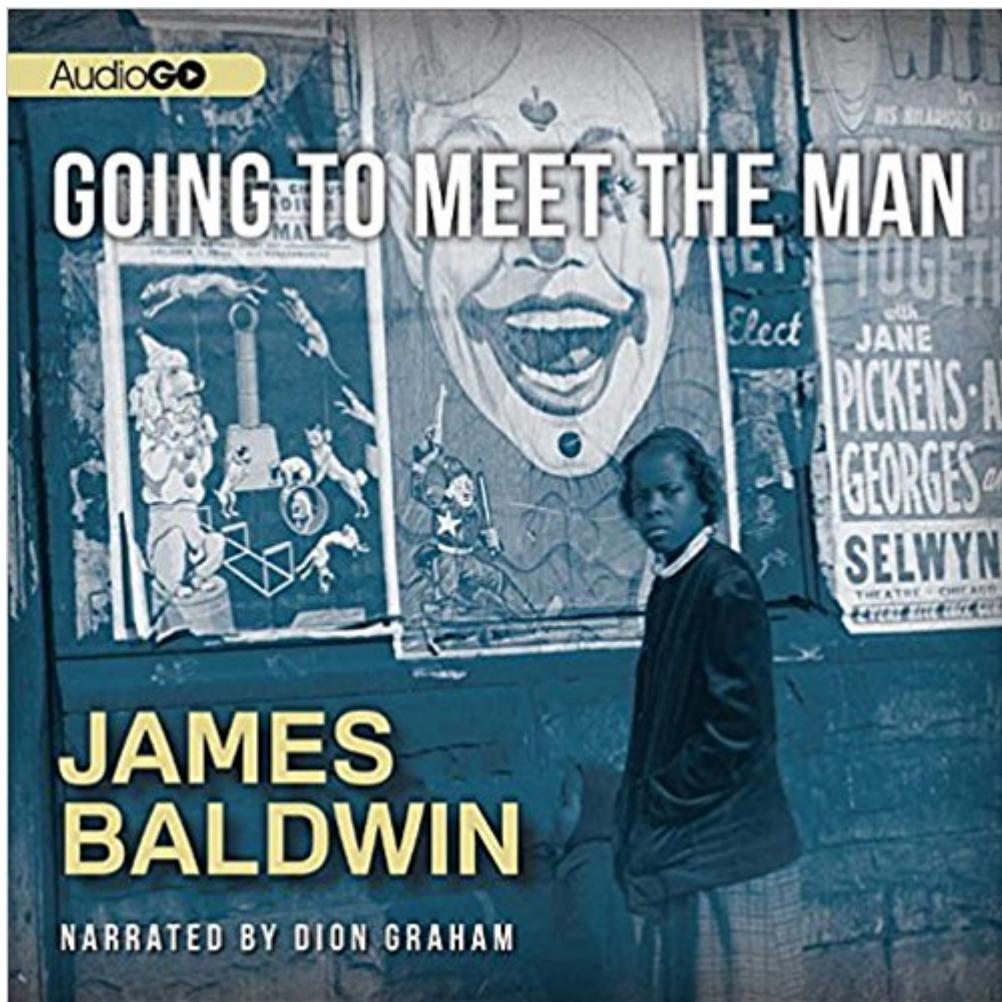


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# Going To Meet The Man



## **Synopsis**

"There's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it." The men and women in these eight short fictions grasp this truth on an elemental level, and their stories, as told by James Baldwin, detail the ingenious and often desperate ways in which they try to keep their heads above water. It may be the heroin that a down-and-out jazz pianist uses to face the terror of pouring his life into an inanimate instrument. It may be the brittle piety of a father who can never forgive his son for his illegitimacy. Or it may be the screen of bigotry that a redneck deputy has raised to blunt the awful childhood memory of the day his parents took him to watch a black man being murdered by a gleeful mob.

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## **Customer Reviews**

"There's no way not to suffer. But you try all kinds of ways to keep from drowning in it." The men and women in these eight short fictions grasp this truth on an elemental level, and their stories, as told by James Baldwin, detail the ingenious and often desperate ways in which they try to keep their heads above water. It may be the heroin that a down-and-out jazz pianist uses to face the terror of pouring his life into an inanimate instrument. It may be the brittle piety of a father who can never forgive his son for his illegitimacy. Or it may be the screen of bigotry that a redneck deputy has raised to blunt the awful childhood memory of the day his parents took him to watch a black man being murdered by a gleeful mob. By turns haunting, heartbreaking, and horrifying--and informed throughout by Baldwin's uncanny knowledge of the wounds racism has left in both its victims and its perpetrators--Going to Meet the Man is a major work by one of our most important writers. --This

text refers to the Paperback edition.

James Baldwin (1924-1987) was educated in New York. His first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, received excellent reviews and was immediately recognized as establishing a profound and permanent new voice in American letters. The appearance of *The Fire Next Time* in 1963, just as the civil rights movement was exploding across the American South, galvanized the nation and continues to reverberate as perhaps the most prophetic and defining statement ever written of the continuing costs of Americans' refusal to face their own history. It became a national bestseller, and Baldwin was featured on the cover of *Time*. The next year, he was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and collaborated with the photographer Richard Avedon on *Nothing Personal*, a series of portraits of America intended as a eulogy for the slain Medger Evers. His other collaborations include *A Rap on Race* with Margaret Mead and *A Dialogue* with the poet-activist Nikki Giovanni. He also adapted Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* into *One Day When I Was Lost*. He was made a commander of the French Legion of Honor a year before his death, one honor among many he achieved in his life.

