



Remember Me Like This

Bret Anthony Johnston

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A gripping novel with the pace of a thriller but the nuanced characterization and deep empathy of some of the literary canon's most beloved novels, *Remember Me Like This* introduces Bret Anthony Johnston as one of the most gifted storytellers writing today. With his sophisticated and emotionally taut plot and his shimmering prose, Johnston reveals that only in caring for one another can we save ourselves.

Four years have passed since Justin Campbell's disappearance, a tragedy that rocked the small town of Southport, Texas. Did he run away? Was he kidnapped? Did he drown in the bay? As the Campbells search for answers, they struggle to hold what's left of their family together.

Then, one afternoon, the impossible happens. The police call to report that Justin has been found only miles away, in the neighboring town, and, most important, he appears to be fine. Though the reunion is a miracle, Justin's homecoming exposes the deep rifts that have diminished his family, the wounds they all carry that may never fully heal. Trying to return to normal, his parents do their best to ease Justin back into his old life. But as thick summer heat takes hold, violent storms churn in the Gulf and in the Campbells' hearts. When a reversal of fortune lays bare the family's greatest fears—and offers perhaps the only hope for recovery—each of them must fight to keep the ties that bind them from permanently tearing apart.

Remember Me Like This Details

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From Reader Review Remember Me Like This for online ebook

Elyse says

NEW UPDATE: I saw this book for \$2.99 as a Kindle special download today -- and I 'still' remember details after details about this book. Its EXCELLENT!!!!!! Highly recommend it --if you haven't read it. \$2.99 is a great price - Read other reviews -- just thought I'd pass this book along -- Bret Anothony Johnston can 'write'!!!

Update: Its bugged me for TOO LONG
This book should be 5 stars....'not' 4

I have recommended it dozens and dozens of times --Its a great story!!

I was 'hooked' from page one! REALLY HOOKED!

The only reason I'm not giving this story 5 stars --is my patience was starting to be tested about the last 100 pages. (364 pages in all). I wanted the conclusion faster. I just couldn't stand it any longer...

How is this book going to come together? I do think those last 100 pages were not as strong as the rest of the book ---yet, overall, this story will stay with the reader a long time! Its GOOD!!!! Lovely-beautiful writing is a plus also!!!! I was able to almost smell the shrimp...etc.

My mind started getting restless towards the very end --(maybe --that's the point though, its still restless). I'm still thinking about this story-this family-this community. I 'still' want to know more about these characters.

Overall: There are MANY things to like about this novel. Its VERY ENGAGING!!!

The emotions within this family & community are so real and raw --(feels truthful to the core)

This book would make an excellent 'book-club' discussion book. Just the characters alone --let alone the story --(much could be discussed).

Here's a line I read a few times: Hm??? (got me thinking)

"The past was a bridge and looked solid and sturdy, but once you were on it, you saw that it extended only far enough to strand you, to suspend you between loss and longing with nowhere to go at all."

One more: (Mom's can relate to this)

""Maybe I should take Karate"

"I'd rather you never leave the house. I'd rather cover you in bubble wrap"

...I laughed soooooooooooooo hard at the above sentence. I wouldn't actually 'say' those words to my children---but some days???

To love: family love!

Christa says

This was a hard one to get through, and I'm not really sure why I finished this one to the end. I think I kept expecting it to pick up--it really did seem to have a lot of promise--so I was pretty disappointed when it just chugged along to the finish.

I was interested in the premise of this, about a teen who's reunited with his family after being kidnapped for a few years. But I was pretty much bored by the story. It seemed a little dry, I think, and it just wasn't able to pick up any momentum. I actually think I scanned the last 20 or so pages rather than actually reading them.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Larry H says

I'd rate this 4.5 stars.

In the small town of Southport, Texas, the Campbells seemed like the perfect family. But one afternoon, their 11-year-old son Justin mysteriously disappears. Four years pass without any tangible clues, or any idea what happened to him.

The uncertainty takes its toll on Laura and Eric, both of whom find very different ways of trying to cope with this loss. Their younger son, Griffin, who fought with Justin earlier in the day he disappeared, is also struggling with guilt and uncertainty. They still hold out hope that they'll find Justin, or at least understand what happened, and they're not quite ready to move on.

