



When Jeff Comes Home

By Catherine Atkins

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Two years ago, Jeff Hart was kidnapped at knifepoint. Now his kidnapper is releasing him to return home. But when Jeff finds his family, he feels shell-shocked and unable to tell anyone what happened. He can't believe that anyone—not even his family or friends—will understand what he went through. Jeff isn't the same person he was before, and he never will be again.

"An accomplished, intense, and powerful first novel." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Kidnapped from a roadside rest stop by a man named Ray, 16-year-old Jeff has spent the past two and a half years locked in a dark basement. He was whipped, mentally abused and forced to have sex with his captor if he wanted to eat. Now his kidnapper has brought Jeff home. The first half of this tautly written debut reads like a thriller: Jeff, the narrator, relates his gruesome history in bits and pieces; initially, he's wrapped up in twisted loyalty to Ray, who begins to stalk his family. The author builds the tension to an almost unbearable peak in scene after scene, such as when Ray leaves the clothes in which the teen was kidnapped on Jeff's front steps or when Ray still anonymously chats with Jeff's father in public while the threatened teen chooses not to identify him. Jeff is in deep denial about his repeated rape; looking at mug shots and rap sheets for the FBI, he cries out, "Why is every man in there some kind of sick rapist pervert?... I told you Ray isn't like that." About halfway through the novel, Ray is caught, and the breakdown of Jeff's denial makes up the rest of the book. Jeff's recovery is sensitively and dramatically handled, but the tension eases up as he no longer seems threatened and as the mystery of what really happened to him is revealed to match everyone's initial assumptions. Although it doesn't quite deliver on its promise of suspense the whole way through, this chilling story will put readers through an emotional wringer. Ages 12-up. (Sept.)

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From School Library Journal

Grade 10 Up-Abducted from a California rest stop and abused-physically, emotionally, and sexually-by his kidnapper for 2 years, Jeff, now 16, is finally released and allowed to return home. Once a star athlete and quintessential "good kid," he is reunited with a family and friends who have become strangers and is caught in a maelstrom of emotions he tries desperately to suppress and deny. Once the apple of his father's eye, Jeff now has a strained relationship with him. His siblings are eager to reconnect, but treat him with a mandated fragility. Consumed with self-loathing, feeling ashamed and unclean, Jeff refuses to cooperate with investigators and name his abductor. The denial comes to haunt him when his kidnapper asserts that their relations were consensual, thus destroying the tentative trust Jeff had rebuilt with an old friend and making his return to school a nightmare of persecution. This is a strong, uncompromising first novel. Jeff's awkwardness and raw pain at having his outlook on life forever altered are drawn with a remarkable sensitivity and honesty. Supporting characters are equally well realized, with each individual differently, yet relatedly affected by the teen's abduction. There can be no instant resolution, ironically no return "home," and there is none. Jeff's emotional scars run deeper than the physical ones scored on his back. There is, however, positive motion toward healing. At last, the boy begins to talk, breaking through his denial and expressing his anger. A powerful, difficult, yet cathartic read.

Jennifer A. Fakolt, Denver Public Library

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From Kirkus Reviews

An accomplished, intense, and powerful first novel about what happens when a kidnapped boy is returned to his family. After two and a half years, the man called Ray, who stole Jeff from his family at a roadside rest stop, delivers him back home. Atkins plunges into the depths of Jeff's tangled consciousness, conjuring his terror, his bottomless degradation, his lingering horror of himself over what he did to survive. While who Ray was and what he did to Jeff remain mostly unstated, the effects on Jeff are ghastly and transparent. Jeff's intelligent, driven father, who has lost so much of his own life in the search for his son, tries to control Jeff's recovery, too. While his rigidity is fearsome, the cost to him, and to Jeff's stepmother and siblings, is fierce. What Jeff has to face his return to his family and to school, his dealings with the FBI and others who had

searched for him, his ugly, overpowering emotions is drawn candidly but never sensationally. Readers will not be able to view incidents of kidnapping and sexual abuse in the same way again. (Fiction. 13+) --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Helen Johnson:

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Madeline Edwards:

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Alta Favors:

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