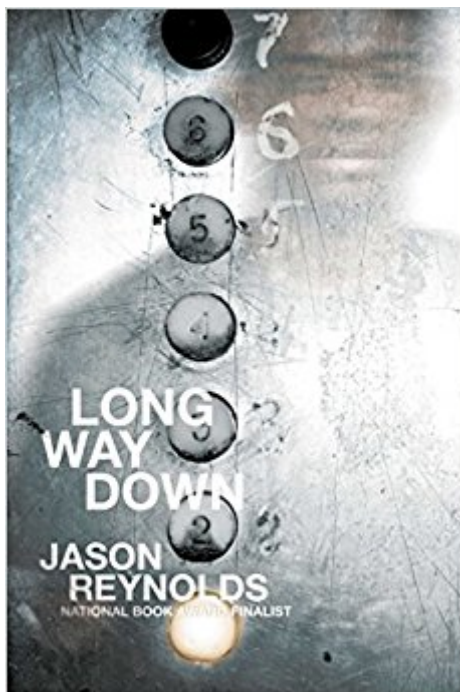


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Long Way Down



Synopsis

An ode to *Put the Damn Guns Down*, this is National Book Award finalist and New York Times bestseller Jason Reynolds's fiercely stunning novel that takes place in sixty potent seconds—the time it takes a kid to decide whether or not he's going to murder the guy who killed his brother. A cannon. A strap. A piece. A biscuit. A burner. A heater. A chopper. A gat. A hammer. A tool for RULE. Or, you can call it a gun. That's what fifteen-year-old Will has shoved in the back waistband of his jeans. See, his brother Shawn was just murdered. And Will knows the rules. No crying. No snitching. Revenge. That's where Will's now heading, with that gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, the gun that was his brother's gun. He gets on the elevator, seventh floor, stoked. He knows who he's after. Or does he? As the elevator stops on the sixth floor, on comes Buck. Buck, Will finds out, is who gave Shawn the gun before Will took the gun. Buck tells Will to check that the gun is even loaded. And that's when Will sees that one bullet is missing. And the only one who could have fired Shawn's gun was Shawn. Huh. Will didn't know that Shawn had ever actually USED his gun. Bigger huh. BUCK IS DEAD. But Buck's in the elevator? Just as Will's trying to think this through, the door to the next floor opens. A teenage girl gets on, waves away the smoke from Dead Buck's cigarette. Will doesn't know her, but she knew him. Knew. When they were eight. And stray bullets had cut through the playground, and Will had tried to cover her, but she was hit anyway, and so what she wants to know, on that fifth floor elevator stop, is, what if Will, Will with the gun shoved in the back waistband of his jeans, MISSES. And so it goes, the whole long way down, as the elevator stops on each floor, and at each stop someone connected to his brother gets on to give Will a piece to a bigger story than the one he thinks he knows. A story that might never know an END—if WILL gets off that elevator. Told in short, fierce staccato narrative verse, *Long Way Down* is a fast and furious, dazzlingly brilliant look at teenage gun violence, as could only be told by Jason Reynolds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Fifteen-year-old Will, immobilized with grief when his older brother Shawn is shot and killed, slowly comes to mull The Rules in his head. There are three: don't cry, don't snitch, and "if someone you love / gets killed, / find the person / who killed / them and / kill them." So Will locates Shawn's gun, leaves his family's eighth-floor apartment, and well, here is where this intense verse novel becomes a gripping drama, as on each floor of the descending elevator Will is joined by yet another victim or perpetrator in the chain of violence that took his brother's life. Shawn's best friend Buck gets into the elevator on seven; Dani, Will's friend from childhood, gets in on six; Will and Shawn's uncle Mark gets in on five, in a cloud of cigarette smoke. And so it goes, each stop of the elevator adding to the chorus of ghosts (including Will and Shawn's father), each one with his or her perspective on The Rules. The poetry is stark, fluently using line breaks and page-turns for dramatic effect; the last of these reveals the best closing line of a novel this season. Read alone (though best aloud), the novel is a high-stakes moral thriller; it's also a perfect if daring choice for readers' theater. **(The Horn Book **STARRED** July/August 2017)** Spanning a mere one minute and seven seconds, Reynolds's new free-verse novel is an intense snapshot of the chain reaction caused by pulling a trigger. First, 15-year-old Will Holloman sets the scene by relating his brother's, Shawn's, murder two days prior—gunned down while buying soap for their mother. Next, he lays out The Rules: don't cry, don't snitch, always get revenge. Now that the reader is up to speed, Will tucks Shawn's gun into his waistband and steps into an elevator, steeled to execute rule number three and shoot his brother's killer. Yet, the simple seven-floor descent becomes a revelatory trip. At each floor, the doors open to admit someone killed by the same cycle of violence that Will's about to enter. He's properly freaked out, but as the seconds tick by and floors count down, each new occupant drops some knowledge and pushes Will to examine his plans for that gun. Reynolds's concise verses echo like shots against the white space of the page, their impact resounding. He peels back the individual stories that led to