"That was the inconceivable and debilitating shock: You could grow accustomed to what had once seemed so miserable and alien. You could feel a foreign presence in your body, endure the pain and deep threat of it, and not notice as it turned to bone."

After four years of false leads and shaky optimism, Laura and Eric get a call one day from the police. Justin has been found—alive—in nearby Corpus Christi, and he appears to be fine. Strangely, he had been nearby all along and they never knew it. Buoyed by this unbelievable turn of events, they are excited for their lives to get back to the way they once were. Yet amidst all the happiness comes uncertainty and fear—can Justin cope with what happened to him? Is he angry at his parents for not being able to find him? Will he be able to get on with his life and progress normally, or will he be damaged by his experiences? And how will the rest of them truly be happy and relax knowing that in a split second, everything can change?

"Really, once the worst happens, it's always happening. It's never not happening."

Bret Anthony Johnson's *Remember Me Like This* is a beautifully written, moving book about coping with

tragedy and coping with happiness, how both force us to remain on edge. It's a book about whether to face and give voice to our fears, or keep them bottled inside. It's also a book about the fragility of love and the strength of family, and how it forces you to do things you might never imagine.

I really enjoyed this and thought it was tremendously compelling. At times I worried where the book would go, but Johnson did an excellent job slowly unfolding the plot and getting me fully enmeshed in this family and their story. It may be a little difficult for some to read given the subject matter, but it's not really a heavy, emotional book. It's just a pretty excellent one.

Carol says

This is a quiet and compelling novel, reminiscent of those written by Kent Hauf. The story chronicles a family's experiences and the aftermath when their young son, Justin is kidnapped and held for four years before finally being spotted and returned to his parents once again.

Bret Anthony Johnston's writing style, like Kent Hauf, is eloquent, spare and beautiful. The author shows amazing insight as he explores the family's grief, their guilt and their isolation when confronted with this tragic event. The novel is told in the alternating perspectives of four of the family members as they attempt to reconcile, reintegrate and heal from what must be the worst nightmare that any parent will suffer. The family members have all been transformed by the kidnapping and wrestle with how to move forward once Justin has returned.

The writing is remarkable and emotionally powerful. I highly recommend this wonderful book and author!

Iris P says

Remember Me Like This

Those that have been reading my reviews this year have probably noticed that I usually don't dwell too much on how many stars I give a book.

Perhaps this is something I need to work on next year, but I considered any rating system, extremely subjective, arbitrary and frankly a little silly.

With that said I also admit that giving books low ratings (3 stars or less) is difficult to me.

So I did agonize a little bit about giving a low rating to this very popular novel, mostly because so many of my Goodreads friends loved it.

Ultimately though as great as Johnson's writing is, I couldn't bring myself to give Remember Me Like This more than 3 stars.

So in summary, here's my take:

What I liked about this novel:

** The premise of the story is fascinating: an exploration not of the abduction or murder of a young boy - let's face it there are probably way too many books already written with that plot- instead we get to see what happens when the victim, seemingly unscathed, gets to come back to his family and his community. We come to realize that what to many outsiders looks like a picture perfect, happy ending is anything but.*

** The story is a nuance and compassionate exploration of trauma, its aftermath and how it could emotionally destroy the fabric that keeps a family together.*

** The author avoided clichés and platitudes and created instead compelling, deeply flawed, therefore deeply human characters.*

What I didn't like about this novel:

** Overall this is a very slow-paced novel, but I thought the story is told from too many characters switching perspectives too fast.*

** The dialogue between teenagers sounded too mature and unnatural to my ears. This is my one big peeves when reading fiction: children or teens that sound either too childish or too grown-up for their age.*

** Too many loose ends that left at least this reader, without a sense of closure.*

** I found many passages, particularly in the second half of the novel extremely boring and redundant.*

** And finally and I admit that this might sound a little bit petty, I found that way too many words were dedicated to describe skateboarding!*

Although overall Remember Me Like This is a decent read, to me it felt flat. Somehow I craved that feeling of being surprised or engaged.

jo says

didn't rock my boat. it may rock yours.