This book does not have one plot per se, as it is a collection of short stories. However, there is a through-line in that all the narratives have to do with the same thing. Mr. Baldwin's stories all relate, directly or indirectly, to the lived experiences of Blacks living in New York City during the 1950's and 60's. Each builds and expands on the themes of the previous story as the reader goes along. To say that the stories are about racism is a gross oversimplification. In many ways they are allegories about American ideals gone awry in the face of a system that ultimately diminishes all its citizens by devaluing the humanity of the race of some of its citizens. The stories include: *The Rockpile*, *The Outing*, *The Man Child*, *Previous Condition*, *Sonny's Blues*, *This Morning*, *This Evening*, *So Soon*, *Come Out the Wilderness*, and *Going to meet the Man*. The first stories, *The Rockpile* and the *Outing*, speak of faith and family, incorporated elements of African American identity playing out against the backdrop of mid-century Harlem. A young boy learns resentment at the feet of a step-father and the early seeds of manhood on the shoulder of a close friend. The White characters that inhabit *Man Child* speak of an underlying bitterness and resentment that fuel grotesque acts. This story strikes this reader as being an allegory about mainstream America in the midst of war, pilfering the lives of her sons, overseas and at home, over battles of entitlement. *Previous Condition* chronicles the life of the young creative intellectual struggling for identity in a society of well-meaning White liberalism and Black misapprehension. *Sonny's Blues* plays the mournful song

of hopelessness and helplessness of a young Black man, accompanied by the sorrowful strains of his struggle with addiction in the Harlem mid-century jazz scene. This Morning, This evening, So soon, powerfully presents the slow, impotent rage of a Black father who must sacrifice the innocence of his son at the altar of racism. Come Out the Wilderness' protagonist struggles with self-worth and identity. Going to Meet the Man, subversively portrays a man trapped by the guilt of a southern tradition, taking his family out for a picnic. Fifty years hence, in the location and settings of these stories, America has changed. The author James Baldwin, who died in 1987, did not live to see the ascent of Colin Powell, Robert L. Johnson, Condoleezza Rice or Barack Obama; evidence that almost certainly things have changed for the better, for many of us. But in many ways it remains distressingly and disturbingly the same. A system that villifies the Black poor for their poverty, and personifies young Black males as violent criminals, continues to perpetuate the kind of psychic pain and anger that permeated much of Baldwin's work. Going to Meet the Man should be required reading, if for no other reason than to remind us of what we must continually strive to change.

I purchased this collection in order to read the titular short story. I was not disappointed, and in fact, I was shocked. I know that James Baldwin's work is part of the Black cultural and art renaissance that seems to be happening right now, but there seems to only be a focus on his interviews, not so much on his writing. This story (and I feel that I can safely assume that other stories in this collection) reinforce the theoretical framework that Baldwin applies to his outlook of American concerning racism, violence, and intolerance. Read it for yourself because he has much more to say than what he has shared in television interviews.

I was slightly disappointed with the first novel I read by the late great James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*. Although I found it difficult to empathize with the main character (who I found to be a little whiny and spoiled), I was really taken by how beautiful Baldwin's writing was. It was enough to keep me interested in reading more of his work and I'm glad I chose this book as the next one. This solid collection of 8 short stories is a great primer to his writing style and the themes that permeate most of his work, such as race, identity, sex, life in Harlem, and the influence of art, religion, and family. Baldwin's writing is consistently sincere, although some stories kept my attention more than others. There are two stories that are the big standouts in this collection. The soulful "Sonny's Blues" is about a man struggling to understand and reconnect with his estranged, heroin-addicted, musician brother, and also happens to be a look at the liberating power of the blues. The following quote is one the best descriptions of what great music, especially "the blues" is supposed to do, and

what it means to be a musician:"He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness."The title story, "Going to Meet the Man", floored me and haunted me, and might be one of my favorite short stories. It actually kept me up at night thinking about it afterward. It's a story written with pitch-perfect confidence by Baldwin, about a middle-aged, racist, deputy sheriff of a Southern town in the U.S. recalling the event in his childhood that might have made him the bigot he is. The story challenges you to see how an innocent 8-year-old boy, who's best friend is black, can somehow turn into something else. It also explores the uncomfortable relationship between prejudice and sexuality, and how one can profoundly affect the other. A great piece.

major writer!

I loved this book and I greatly admire the author, James Baldwin. Been a long-time fan, in fact. I recommend it to all teens and adults who find it both interesting and enlightning to read fiction and non-fiction relating to social issues in America.

Amazing stories, great writer, again so timely

An amazing read written by a giant of American literature.

A mixed collection with three wonderful stories. The others are interesting but flawed. Sonny's Blues is one of the finest short stories I've ever read.

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