this moment in the elevator and exposes a culture inured to violence because poverty, gang life, or injustice has left them with no other option. In this all too real portrait of survival, Reynolds goes toe-to-toe with where, or even if, love and choice are allowed to exist. **Â HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** A noisy buzz always surrounds this critically acclaimed author's work, and the planned tour and promo campaign will boost this book's to a siren call. (Booklist Online, STARRED REVIEW July 1st, 2017) After 15-year-old Will sees his older brother, Shawn, gunned down on the streets, he sets out to do the expected: the rules dictate no crying, no snitching, and revenge. Though the African-American teen has never held one, Will leaves his apartment with his brother's gun tucked in his waistband. As he travels down on the elevator, the door opens on certain floors, and Will is confronted with a different figure from his past, each a victim of gun violence, each important in his life. They also force Will to face the questions he has about his plan. As each "ghost" speaks, Will realizes how much of his own story has been unknown to him and how intricately woven they are. Told in free-verse poems, this is a raw, powerful, and emotional depiction of urban violence. The structure of the novel heightens the tension, as each stop of the elevator brings a new challenge until the narrative arrives at its taut, ambiguous ending. There is considerable symbolism, including the 15 bullets in the gun and the way the elevator rules parallel street rules. Reynolds masterfully weaves in textured glimpses of the supporting characters. Throughout, readers get a vivid picture of Will and the people in his life, all trying to cope with the circumstances of their environment while expressing the love, uncertainty, and hope that all humans share. This astonishing book will generate much needed discussion. (Verse fiction. 12-adult) **Â** (Kirkus, STARRED REVIEW 7/15/17) Fifteen-year-old Will's big brother has been shot and killed. According to the rules that Will has been taught, it is now his job to kill the person responsible. He easily finds his brother's gun and gets on the elevator to head down from his eighth-floor apartment. But it's a long way down to the ground floor. At each floor, a different person gets on to tell a story. Each of these people is already dead. As they relate their tales, readers learn about the cycle of violence in which Will is caught up. The protagonist faces a difficult choice, one that is a reality for many young people. Teens are left with an unresolved ending that goes beyond the simple question of whether Will will seek revenge. Told in verse, this title is fabulistic in its simplicity and begs to be discussed. Its hook makes for an excellent booktalk. It will pair well with Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* and Reynolds's previous works. The unique narrative structure also makes it an excellent read-alike for Walter Dean Myers's *Monster*. **VERDICT** This powerful work is an important addition to any collection. (School Library Journal *STARRED* July 2017)

Jason Reynolds is crazy. About stories. He is a New York Times bestselling author, a National Book Award Honoree, a Kirkus Award winner, a Walter Dean Myers Award winner, an NAACP Image Award Winner, and the recipient of multiple Coretta Scott King honors. His debut novel was *When I Was the Greatest* and was followed by *Boy in the Black Suit* and *All American Boys* (cowritten with Brendan Kiely); *As Brave As You*; *Jump Anyway*; and the first two books in the Track series, *Ghost* and *Patina*. You can find his ramblings at JasonWritesBooks.com.

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