ETA: i have decided some time ago that i wouldn't write negative reviews of living authors who are not super-established celebrities (say, Haruki Murakami). since this is a first novel, my resolution feels even more justified.

i will only say this, because it seems important to me as a general thought, regardless of the merits of this book. it is the job of writers to show the many nuances of the human soul, those we are too busy or too uninterested or too self-protective to catch on our own in our daily living. this is what literature does. it shows the heart. it shows the mind. it shows the soul.

in this book, bret anthony johnston chooses to focus on the feelings of the family of a boy who was kidnapped and then, four years later, returned to his family. the family is mom, dad, and brother. the feelings are multiple, but a big emphasis is given to fear of the kidnapper, hatred of the kidnapper, and desire for the

kidnapper's death.

i cannot possibly imagine what i would feel if my son were kidnapped and tortured for four years, and i knew the kidnapper lived in my town, or very close to it, and he was out on bail. i might very well go crazy. i'm sure all of us can imagine this. what is difficult to imagine, and what literature has a responsibility to open up for us, are all the *other* stories: that this man is someone else's son; that *my* son may have grown attached to him; what goes on when someone does something like this; what the protagonists's own demons and dark areas are. in other words: empathy; compassion.

i don't need to read a literary novel to know that i want to quarter slowly and painfully a kid's abductor and torturer. i read a literary novel to know why i don't want to.

Ken says

A classic 3 1/2 star book.

If REMEMBER ME LIKE THIS were a kitchen appliance, it would be a slow cooker. Put the chicken in first thing in the morning, set it on low, and go to work for the day. When you get home, it'll be done. Maybe. You might want to put in an hour overtime just in case.

To be upfront and honest, I can understand why readers would 5-star this. And you, curious reader, might just fit the profile of a reader who would love it. The writing, though not stellar, is well above ordinary. Really. And the characterization of a Texas family (the Campbells -- Mom, Dad, two sons, Grandpa) is top-notch and gorgeous to behold. If reading a lot of internal monologues is what you like, you'll find Johnston's book a memorable one.

But I'll warn you -- it's a lot of thinking. Well-done thinking, yes. But a lot. Bottom line: If you like psychological stories that have little use for a fast-moving or real-time developing plot, click CART or hie thee to the nearest brick-and-mortar now. If it's 10-gallon action you want (did I remember to mention the setting is Texas?), you'll suffer some frustration.

Ah, the plot. It's not that one is lacking, it's that the early promise of direct conflict is drawn out for a LONG time and... well, never quite fulfilled. You might argue, "Well, Bub, that's how an author develops suspense," and I agree. Partially.

We get a lot of tortured thinking here -- first of a fractured family with a kidnapped son, then of a reunited family stepping on eggshells, and finally of an outraged family not sure what to make of the legal system and its guarantees of safety and due process -- but fans of the crime/thriller genre might buy this and find all of the psychological musings (Mom writes everything important and not so important in a Moleskine) overdone (thus, the docked stars). I mention this only because taking stock of your preferences as a reader might influence your purchase.

Overall, a story of an ordeal no family would ever want to suffer, professionally told by a writer who knows how to use everyday actions, dialogue, description, and thoughts to capture characters -- slowly.

switterbug (Betsey) says

"There can be disturbances of every kind--eating disturbances, disturbances in his sexuality and attachments, disturbances in fear-based behavior. Victims of childhood trauma often won't have the vocabularies to describe their emotions."

I have been working with abused children for 30 years; Johnston's description of a family trying to heal from a traumatic ordeal is spot-on-- beautifully written, nuanced, and heart stopping. This is neither clinically rendered nor a potboiler. Rather, as it says in the book description, this book begins where others tend to end. 'Happy ever after' after a rescue from an abduction is not this book's premise. This deals with post-traumatic afflictions of family after one of the sons, Justin, who was kidnapped at age eleven, returns four years later.

Roxanne Gay's 2014 novel of PTSD, *An Untamed State*, concerned the kidnapping, captivity and post-rescue of a young mother, and how it affected all the family members. That book started with the amplified action and graphic displays of trauma, and later moved into the more nuanced territory. However, Johnston's book is consistently understated. There are no overt atrocities; if anything, Johnston curtailed the gruesome events, and delicately implied what we tacitly understand about the trauma, allowing the reader to interpret and move on from the headline-grabbing type of action and into the deeper recesses of the emotional wounds. That is what this is about--how a family's life is permanently altered from the events, an upheaval that requires therapy and time.

