I HAD HALF A SECOND

to
get a grip,
grab the grip,
tuck the gun,
turn around,
ignore Buck,
catch my breath,
stand up straight,
act normal
act natural
act like
the only rules
that matter
are the ones
for the elevator.

FABER & FABER has published children's books since 1929. Some of our very first publications included *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* by T. S. Eliot starring the now world-famous Macavity, and *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes. Our catalogue at the time said that 'it is by reading such books that children learn the difference between the shoddy and the genuine'. We still believe in the power of reading to transform children's lives.

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LONG WAY DOWN

JASON REYNOLDS

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHRIS PRIESTLEY

FABER & FABER

For all the young brothers and sisters in detention centres around the country, the ones I've seen, and the ones I haven't. You are loved.

DON'T NOBODY

believe nothing
these days

which is why I haven't
told nobody the story
I'm about to tell you.

And truth is,
you probably ain't
gon' believe it either
gon' think I'm lying
or I'm losing it,
but I'm telling you,

this story is true.

It happened to me.
Really.

It did.

It *so* did.

MY NAME IS

Will.
William.
William Holloman.

But to my friends
and people
who know me
know me,

just Will.

So call me Will,
because after I tell you
what I'm about to tell you

you'll either
want to be my friend
or not
want to be my friend
at all.

Either way,
you'll know me
know me.

I'M ONLY WILLIAM

to my mother
and my brother, Shawn,
whenever he was trying
to be funny.

Now
I'm wishing I would've
laughed more
at his dumb jokes

because the day
before yesterday,
Shawn was shot

and killed.

I DON'T KNOW YOU,

don't know
your last name,
if you got
brothers
or sisters
or mothers
or fathers
or cousins
that be like
brothers
and sisters
or aunties
or uncles
that be like
mothers
and fathers,

but if the blood
inside you is on the inside
of someone else,

you never want to
see it on the outside of
them.

THE SADNESS

is just so hard
to explain.

Imagine waking up
and someone,
a stranger,

got you strapped down,
got pliers shoved
into your mouth,
gripping a tooth

somewhere in the back,
one of the big
important ones,

and rips it out.

Imagine the knocking
in your head,
the pressure pushing
through your ears,
the blood pooling.

But the worst part,
the absolute worst part,

is the constant slipping
of your tongue
into the new empty space,

where you know

a tooth supposed to be

but ain't no more.

IT'S SO HARD TO SAY,

Shawn's
dead.
Shawn's
dead.
Shawn's
dead.

So strange to say.
So sad.

But I guess
not surprising,
which I guess is
even stranger,

and even sadder.

THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

me and my friend Tony
were outside talking about
whether or not we'd get any
taller now that we were fifteen.

When Shawn was fifteen
he grew a foot, maybe a foot
and a half. That's when he gave
me all the clothes he couldn't fit.

Tony kept saying he hoped he grew
because even though he was
the best ballplayer around here
our age, he was also the shortest.

And everybody knows
you can't go all the way when
you're that small unless you can
really jump. Like

fly.

AND THEN THERE WERE SHOTS.

Everybody
ran,
ducked,
hid,
tucked
themselves tight.

Did what we've all
been trained to.

Pressed our lips to the
pavement and prayed
the boom, followed by
the buzz of a bullet,
ain't meet us.

AFTER THE SHOTS

me and Tony
waited like we always do,
for the rumble to stop,
before picking our heads up
and poking our heads out
to count the bodies.

This time
there was only one.

Shawn.