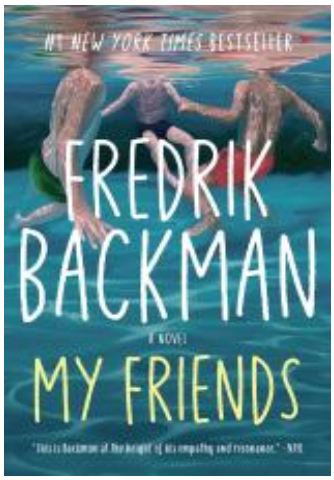
My Friends

by Fredrik Backman



About the Book

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author Fredrik Backman returns with an unforgettably funny, deeply moving tale of four teenagers whose friendship creates a bond so powerful that it changes a complete stranger?s life 25 years later.

Most people don?t even notice them --- three tiny figures sitting at the end of a long pier in the corner of one of the most famous paintings in the world. Most people think it?s just a depiction of the sea. But Louisa, an aspiring artist herself, knows otherwise, and she is determined to find out the story of these three enigmatic figures.

Twenty-five years earlier, in a distant seaside town, a group of teenagers find refuge from their bruising home lives by spending long summer days on an abandoned pier, telling silly jokes, sharing secrets, and committing small acts of rebellion. These lost souls find in each other a reason to get up each morning, a reason to dream, a reason to love.

Out of that summer emerges a transcendent work of art, a painting that unexpectedly will be placed into 18-year-old Louisa?s care. She embarks on a surprise-filled cross-country journey to learn how the painting came to be and to decide what to do with it. The closer she gets to the painting?s birthplace, the more nervous she becomes about what she?ll find. Louisa is proof that happy endings don?t always take the form we expect in this stunning testament to the transformative, timeless power of friendship and art.

Discussion Guide

1. MY FRIENDS deals intimately with themes of friendship and loyalty, uniting characters who seem, from the outside, to be more different than alike. What is it that brings them together, and what does that say to you about the enduring power of human connection?

2. Was there a particular character you identified with more than the others? Why?

3. The artist?s painting of the sea plays a pivotal role in the book, as it inspired the group of friends --- and later Louisa --- toward a common goal. Does art play a different role in the lives of young people than it does in adults? Do you think the painting?s significance changes as the friends grow older?

4. What do you think the pier in the painting might symbolize?

5. The setting of the story, a town by the sea, influences the atmosphere and character dynamics. How did the setting impact your experience of reading the book?

6. While being at times delightfully funny and lighthearted, MY FRIENDS also explores serious topics of loss, grief and trauma. How did these topics, present from the very beginning, change your perspective of the individual characters as you got to know them?

7. In Chapter 28, Louisa says that her friend, Fish, read in a book that in Heaven you could choose a moment in life when you felt really good, and then you got to feel like that for all eternity. What would that moment be for you, and what does it say about Fish and Louisa that they are entranced by this idea?

8. Joar?s character is perhaps the one that changes the most over the course of the book. Were you surprised to meet him in the latter half of the book? Consider the ways he was different and the ways he was the same.

9. Family dynamics and upbringing greatly influence the personalities, values and choices of Ted, Joar, Ali and the artist. Discuss the role of inherited trauma in the lives of these characters. What do they gain and/or lose because of these legacies?

10. The themes of redemption and second chances are present throughout the book. How do these second chances ultimately play out, and how do they help to tie up the narrative and character arcs in the book?

11. Fredrik Backman often uses humor and wit to navigate through darker moments in his novels. Discuss some of your favorite moments of humor in MY FRIENDS. How did they impact your reading experience?

12. Ted, Joar, Ali and the artist could be considered a ?chosen family.? How does the concept of home feature throughout the book? Do you think those ideas change as we get older?

13. In chapter 7, the artist thinks to himself, ?You have to take [life] for granted.... That?s the only courageous thing a person can do.? What do you imagine he means by this?

14. When the artist is telling Ted about his meeting with Louisa in the alley, he says, ?She?s one of us!? In what ways is Louisa similar to the artist and his group of childhood friends?

Author Bio

Fredrik Backman is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of A MAN CALLED OVE, MY GRANDMOTHER ASKED ME TO TELL YOU SHE'S SORRY, BRITT-MARIE WAS HERE, BEARTOWN, US AGAINST YOU, ANXIOUS PEOPLE, THE WINNERS and MY FRIENDS, as well as two novellas and one work of nonfiction. His books are published in more than 40 countries. He lives in Stockholm, Sweden, with his wife and two children.

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