"Her life--everyone's life--seemed rigged with trapdoors and hidden, collapsible walls, panels that would open without warning and claim what had been yours, claim it only because you'd allow yourself to believe it couldn't be claimed."

Justin's parents, Laura and Eric, his grandfather, Cecil, and his younger brother, Griff, all possess their own turmoil after Justin comes home. Johnston reveals the contrast of before and after--how their lives have been capsized in innumerable ways. And, especially, he depicts the isolation that each family member feels, and the way they walk on ice to give a wide berth to each others' fragility. But, we feel the tension of that ice about to crack. Johnston's luminous use of extended metaphors, such as conveyed in Laura's volunteer work with ailing or impaired dolphins, invariably brings it home to the central premise.

Johnston's prose is flawless, and every passage is organic and lucid. He doesn't put too fine a point on things, allowing the reader to translate what is revealed to what is not. He tells you enough, but does not telegraph events. There isn't one inauthentic moment in this novel. His descriptions of Corpus are so ripe that I felt that I was there, as I have been numerous times as a tourist. He brought the city into sharp relief--the Harbor Bridge, the brackish water, and the townspeople. And, he sets up a suspenseful plot line in the prologue, which keeps us on tenterhooks until the very end.

This is mesmerizing writing, and I am not using hyperbole when I say that Johnston is easily one of the top 1% of American writers living today. I am astonished that this is his debut novel (but he does have short story collections under his belt). (No wonder he is Harvard's creative writing director.) If you only read a handful of books this year, consider REMEMBER ME LIKE THIS.

Diane S ? says

Justin Campbell was twelve years old when he went missing. His parents and younger brother spent this time trying to deal with, or in some cases not deal with, the loss of Justin.

Then wonders of wonders, he is found due to an observant lady who notices him and calls the police. A man is arrested, a pedophile who feeds on the young, and a man who is the son of someone Justin's grandfather knows. It is here that the story really begins.

A family trying to put their lives back together, brothers who must rediscover a bond. Guilt, ideas of revenge and many other emotions that can affect a family and tear it apart. Is it possible to rebuild lives after such a horrible event. Will it ever be the same? The ease of just being together? How to keep the quest for justice from tearing everything wide open.

While the kidnapper does play an integral part, not so much what he did to Justin but just the fact that he exists, it is more about this family, their bonds, their thoughts and actions. I believe that this is the author's first book of fiction, previously writing non fiction, and he does a wonderful job. He doesn't try with his prose to wring every last ounce of heartbreak out of his readers, but presents the story very realistically, at least I thought so. After all the story itself, the circumstances alone provide enough emotion.

ARC from librarything and the publisher.

Jill says

Bret Anthony Johnston, where have you been all my reading life? For a character-based reader like me, this luminous debut book is sheer manna from heaven. It's certain to make my personal Top Ten list of 2014.

The concept is deceptively simple: an 11-year-old boy named Justin goes missing one day and is likely abducted. His parents, Eric and Laura, and his younger brother Griffin are all well-liked in their Corpus Christi community; they muddle their way through the four ensuing years, coming apart personally and as a family. And then (no spoiler – it's in every book blurb), Justin is found.

And there's where the happy ending comes in. Except...it's not. The genius of this author is that – without any manipulation – he closely examines what the granting of this fortuitous return really means to each of them. The emotions are so real that the writing took my breath away. Take this description of his mother, Laura: "Those four years had gutted her family. How could she not understand such hideous gravity? Everywhere she looked, the absolute and crushing weight of the past. At times she'd been bloated with sadness, leaden and unmovable. Other times, she would have sworn she was a sieve." And later: "Life started to feel – what? Not normal. Not familiar. Inhabitable. Navigable."

There is not one false note in this book. Not one. The writing is assured, confident and clear eyed; the characters are so real they could step out of the pages; and the insights are organic and beautifully realized. There are no huge surprises or "drama for the sake of drama". These are all good people, regular and steady and seemingly unafflicted. They're people who – in the aftermath of one of life's worst traumas— take cautious and struggling steps to deal with a range of unexpected emotions and work mightily to make themselves whole again. It's not the mythic Hollywood ending to a kidnapping; rather, it's an achingly intimate view into the emotional canvas of a family damaged by circumstances beyond their control.

