'*Gloves Off* is an intense, original and profoundly moving verse novel, filled with the fierce, hard joy of finding your power'
Imogen Russell-Williams, *The Guardian*

'A beautiful, lyrical read. Buy it for your daughters – and sons'
Natasha Harding, *The Sun*

'Pride in your body, courage and self-belief – this is a knock-out'
Marianne Levy, *the i*

'*Gloves Off* is filled with beauty, heart and hope. I devoured it, loved it and will keep to read again'
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'Such a beautifully written and inventive novel'
Brian Conaghan, author of *When Mr Dog Bites*

'The world needs more books like this'
Jenny Downham, author of *Furious Thing*

'Beautiful, brave and inspiring, Lil's story will have you weeping one moment and cheering her on the next. I loved it'
Lisa Williamson, author of *The Art of Being Normal*

'Stunning . . . *Gloves Off* punches in the guts'
Nicola Morgan, author of *Body Brilliant*

'Will have you cheering Lily on as she finally stands up for herself and finds her own way. Beautifully written'
Teri Terry, author of the *Slated* series

'Reid tackles self-image, bullying and mother/daughter relationships in a way that will have you aching to finish the story. Reminiscent of Sarah Crossan and Jason Reynolds, this novel is a stunning achievement'
Charlotte Eyre, *The Bookseller*

'A stunning verse novel that, quite literally, pulls no punches in depicting one girl's transformative journey from victim to victor'
Joy Court, *LoveReading.co.uk*

'*Gloves Off* is going to stay with me for a long time . . . ultimately it's a book about bravery, fresh starts and family'
Perdita Cargill, author of the *Waiting for Callback* trilogy

'*Gloves Off* will undoubtedly be one of the top UKYA books of the year'
Lucas Maxwell, School Librarian of the Year, 2017

'An incredibly powerful novel for young people that fully reflects the crushing reality for some, and the spirit it takes to change a situation. A must read'
Alison Tarrant, Chief Executive, *The School Libraries Association*

'Beautifully written in verse, and packing an emotional punch, it's a gem of a book'
The Book Nook, Brighton

'The verse really does float like a butterfly . . . *Gloves Off* packs a real punch: highly recommended'
Armadillo Magazine

'A memorable verse novel, powerful and poignant on body image, bullying and mental health'
Fiona Noble, *The Bookseller*

'An inspirational book and a thrilling read'
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"Going in one more round
when you don't think you can.
That's what makes all the
difference in your life."

– Rocky Balboa

ROADKILL

i taste the street –
it's filthy,
gritty and hard,
and it has
knocked
all the
breath
out of my body.

slammed low,
i grope for my bag,
stinging shame in my palms,
on my knees,
and my chin.

i don't get up.
i stare at the ground,

something in my eye.

RESCUE

waiting for the thunder of feet to fade,
for the taunts to be swallowed
by the blare and shout of traffic –

who finds me?
who scrapes me off the street
and helps me home?

(oh, god,
how long did i
lie
there?)

i don't like to be
SEEN.
and – like *that* –
SPOTTED
at my worst.
i like to pretend
that no one knows
who i am,
that i'm hiding well,
hiding here,
in front of you –

invisible,

nevertheless.

but when you're
down and out,
knocked
on the ground,
crumpled –

it's clear that someone put you there,
and that you didn't fight back.

too weak.

too wet.

even so,
i remember to say thank you
to the woman who drives me home.

manners cost nothing.

FOR SHE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

i turn my key in the door,
and hear mikey's voice –
"she's home, she's home! lily! lil!"
he runs towards me,
grabs my hand,
before i can escape upstairs,
and drags me into the sitting room
where mum and aunty clare are waiting
with balloons,
and a fountain of silly string explodes.

"happy birthday to you!"
they chorus
in voices so loud
the whole street will hear,
even the baby is bouncing
and cooing in time.

i crush the rest of the day inside my fist,
and smile.

SWEET SIXTEEN

there's birthday kisses and cake.
a tower of pink candles
flickers and flares,
mikey claps his hands,
jumps up and down –
our sofa his trampoline,
as i blow out my age – all sixteen at once –
and screw my eyes tight,
and make my wish.

"look what i got you!" mikey cries,
shoving a parcel into my hands,
and i peel back the tape,
peep inside,
"oh wow," i say, "oh, thanks, mikey, aunty clare, that's great."
make-up,
– a palette of war paint.

