



Sugarless: A Novel

James Magruder

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Things look bad for Rick Lahrem, a high school sophomore in a cookie-cutter Chicago suburb in 1976. His mother's second husband is a licensed psychologist who eats like an ape, his stepsister is a stoner slut, and his father is engaged to a Southern belle. Rick's only solace is his growing collection of original Broadway-cast LPs, bought on the sly at Wax Trax.

After he brings two girls in speech class to tears by reading a story aloud, Rick is coaxed onto the interscholastic forensics team to perform an eight-minute dramatic interpretation of *The Boys in the Band*, the controversial sixties play about homosexuality. Unexpectedly successful at this oddball event, Rick begins winning tournaments and making friends with his teammates.

Rick also discovers the joys of sex—with a speech coach from a rival school—just as his mother, reacting to a deteriorating home environment, makes an unnerving commitment to Christ. The newly confident Rick assumes this too shall pass—until the combined forces of family, sex, and faith threaten to undo him at the state meet in Peoria.

James Magruder's *Sugarless* offers a ruefully entertaining take on the simultaneous struggles of coming-out, coming-of-age, and coming-to-Jesus.

A selection of InsightOut Book Club

Finalist, Lambda Book Award for Gay Debut Fiction, Lambda Literary Foundation

Finalist, TLA Gaybie Award for Best Gay Fiction

Semi-finalist, James Branch Cabell First Novelist Award, Virginia Commonwealth University

Semi-finalist, William Saroyan International Prize For Writing, Stanford University

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Ken Martin:

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