

Come Down Somewhere

Jennifer L. Wright

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Jennifer L. Wright's intelligent and arresting historical novel focuses on two girls who witness the atomic bomb test in New Mexico.

In 1944, the US Army claims Olive's family ranch through eminent domain. Against her will, she's sent to live with her grandmother in Alamogordo. There, Olive meets Jo, the Christian daughter of the sergeant in charge at the ranch. Olive's animosity—fueled in part by her feelings of displacement, her agnosticism, confusion about her grandmother's dementia, and the secrecy surrounding what's happening back home—push Jo away. But Jo's faith draws Olive closer, and the girls become friends.

A few years after the war, disillusioned Jo returns to New Mexico to put old ghosts to rest. The period of Jo's transformation is represented as a fascinating, fertile gap; questions about what happened with Olive arise. The girl's rift ties into the historic test in Jornada del Muerto. Alternating timelines fuel suspense as they move toward that fateful event, mining the changes that led the girls farther from their roots.

Faith plays a clear role in Olive and Jo's stories—as do family betrayals. Though Olive is at first repulsed by what she perceives as naïve Christian piety, she thaws as she witnesses the actions of her grandmother's warm congregation. And Jo's steadying presence, paired with her vulnerability, pull Olive into the unexpected joys of friendship. Still, the girls are impacted by the tragedies of war, which touch their loved ones. In time, they experience the pain of abandonment, the relief of returning to faith, and healing.

In the moving historical novel *Come Down Somewhere*, a nuclear test has explosive consequences for a burgeoning friendship.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2022)

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