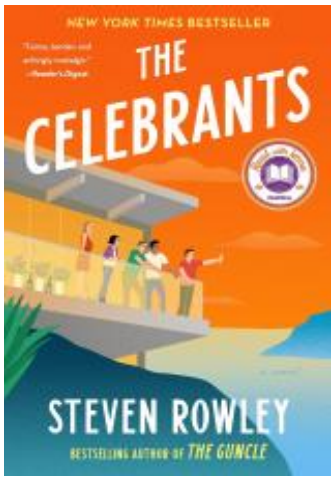
The Celebrants

by Steven Rowley



About the Book

A *Big Chill* for our times, celebrating decades-long friendships and promises --- especially to ourselves --- by the bestselling and beloved author of THE GUNCLE.

It?s been a minute --- or five years --- since Jordan Vargas last saw his college friends, and 28 years since their graduation when their adult lives officially began. Now Jordan, Jordy, Naomi, Craig and Marielle find themselves at the brink of a new decade, with all the responsibilities of adulthood, yet no closer to having their lives figured out. Though not for a lack of trying. Over the years they?ve reunited in Big Sur to honor a decades-old pact to throw each other living ?funerals,? celebrations to remind themselves that life is worth living --- that their lives mean something, to one another if not to themselves.

But this reunion is different. They?re not gathered as they were to bolster Marielle as her marriage crumbled, to lift Naomi after her parents died or to intervene when Craig pleaded guilty to art fraud. This time, Jordan is sitting on a secret that will upend their pact.

A deeply honest tribute to the growing pains of selfhood and the people who keep us going, coupled with Steven Rowley?s signature humor and heart, THE CELEBRANTS is a moving tale about the false invincibility of youth and the beautiful ways in which friendship helps us celebrate our lives, even amid the deepest challenges of living.

Discussion Guide

1. Author Steven Rowley describes the end of college with the anticlimactic feeling that sometimes accompanies it as adulthood dauntingly approaches and friends disperse toward new adventures. At which point in your life did you meet your closest friends? How do you keep memories of fond early days alive?

2. The celebrants in this story make a pact to throw each other living funerals ?so that none of them could ever question exactly what they meant to the others.? Do you think anyone truly knows how much they?re loved? Discuss.

3. Throughout the story, Rowley ponders the interrelation between beginnings and endings. He writes, ?all that begins, ends.? Later, ?endings are also beginnings.? The book?s epigraph is from CHOCOLAT by Joanne Harris: ?Life is what you celebrate. All of it. Even its end.? What is Rowley saying about this connection, and how do the living funerals illustrate this point? Discuss if and how endings are crucial to living a fulfilled life. Can celebration and grief coexist?

4. Alec is described as the life of the party, and as the heart of the group. In what individual ways did Alec bind each member to the larger group?

5. At one point, the celebrants decide to use a Ouija board to communicate with Alec. What purpose does the board serve for them? If you could talk to a lost loved one, would you?

6. When it comes time for Naomi?s living funeral, it doesn?t quite go as planned. What do you think Naomi needed from her friends in this moment? In what ways was she extending herself outside of her usual pattern?

7. Through grief, change and acceptance, THE CELEBRANTS also touches on our need for control. Which celebrant had the biggest challenge with this, and why?

8. Like Naomi?s, Craig?s living funeral is marked by surprises of its own. What did you make of the way Craig?s funeral was triggered? Was it successful in fulfilling, for Craig, what the pact intended?

9. Alec and Mia, through different means, are two elusive figures in the story. They?re mentioned frequently, but rarely seen on the page, if at all. But discuss how they play important roles in specific moments in the story.

10. Later in the story, Rowley reveals a shocking truth about Alec. How would you have handled the situation if you were in the know? Which character did you feel the most for in this scene? Discuss the impact of secrets on the relationships in the book.

11. In true Rowley fashion, the author touches on hefty topics with humor and heart, aptly titling this story THE CELEBRANTS. Discuss the meaning of the title, relating to the characters in the story and the idea of connection. What did each of these characters have to celebrate?

12. As the celebrants? motto goes, ?leave nothing left unsaid.? In honor of Alec, Jordan, and celebrating love and life, turn to the person next to you and tell them about one positive impact they?ve had on your life.

Author Bio

Steven Rowley is the *New York Times* bestselling author of LILY AND THE OCTOPUS, a *Washington Post* Notable Book; THE EDITOR, an NPR Best Book of the Year; THE GUNCLE, winner of the Thurber Prize for American Humor and Goodreads Choice Awards finalist for Novel of the Year; THE CELEBRANTS, a "Read with Jenna" Book Club

pick; THE GUNCLE ABROAD, a *USA Today* bestseller; THE DOGS OF VENICE; and TAKE ME WITH YOU. His fiction has been translated into 20 languages. He resides in Palm Springs, California.

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