

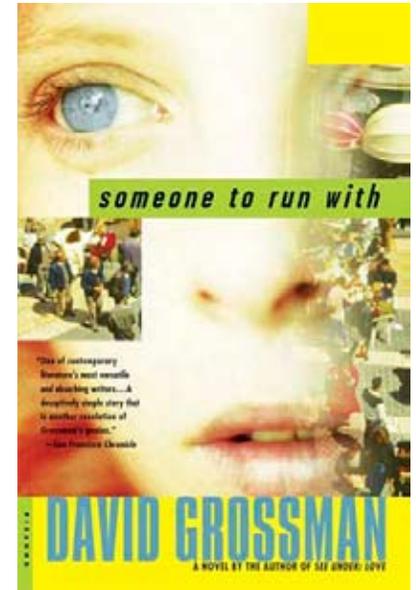


Reading Group Gold

Someone to Run With A Novel

by David Grossman

Translated by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz



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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Someone to Run With* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Someone to Run With*.

About the Book

The story of a lost dog and the discovery of first love on the streets of Jerusalem are portrayed in *Someone to Run With* expressing a gritty realism that is as fresh as it is compelling.

When awkward and painfully shy sixteen-year-old Assaf is asked to find the owner of a stray yellow lab, he begins a quest that will bring him into contact with street kids and criminals, and a talented young singer, Tamar, engaged on her own mission: to rescue a teenage drug addict.

Praise for *Someone to Run With*:

"*Someone to Run With* reveals again that Grossman is one of contemporary literature's most versatile and absorbing writers....A deceptively simple story that is another revelation of Grossman's genius."—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Beautiful and arresting...Grossman has created a place of great dangers and improbable strokes of fortune, of compelling suspense and love's labors gained."—*Los Angeles Times*

"Passionate and heartfelt...a story that is at once universal and specific, a classical fable of love brought to contemporary Israel."—*Claire Messud, The New York Times Book Review*

About the Author

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David Grossman is the author of six novels and three works of nonfiction. He lives in Jerusalem.

Discussion Questions

1. It seems like an unpleasant task to have to follow a frantic dog around the city on a leash looking for its owners. Why do you think Assaf agreed to do it? Do you think he was already looking for something even before he was given the leash? Do you think he was just accustomed to giving-in to people? Would you have agreed to do it? Why or why not?
2. Assaf seems to be dissatisfied with his life. What's wrong with Assaf? What are his difficulties with other people? Where do you think his shyness comes from? We learn later that he has very loving parents and comes from a happy home. How do you think someone like that becomes so shy?
3. What was your impression of Theodora, the nun who had never left the monastery? Does her life strike you as tragic, or is there something about her confinement that somehow suits her personality? How does her isolation remind you of Assaf and Tamar?
4. When we meet Tamar, we find out that she is shy too. Only she isn't shy in the same way as Assaf. She is actually bold, in spite of her shyness. Grossman describes it as "the arrogance of the shy, the deliberateness of those who are scared of their own shadows (p.72)." If Tamar is able to overcome her shyness in this manner, would you say she's truly shy? Or is her boldness always an attempt to overcompensate for a shyness that she can't get away from? Why do you think Assaf can't overcome his shyness like Tamar does? How do Assaf and Tamar compare to people you know who are shy? Can you personally relate to their difficulties with shyness?
5. Early in the novel, we learn that both Assaf and Tamar are ill-at-ease with other people, and that this leads them to live mostly in their imaginations. In what manner do they each have rich fantasy lives? What about their fantasy lives is dissatisfying to them?
6. As Assaf follows the traces of Tamar's life and learns more about her, the narrative switches back and forth between him and Tamar as we learn her story from her own perspective. What did you think about this method of revealing the story by only a piece at a time and switching between narratives? Does it make the novel more engaging, or create a kind of suspense? By the time Assaf actually meets Tamar, who do you think knows her better, him, or the reader?
7. When Tamar meets Sheli at the home for street performers, what is it about Sheli that Tamar likes so much? Does her friendship with Sheli prepare her to learn to trust people? Would she have been open to trusting Assaf in the end if it hadn't been for her friendship with Sheli? When Tamar talks and laughs with Sheli, she laughs differently with her than she used to with her friends Idan and Adi (p.139). What is the difference? Why do you think there is a difference?
8. Tamar tries to avoid thinking and feeling certain things, for example, reminiscing about her past, wondering about the future, dwelling on her feelings, et cetera. She feels she has to do this in order to save



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her brother. Sometimes, when things become unbearable, she “goes somewhere” in her head. Where does she go? Is this a necessary defense that everyone has, or only certain types of people? Is it a good or a bad thing to escape in this manner?

9. As Tamar begins her performances for Pesach, we find that her real home is her voice (p.153-4). This is the only safe way for her to express her feelings. Is this her only home? Can Tamar build on her comfort in her creative ability in order to extend this feeling of home? Or does her salvation lie in trying to feel at home outside of her creative ability? Will Tamar’s singing always be deeply personal to her alone, or does her creative life give her the opportunity to commune with other people?

10. We learn that Theodora’s was required to remain in the monastery in order to retain her innocence and purity. Do you think she’s immaculate, uncorrupted? Does her lack of experience in the real world give her these qualities? Why does everyone think that Tamar’s voice sounds so pure, innocent? In what way, despite how canny she is, does Tamar contain a sense of innocence?

11. What is it about Assaf that people find so trustworthy? How did Leah, who is protective of Tamar, become convinced of the need for him to meet Tamar despite the danger? What is it about Leah’s interaction with Assaf that made her “overcome” by him (p.291)?

12. How does Assaf’s journey parallel Tamar’s? What do Assaf and Tamar have in common? When they finally meet each other, they both just notice their differences from, but what is it that we have learned about their characters throughout the story that that makes them so mysteriously compatible?

13. When Assaf finally meets Tamar, why does he decide to stay with her in spite of the difficulties involved? Did he have an inkling that he was going to fall in love with her? Did devoting himself to something cause him to feel more at home in the real world? What do you think is meant by the description of the change inside Assaf when he met Tamar, when the “new tenant” had moved into him (p.303)?

14. When Tamar finds out that Assaf had read her diary, it is described as the worst thing anyone can do to her (p.303-4). Why is it okay for her when she learns that Assaf read her diary? How did this incident facilitate their falling in love? Was she, in fact, actually dying to tell her innermost secrets to someone and she didn’t know it? Does trust become for her a new form of expression in addition to her singing? Will Tamar love as well as she sings?

15. What do you think of Grossman’s depiction of first love? Does it remind you at all of your first love? Does falling in love for the first time always involve overcoming some personal hang-ups or difficulties, like with Tamar and Assaf? Is there something about going on a quest, about searching after someone, about running like Assaf and Tamar were running, that expresses what it’s like to search for love? Could you fall in love with someone like Assaf? Like Tamar?