FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ GENERAL FICTION

Just Gone

William Kowalski
Raven Books (Sep 1, 2013)
Softcover $9.95 (128pp)
978-1-4598-0327-5

With innovative characters, this short novel for beginning adult readers ties mystical urban legends with inner-city life.

The Rapid Reads series, a collection of short, easy to read novels featuring contemporary themes, is intended for adults developing their reading skills. With diverse topics and interesting plotlines, presented clearly, in language that is straightforward and easy to understand, the books provide engaging subject matter for those struggling with literacy and those for whom English is a new language.

Author and adult education consultant William Kowalski has published several novels, and his newest, *Just Gone*, is his fourth for the Rapid Reads series. Set in and around an inner-city homeless shelter for women and children, his story deals with issues of life-threatening poverty and violent urban crime, countered by the ongoing struggle of his characters to transcend their problems through faith, determination, and even belief in the most mystical of urban legends.

Kowalski excels in character development. Mother Angelique, his first-person narrator, comes vividly to life from the start. A God-fearing woman who has devoted over forty years to the shelter, dedicating her life to the city's poorest children, she abhors violence yet keeps a homemade cosh on hand, just in case. Small but feisty, she bends the rules as necessary to protect her charges. She philosophizes and explains, setting the mood of the story with her forthright tenacity. "I am used to living with fear," she says. "And one of the ways I stay strong is to never give in." Her strength is rooted in her faith, and her purpose is always to do the right thing, yet her vulnerability hovers, forever close to the surface. She seems positively real.

Entwined with Mother Angelique's own story is the extraordinary tale of Jacky Wacky, a magical being whose legend is first shared by a heart-breaking young orphan named Jamal. As the plot progresses, Jacky Wacky is revealed to be a superhero of sorts, at least to the children on the streets. Wearing old clothes and a floppy hat, he does not dress the part, yet his role, like Mother Angelique's, is to protect and serve those who most need his help. Carrying a suitcase filled with food, he feeds hungry street children and keeps them out of danger. He has a darker side as well and doles out punishment, usually death, to adults who cause harm to children. So compelling are his story and deeds that his existence, initially deemed an illogical urban legend, begins to border on reality.

Just Gone is a far more complex book than its basic presentation might suggest. Not a book for children, it is certainly suitable for teens. With innovative characters who speak like real people and a plotline that progresses steadily and convincingly over the course of many years, *Just Gone* simply makes sense.
CHERYL HIBBARD (Fall 2013)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.