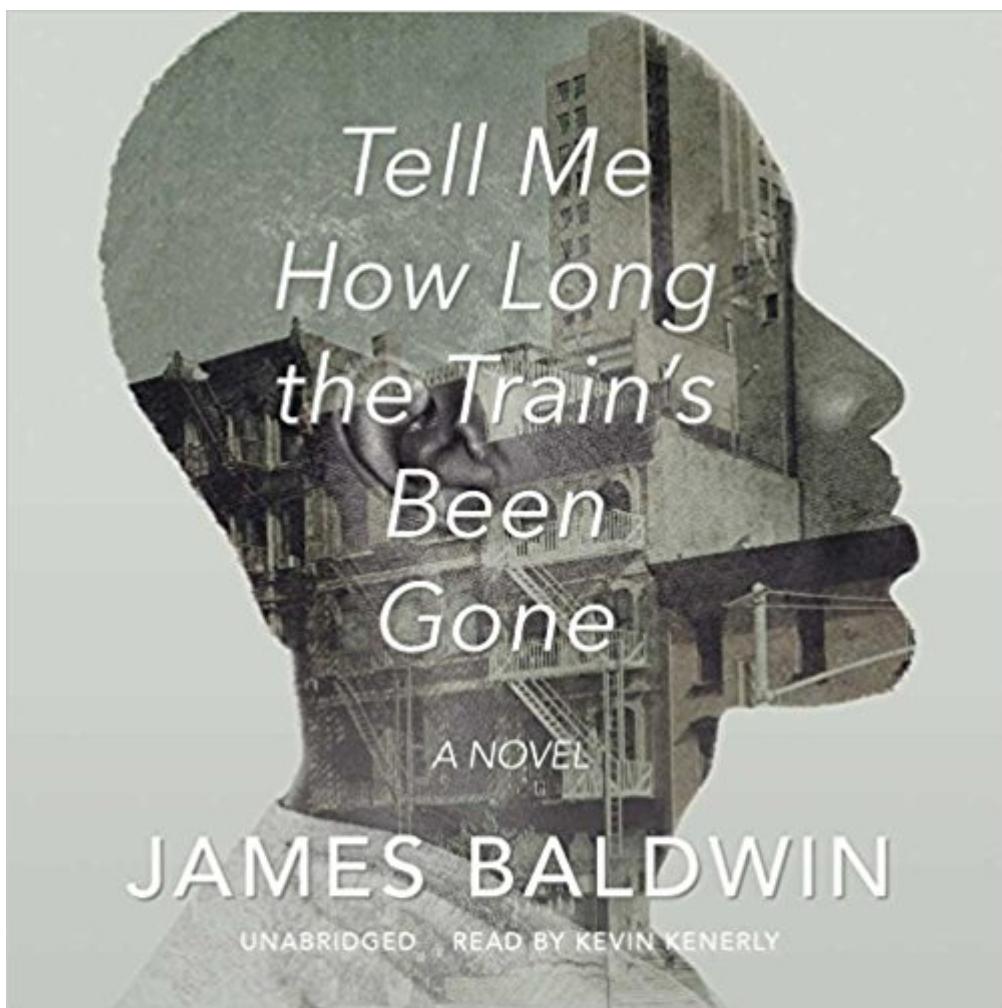


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Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone: A Novel



Synopsis

[Read by Kevin Kenerly] At the height of his theatrical career, the actor Leo Proudhammer is nearly felled by a heart attack. As he hovers between life and death, Baldwin shows the choices that have made him enviably famous and terrifyingly vulnerable. For between Leo's childhood on the streets of Harlem and his arrival into the intoxicating world of the theater lies a wilderness of desire and loss, shame and rage. An adored older brother vanishes into prison. There are love affairs with a white woman and a younger black man, each of whom will make irresistible claims on Leo's loyalty. And everywhere there is the anguish of being black in a society that at times seems poised on the brink of total racial war. Overpowering in its vitality, extravagant in the intensity of its feeling, *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* is a major work of American literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Baldwin is one of the few genuinely indispensable American writers." --Saturday Review "He has not himself lost access to the sources of his being--which is what makes him read and awaited by perhaps a wider range of people than any other major American writer." --The Nation "James Baldwin's story of the mid-century African American experience is told in the first person by the character Leo Proudhammer, ably voiced here by Kevin Kenerly." --AudioFile

"Baldwin is one of the few genuinely indispensable American writers." --Saturday Review "He has not himself lost access to the sources of his being--which is what makes him read and awaited by perhaps a wider range of people than any other major American writer." --The Nation --This text

refers to the Paperback edition.

This may be the best book I have ever read. I was so engrossed that I read it very slowly because I didn't want it to end. Baldwin is a genius writer at the highest level. I'm now reading all his novels and story collections.

This is the first James Baldwin work I've ever read and I wasn't prepared for the emotional depth, precision, beauty and moral stance of the writing. I call it incendiary b/c it set my heart and mind on fire. He's a great American author.

His writing is captivating. I agree with a previous comment that his works should be required reading in school, especially this day in age. So ahead of its time, that even now it's relevant. Ended abruptly, but only because I didn't want it to end.

It is thrilling to read such an amazing story from one of the Greats!! I love his creativity and inspiring literature! Poetry included!

I bought Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone still swooning over Baldwin's Another Country. To my disappointment, this book did not have the same complexity, depth, nor energy that Another Country had. I found myself sticking to the book in some hopes that I would reach the same feeling of satisfaction and rapture that I found with Another Country, or Giovanni's Room. Not a complete waste of time, but not Baldwin's best.

Sent fast. And a very interesting read indeed.

James Baldwin has a way of capturing the experience of black (and queer) people in such a captivating and believable way that I sometimes wonder if white people could learn even more from his books than they can from academic texts or political rallies. He also manages to build stories around characters without making their marginalized status the main plot. He is truly one of the greatest writers out there. His anger with the world and his kindness towards those in it shine through in this book.

Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone (1968), James Baldwin's fourth novel, is

an overlong, somewhat meandering chronicle of the life of Leo Proudhammer, a black man who rises from a poverty-stricken childhood in Harlem to become one of the leading stage actors of the 1950s and early 60s. It is told mostly in flashback, with the story opening as Leo, at the height of his fame, suffers a heart attack on stage during a performance in San Francisco. The flashbacks deal primarily with Leo's relationships with his older brother Caleb and with Barbara, a white woman with whom he has a long-term relationship that ranges from platonic to sexual to contentious. Baldwin gives us long scenes from these and other relationships, some wonderfully realized, others drawn out to seemingly little purpose. Most curiously, he gives fairly short shrift to a third important relationship, Leo's affair (he's bi-sexual) with Christopher, a young black radical who represents the new black militant attitude of the 60s. The other failure, even less explicable, is Baldwin's neglecting to give the reader a fuller chronicle of what is the undoubtedly most interesting thing about Leo: his rise to stardom in spite of the racism of the times and the theater industry. We do get to see his first big success, in a radical staging of a minor work in a small out-of-the-way theater, but that could hardly have propelled someone to the kind of stardom Baldwin grants his protagonist. How did he build on that stepping stone? We aren't shown, even though it was the one big question hanging over the narrative in the many preceding pages. This isn't to say that this book is a tedious read. Baldwin's too good a writer and even scenes that really go nowhere retain an intrinsic narrative interest due to his descriptions, but it is nevertheless a very frustrating exercise to read and feel cheated at the end.

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