because he strayed into the territory of a neighbouring gang. Will believes he knows his brother's killer. He tucks his brother's gun into the waistband of his jeans, creeps out of the apartment past his wrung-out sleeping mother, and takes the elevator to the ground floor on his revenge mission. But the elevator insists on stopping at each of the intervening floors, and letting in, one by one, the ghosts of friends and relatives, all but one of them are men, who have killed and died on the streets, as murderers and victims, and sometimes as both. As Will descends jerkily to his fate, in a growing fog of ghostly cigarette smoke, this intense verse novel presents a history of inseparable love and hate, of male bonding which is sealed in blood. And what message do the ghosts bring? Their lives and their deaths intensify Will's doubts about his willingness and capacity to kill. But are they goading him for his weakness, his inability to take on the obligations of manhood, or warning him against making his own entry into this cycle of destruction? The last ghost to enter is Shawn himself, who leads Will out into the lobby with the mocking question (in capital letters) ?YOU COMING?? This is a powerful novel that immerses the reader in an enclosed and isolated world of limited opportunities and distorted loyalties, riffing brilliantly and darkly on the language of the street. Its power is such that although we would like Will to make the best choice, we understand completely if he makes the worst. Chris Priestley's dark grainy monochrome illustrations bring us in close on the face of a dead brother obscured by a body bag, the gun and the ammunition clip, the finger reaching for the elevator button, the gun pressed against a temple: images that mark out Will's choices and feed his terror filled indecision. Published first to great acclaim in the United States, Faber are to be congratulated on making Jason Reynolds' compelling and disturbing novel available to readers here.

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