I simply cannot recommend this book highly enough. I envy those who are starting it for the first time.

***TANYA* says**

I really, really wanted to love this book. I kept losing interest in it. Great storyline, it just felt like it was lacking something.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

3.49 stars

This was like eating a giant Tootsie Pop and discovering the chewy chocolate center is missing. Lick lick lick lick suck suck suck lick lick lick suck suck suck suck....this hard candy stuff is yummy, but where's my reward for all that sucking and licking? At the end there's just that white paper stick soggy with your saliva.

Bret Anthony Johnson is a talented writer, and I would read another novel from him for sure. But he gave us all the good stuff in the first half of the story. In the second half he belabored all the points he'd already made, and ultimately didn't hand over what he made us crave early on.

Lick.....suck.....lick.....suck.....ick....uck....wet stick.

Now if you'll excuse me, I need to go brush my teeth.

Julie Christine says

Much as Emma Donoghue did in 2010's smash hit *Room*, Bret Anthony Johnston leads us through the aftermath of human captivity. But utterly unlike *Room*, *Remember Me Like This* never lets us inside the victim's head. In fact, we knew very little of what happened to Justin Campbell, who vanished one day near his home outside Corpus Christi, TX. The book opens four years after his disappearance with the news that he has been found.

Instead of shining the character spotlight on the kidnapped, Johnston rotates the narrative through the perspectives of his parents, Laura and Eric, his younger brother, Griffin, and his grandfather, Cecil. Through flashbacks, we are immersed in their surreal existence, in which one world halted the day Justin disappeared and another spins on. Justin's room remains unchanged, except for the pile of birthday and Christmas gifts his mother buys for him every year. The modest Campbell house suffers from neglect, as does the Campbell marriage. There are shadows everywhere: Laura is becoming one, present only at the Marine Lab where she volunteers; thirteen-year-old Griffin grows up in the shadow of his brother; and Eric lives a double life. It is an achingly real portrait of a family unable to grieve, yet losing hope as the years pass without word of their son. Johnston masterfully maintains the tension of this loss and hope, even as we know that Justin has been safely returned to his family.

That tension morphs from "What happened to Justin?" to "What will happen to this family now that he's back?", which is truly the premise of the novel. Upon her son's return, Laura transforms, throwing open the literal curtains in the house and the figurative curtains of her depressed state. Griffin falls in love, becoming the center of attention in someone else's world, still playing second fiddle to his older brother at home. Campbell *père et fils*, Eric and Cecil, turn their attention to Justin's captor, who is released on bail and remains in this sweltering, grimy, east Texas community.

I couldn't put this down until, well, I can't remember when I last had such a change of heart and brain while reading a book. I was riveted for the first two-thirds, then the tension simply spluttered out and I couldn't wait to be done with it. Because the author was so intent on not bringing us into Justin's mind, the emotions and actions of the rest of the family became repetitive to the point of exasperation. Eric and Cecil's plot was melodrama that cheapened a nuanced and intense emotional thriller, but couldn't lift the narrative from doldrums of navel-gazing that brought down the final third. The one character I most wanted to hear from, Justin, had a walk-on role in his own story. It was a strangely unsatisfying experience, yet this is tremendous, vivid writing from an author I would seek out again.

I thank Random House for an Advanced Reading Copy.

B the BookAddict says

Devastating and original with an attention to detail which will leave the reader enmeshed in loss, hope and unrelenting memory. It is hard to believe that this was Johnston's first full length novel; he writes with the grace of a seasoned novelist.

The Campbell family has been torn apart by the disappearance of their son Justin. Although at first united in a quest to find Justin, time has worn them down. Eric has found some solace in an affair, Laura finds a refuge in dolphin rescue and their other son Griffin, in skateboarding and his first girlfriend. But, they are all painfully aware of the void which left by Justin and of their own feelings of unassailable guilt. Four years later, unbelievably, Justin is located by the police and his kidnapper arrested. But as time goes on, they realize life will never be as it was before. They are haunted by the spectre of what Justin has been through, how much he is changed and by their own failings. The perpetrator's plea leaves them facing them the fear that, for them, the world will never feel secure again.

