

Take Me with You

by Steven Rowley



About the Book

We are all alien, even to the people who know us best.

College professor Jesse del Ruth has been abandoned. Thirty years into their relationship, Jesse witnesses his husband, Norman, get out of bed late one night, walk into their Joshua Tree backyard, step into a strange beam of light, and... *disappear*. How could Norman desert him after a lifetime together? Where did he go? And, most confoundingly, will he ever return? Jesse knew they were longing for something, both feeling stuck. But had Norman been so stuck that his only option was to leave Jesse behind?

As Jesse struggles to understand Norman's disappearance, he tries to piece together his new reality. Is he expected to wait patiently for a partner who may never come back? Or is this an opportunity for reinvention? He is, after all, alone for the first time in his adult life. Should he return to the classroom? Put in a pool? Get a dog? Call his estranged mother? What does it mean to be alone when you've always been one half of a whole?

When Norman's sister, Lally, lands on Jesse's doorstep with an urgent request, Norman's absence becomes even more profound. Add to Jesse's grief and confusion a conspiracy-theorist neighbor, a strange man following him, and suspicions that he may have had a hand in Norman's disappearance, and Jesse starts to crack under the pressure. With his husband missing and the world closing in, all eyes are on Jesse. Before he can understand how Norman could leave it all behind, Jesse must confront what it means to stay.

In TAKE ME WITH YOU, Steven Rowley brings his resonant wit and emotional insight to an epic love story --- an exploration of the forces that draw two people into the same orbit and the gravity that threatens to pull them apart.

Discussion Guide

1. TAKE ME WITH YOU opens with Jesse and Norman meeting for the first time. The scene closes with Norman telling Jesse: "Where you go, I go. C'mon. I promise it will be an adventure." Why do you think the author chose to begin the story there? To what extent does Norman keep this promise to Jesse?
2. For Jesse and Norman, the move to Joshua Tree was, in part, meant to invigorate their marriage. Can a change of scenery bring more excitement into a relationship? Would you say the move worked for them as intended?
3. Lally, Norman's sister, hires a private investigator to uncover Norman's whereabouts. Discuss how this decision and the way it unfolds speaks to her increasing desire for companionship.
4. Jesse is a college professor who teaches his students the art of comedy. And he stands by the teaching: "Comedy, tragedy. Two sides. Same coin." Share one of your favorite comedic moments from the book and discuss how it informed your reading of the characters' tragedies.
5. Norman and Jesse have both experienced the loss of a family member. For Norman, it's his younger brother, and for Jesse, it's his father. In what ways, if at all, did their early experiences with loss inform their relationship?
6. The book culminates with a dinner party scene where various relationships are questioned and redefined. Why is it in this gathering that points of tension are brought to the surface? To what extent is this what the host intended?
7. At one point in their relationship, Jesse and Norman hoped to build a family together. How do you define *family*? In what ways had Jesse and Norman already built a family? What did you make of Jesse and Norman's ultimate decision on whether or not to have a child?
8. TAKE ME WITH YOU delivers a distinct cast of characters, all of whom we see seeking in their own way. From Jesse's mom, Gail, to their neighbor, Randall Moss, to the detective, Harlan, their presence, once peripheral, starts to add a sense of "fullness" to Jesse and Norman's story. Which supporting character had the biggest emotional impact on you, and why? In what ways have they dealt with abandonment themselves?
9. Steven Rowley posits that we are all of us alien, even to the people we think know us best. Do you agree with this sentiment? Having finished the book, does this sentiment alter your interpretation of the title TAKE ME WITH YOU?
10. In some regards, the meaning of life is exploration, whether that be emotional, spiritual or physical. If you woke up one night and stumbled outdoors and a beam of light shone down, would you go like Norman? Would you stay like Jesse? Which choice is the braver one?

Author Bio

Steven Rowley is the *New York Times* bestselling author of LILY AND THE OCTOPUS, a *Washington Post* Notable Book; THE EDITOR, an NPR Best Book of the Year; THE GUNCLE, winner of the Thurber Prize for American Humor and Goodreads Choice Awards finalist for Novel of the Year; THE CELEBRANTS, a "Read with Jenna" Book Club pick; THE GUNCLE ABROAD, a *USA Today* bestseller; THE DOGS OF VENICE; and TAKE ME WITH YOU. His

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