"you can get married now," says aunty clare,
giving me a wink,
no ta
"or just play the lottery," she hands me a ticket,
for tomorrow night's draw,

and i smile at the thought.

mum's made me a scarf,
crocheted perfection, matching hat and gloves,
in rainbow hues,
"do you like it, lil?"
she asks, watching me,
so anxiously,
"it's getting colder now,
they'll keep you warm."

i wrap myself in her love,
they're perfect, mum, so beautiful.

but i know i can never wear this stuff
anywhere near school.

DANCING QUEENS

mum cranks up Abba,
and mikey insists
that we play some games –
musical statues, he decides,

so we all join in,
and let him win.

"didn't you do a pass the parcel, aunty bern?"
mikey wonders,
and we laugh, tease mum,
then i grab my cousin and swing him
round
and round
until we fall on the sofa,
dizzy and daft,
and i tickle him until all I hear is his laugh.

BERNADETTE (1)

When you were born you were perfect.
And now,
Standing here,
Looking at you –
Sixteen! –
I watch you and wonder,
At the shape of your face,
The arch of your brow,
The bow of your lips,
The length of your neck,
The strength of your back,
The curve of your cheeks,
The joy of your laugh,
Your heart, so sweet.

Oh Lily,
You are my masterpiece.

WE ALL FALL DOWN

my dad thinks i'm clumsy.

i don't let him see
all the bruises –
sometimes, though, he'll look at me twice
and ask questions that make me
wince and hide.

"happy birthday, lil," he shouts down the phone,
the roar of a motorway
growling hello.

he's not home tonight.
he works long hours
far away
for not much pay,
which is why I need
to do well at school,
to find a way to rise above,
they say.

but what if you can't concentrate?
what if there's always too much noise?

sixteen –
should know what's what,
how to deal
with what i'm not.

i lie awake,
as sirens strafe the early hours –
someone else's problem,
but,
still,
close enough to remind us
no one's safe
round here.

3 A.M.

and the front door opens, shuts.
i can hear mum in the hallway,
murmuring, the sound of
lights being turned on,
and the kettle humming,
fridge sucking open, shut.

i wonder
if it's dad.

standing at the top of the stairs,
i listen in.

uncle ray.

oh, god.

go away.

"MORNING,"

he says, sitting there,
feet under the table,
cooked breakfast round his mouth,
mopping up yolk
with a piece of fried bread.
"all right? get the girl some grub, bern. lazy cow,"
he laughs,
eyeing me,
no card or present, that's no surprise.
mum steps to the cupboard,
her face grey and pouchy,
yawning behind her hand.

they've talked all night,
his voice echoed
up the stairs,
into my room,
vibrating, deep and low.
he likes the sound of it,
sings karaoke at the weekends,
when he can.

and now this morning
ray is brazen,
has shaved his face
with one of dad's razors.
"she never did pull her weight, eh, lil?"
he laughs at his joke, gestures at my mum,
but i don't smile
or sit down.

"come on then,"
he says to mum,
"get into gear.
get that arse moving, eh?"

ray comes over
when dad's away
and mum
lets him in.

if dad were here,
he'd tell ray to sling his hook.

once i saw mum open her purse
and hand over all she had.

i know his knock:
a hammer.
if no one answers
he calls through the letter box,
then comes round the back,
"i know you're in there,"
he shouts.

i'm a coward. i make her face him alone.

see *you later, mum,*
i kiss her goodbye
and slam the door behind me.

uncle ray is
in the police,
        you'd think
        that you could trust him.

BERNADETTE (2)

The past
Follows me,
A stalker
Who knows everything I've ever regretted,
Every shameful moment I can't forget.
My brother, Ray, grins.
His face is over the breakfast table
And
His fist is in my belly
In the alley
Near school
Twenty years ago,
Taking my bus money,
Pulling my hair,
Telling his friends they can have a ride.

And I'm still a kid
Who can't tell him where to go.

Every day
I watch my daughter leave,
See her walk away,

Close the door,
Everything on her shoulders.
And I try not to cry at the strength that somehow she has learned.

What now for me?
I sit in her room and stare at the pictures on her walls.
She'd hate to know I was here
Touching her things,
Trying to worm my way inside her thoughts.

I talk to Lil of how she'll leave all this
Behind,
And that thought is the saddest one of all.