"Really, once the worst happens, it's always happening."

Johnston's characters find that the redemption of their son does not bring the respite expected and they remain continually aware that for them, life will never be the same. There is the Before and the After but it is what was between those spectrums, that will continue to haunt each of the Campbells.

Johnston paints an acutely vivid picture of a family suffering one of the worst crisis ever. His depiction of the hot and unrelenting Texas summer leaves you feeling breathless and sweaty. The prose is clean, lucid and flawless. It is so compelling, so taut; he draws you effortlessly into the tide of the story. Remember Me Like This will have you holding your breath as it draws to it's surprising conclusion. Powerful and gripping - you must read this novel. Most Highly Recommended. 5★

Many thanks for the ARC provided by the Reading Room and the publisher.

Douglas says

Thanks to Goodreads and Random House for the advance copy. This brilliant novel comes out May 13, 2014. Amy Hempel blurbs on the front cover of the ARC, which I assume will make it's way to the back upon publishing, "Both devastating and transporting, this is the rare novel a reader lives in, so persuasive is the impact, the insight, the heat of south Texas."

I couldn't have said it better myself. This is a gripping novel that sometimes reminded me of the stories of Raymond Carver, but with the pace of a thriller. Illuminating the inner lives of a family reeling from the return of a kidnapped son, this story is at once an indictment and homage to the American family. Johnston spotlights one of the worst fears of the typical American family- losing an innocent child to a monster. When this happens, the focus is immediately on redemption, bringing the child back, finding the monster, delivering justice. But Johnston shows us that it can never be that simple. Even when there is a return, a redemption, the scars of guilt, grief, and fear still linger, and Johnston masterfully reveals that many of these emotions were there all along.

I love what Johnston does with the theme of guilt. When something bad happens to the typical American family, I think we often feel like we deserved it, and when and if it's ever redeemed, it's hard for us to move on. Like the family in this novel, we're so hell bent on making our lives make sense, that when bad things happen, we almost expect them as the price we have to pay. Guilt finds fertile ground because we know that our motives were never pure in the first place.

I won't go into the plot, but it's as rich and sturdy as they come. I think I could've read this in one sitting, and I'm sure many will. This has bestseller written all over it, but I feel certain there will also be a heaping of critical acclaim and maybe film rights. It's that good.

I believe this is being touted as a first novel, but when reading this, you can't escape the feeling that Johnston's done this before.

Ron Charles says

A few years ago, I started avoiding imperiled children. I wasn't always so callous. I'd wept for Susie Salmon in "The Lovely Bones" and cheered for Jack in "Room." But suffering kids are an easy way to extort emotional thrills from readers. If you're not careful, your bookshelf starts to look like a row of old milk cartons, each with a child's plaintive headshot staring out. As Maureen Corrigan once noted in our pages, "In too much of contemporary American literature — high and low — the story line concerns kidnapping, pederasty and the torture of children."

Bret Anthony Johnston's first novel, "Remember Me Like This," initially gives every indication that he's trudging down that gruesome old path. In a brief prologue, joggers in Corpus Christi, Tex., see a body floating in the bay. "None of them thought of Justin Campbell," Johnston writes, "the boy who'd gone

missing years before.” Then, as the story begins, we immediately meet Justin’s parents, Eric and Laura, who’ve been hollowed out by four years of looking for their son. Their marriage desiccated by anguish, Eric is having an affair, while Laura tends ailing dolphins at a marine laboratory. The Amber Alerts have fallen silent, the photocopies have blown off telephone poles and cable news reporters have lost interest. Neighbors stare at the Campbells as though they’re burn victims, their faces “mottled and waxy with misfortune.”

But Johnston, who directs the creative writing program at Harvard, isn’t going to retell the story of a child’s murder or a family’s grief-fueled incineration. . . .

To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/enterta...>

Taryn Pierson says

I am not a big fan of books about Mothers of Missing Children. There are so many out there, they should probably have their own section in the bookstore. They're all the same: the child is kidnapped, or maybe goes missing on the way to the corner store, and the rest of the book consists of the mother's angry, self-pitying inner monologues, with plenty of sleepless nights and maybe an eventual affair with the crusty but caring detective assigned to the case. The mystery of what happened to the child and if he or she will be found alive isn't usually enough to get me through all the shrill hand-wringing.

Because that's not why we show up to read, is it? I don't want to trudge through somebody else's worst nightmare if all I'm hearing is the voice of the person who knows the least about what's going on. That's why I loved *Remember Me Like This*—it's so much more than just the story of a mom whose son has been kidnapped. It's about an entire family, and how far they will go for justice.

Johnston gives us his story from so many different angles, all of them fascinating, all of them devastating. Justin disappeared at age eleven. The family he left behind did everything they could to find him, papering their Corpus Christi suburb with flyers, organizing search parties through the dunes, taking out a second mortgage on the house to offer a reward for his return. Still, all their efforts turned up nothing but thin air.

Four years later, the impossible: Justin has been found alive, just miles from home. His parents Laura and Eric, shocked back to life by his return, are instructed not to press Justin about what happened during his captivity. Their younger son Griffin is thrilled to have his brother back, but he often doesn't know what to say or how to act around him. Eric's father Cecil also figures prominently, a fount of simple wisdom and righteous anger. (I'm having a hard time describing him in a way that doesn't make him sound like a cliché, but he's not, trust me.)

Justin's sudden return is only the beginning. Everyone has so many questions, and not one of them has an easy answer. What happened to Justin while he was being held? Why didn't he try to get away? If the case goes to trial, will the man accused of taking him go to jail? Will he be able to hurt Justin again? What could they have done to prevent the abduction? Will Justin ever be able to live a normal life after suffering such an ordeal? Will any of them?

It's those questions that make up the bulk of the book, and they're what kept me reading late into the night.

Each character is realistically drawn, so clearly teetering on the edge of control that the suspense just builds and builds. Every single member of the family seemed capable of anything. I read the final pages with my heart in my throat.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Carol says

The Hook - Have you ever played that trust game called Fall Back? You know the one where you fall backwards into empty space and trust that someone will catch you or you could say “has your back”. That’s how I felt when I chose Remember Me Like This. Two of my trusted friends, Jill S. & Elyse W. both raved so much about this that I had faith they wouldn’t drop me into the pages of a book that was not good.

The Line – *“When she’d last seen Justin, girls were strange, prissy creatures to be avoided—a flash of memory: hadn’t he, one evening, Asked her to marry him?—so the fact that he’d returned having had a girlfriend was the sorriest, most irrefutable proof of how long he’d been gone.”*

The Sinker – I’d consider Remember Me Like This to be one of the most *real* fiction books I’ve ever read. Many books have explored the theme and horror of a missing child. Few have done it as well as Bret Anthony Johnston. If I hadn’t known he was a man, I’d have thought he was a woman, as he captured the emotion and deep pain of the mother of the missing teen, while not losing the torment, helplessness or guilt felt by Justin’s father, brother and grandfather.

There you have it, simple yet so complex. Justin Campbell disappears from his coastal Texas town. As you’d expect everyone rallies, parents, friends, police and townspeople search for the missing youth. As time passes, it’s difficult to keep the momentum up but his parents Eric and Laura do their best to keep Justin’s photo and case in people’s minds. When they receive a postcard in Justin’s writing telling them *Don’t Stop Looking*”it strengthen their belief their son is alive. Then one afternoon, the impossible happens.” Four years had gone by, four years of searching, of wondering, of spiraling hope, of prayers, of tears, of the most agonizing pain one could bear. Justin’s return seems a miracle, a cause for joy and it is, but it is also a time of questions, struggle, guilt, love, hate, a myriad of emotional fervor as this family tries to heal.

Johnston has bared a family’s soul in every way you can imagine in this excruciatingly written, tightly plotted book.

It is difficult not to share any passages confirming the truth of the excellence of Johnston’s writing. Fall back, trust me, I’ll catch you.

Tooter says

4.75 Stars for a beautifully written story. Nearly perfect for me....except for the OCCASIONAL excessive details that wore a little thin at times. Highly recommend.
