

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Steven Rowley is the New York Times bestselling author of *Lily and the Octopus*, a Washington Post Notable Book of 2016, *The Editor*, named by NPR as one of the Best Books of 2019, *The Guncle*, a Goodreads Choice Awards finalist for 2021 Novel of the Year and winner of The 22nd Thurber Prize for American Humor, and *The Celebrants*, a TODAY Show Read With Jenna Book Club pick. His fiction has been published in twenty languages. All of his books are in development for feature film or television adaptation.

Originally from Portland, Maine, he is a graduate of Emerson College and currently resides in Palm Springs with his husband, the writer Byron Lane and two rescue dogs.

[Author's Website.](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your overall impression of this group of friends? Why do you think they stay connected all these years?
2. Did you find any similarities between yourself and any of the characters?
3. What do you think are the driving forces keeping this group of friends together? Why do they call themselves the celebrants?
4. Why did Marielle come up with the idea of living funerals? What is the concept behind the funerals?

5. Would you want to have a living funeral thrown for you?
6. We find out quickly that Jordan has cancer and only a few months left to live. Both him and Jordy experience a wide range of emotions and sometimes argue out of sadness and frustration. What were your thoughts about their scenes together after his diagnosis?
7. How did Alec's death impact the entire group of friends?
8. Throughout the decades, secrets are revealed. For instance, Alec confided in Jordy that he was diagnosis with HIV. But even after his death, Jordy didn't tell anyone else. Why do you think he kept that a secret?
9. Marielle and Craig sleep together the night of Alec's funeral. She then moves away and meets another guy and gets pregnant right away. It eventually gets revealed that her daughter is in fact Craig's—but it wasn't a secret she kept, she just didn't really connect the dots until she saw Craig again later in life. What are your overall thoughts on this development?
10. Do you think the group will stay in touch after Jordan's death? Why or why not?

Bookclubchat.com.

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Rowley's (*The Guncle*, 2021) latest is a superbly crafted narrative about five college friends who make a unique pact. After losing their close friend, Alec, at a young age while at Berkeley, Marielle, Craig, Jordan, Jordy (collectively "The Jordans"), and Naomi agree that they will all have the right to invoke a living funeral. At any point, each can call on the rest to come to a place of their choosing and celebrate their life while they are still alive. Each section is dedicated to one "funeral" and often provides stories of the group's younger selves to explain why they invoke the pact when they do. As the pact morphs and shifts into a lifeline in moments of crisis--whether it's divorce, death, sickness, or criminality--past secrets are revealed, and their bonds are both tested and strengthened. Beautifully written and culminating in a phenomenally wellrealized resonant set-piece, Rowley's tale wonderfully captures how deeply important friendships are. Like Ron Currie Jr.'s *Everything Matters!* (2009) this is a lifeaffirming work, one that is both hilarious and richly affecting, with an unforgettable cast of engaging characters that readers will wish they could spend more time with.

Publisher's Weekly

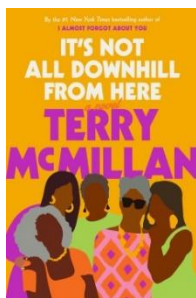
Rowley (*The Guncle*) offers another winning story of a friend group held together by an unusual bond. Five friends at U.C. Berkeley are reeling from another friend's overdose death. Just before graduating in 1995, they make a pact. Each of them may ask for a "living funeral" in a moment of crisis, and their friends will show up to celebrate their life. After college, they drift apart. Then, in 2013, Marielle Holland, now living in Washington, D.C., sounds the alarm, flailing through an impending divorce. In 2016, Naomi Ito's parents die in a plane crash, pushing the strident Naomi, now a music executive, to drag them all to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. In 2018, Craig Scheffler, who relies on humor to

shield his emotions, is facing prison for art fraud when the friends ambush him for his own "funeral" in New York City. Finally in 2023, Jordy Tasic and Jordan Vargas, now husbands in New York City, activate the pact because Jordan's cancer is back. Faced with an impending real funeral, the quintet, now 50, gathers a final time for a genuinely heartfelt conclusion. Rowley admirably avoids sentimentality along the way, and there's plenty of fresh and witty dialogue. For anyone needing a reminder about the importance of friendships, this will more than do the trick. Agent: Rob Wiesbach, Rob Wiesbach Creative. (May)Correction: An earlier version of this review misstated the city two characters live in.

Kirkus Reviews

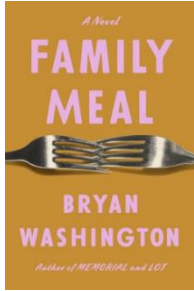
A privileged but somewhat diverse group of friends support each other in a profound way through their early to middle adulthood. Meeting first as misfit transfer students in their sophomore year at Berkeley, Marielle, Naomi, Craig, the Jordans (a gay couple), and Alec quickly become family to each other. But Alec, the wildest, dies of an overdose two weeks before graduation, leaving the others bereft and confused. After Alec's funeral, Marielle convinces them to join in an unusual pact to celebrate each other: At any time of their choosing, each can call on the others to gather for their own "funeral" during which they get to be celebrated, loved, and supported while still alive. The book covers the "funerals" of Marielle, Naomi, and Craig at different crisis points in their lives over the next 30 years. Hanging over the proceedings are two things, one of which is always present for the characters: the trauma of Alec's death. The other is the novel's present-day framing, in which one of the Jordans has terminal prostate cancer, and his husband (now Jordy for distinction) is nudging him to trigger the pact and tell the group. There is an updated Big Chill quality to it all, hitting many of the same sweet and melancholy notes around aging, death, love, and the shorthand old friends have with each other. This particular group's lingua franca is quite tart--they trade in jabs, cynicism, and intellectualism--but over time it becomes clear how much they value each other, even when old secrets get revealed and dynamics shift. Rowley peppers biographical details evenly through the book, making it initially hard to get a good grasp on the friends' individual personalities, though they come into better focus over time. Occasionally their dialogue and misadventures are downright hilarious. A touch wiseacre but more wise. Copyright (c) Kirkus Reviews, used with permission.

SOLITO READALIKES - FOOTNOTES



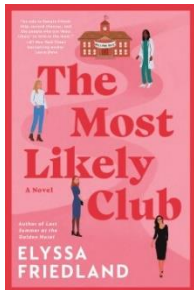
***It's Not All Downhill From Here* by Terry McMillan**

Loretha Curry's husband Carl whisks her away for a weekend getaway in Palm Springs, Calif., to celebrate her 68th birthday, only to die of a heart attack while they are staying at the resort. Loretha's friends rally around her as she tries to recover from the devastating loss. Loretha also contends with her own health issues after her doctor diagnoses her with diabetes. Though Loretha is filled with loneliness after Carl's death, the wit and candor of her friends lessens the blow as Loretha weathers the angst of a difficult relationship with her alcoholic daughter Jalecia and considers selling her beauty products business.



***Family Meal* by Bryan Washington**

Cam, mourning the death of his lover Kai, is back in Houston after spending time in rehab, but he's still struggling with addiction and an eating disorder. When the bar he's working at closes, Cam accepts childhood friend TJ's job offer at his family bakery. Between his visions of the deceased Kai and attempts to ease his pain with random hookups, Cam's despair is palpable: he feels he is "suffocating from the weight of myself."



***The Most Likely Club* by Elyssa Friedland**

When Melissa graduated from Bellport Academy in 1997, she was voted "Most Likely to Win the White House." Twenty-five years later, the only thing she's winning is a game of virtual Scrabble, if that. Her friend Tara isn't having the success she thought she would either, teaching children to cook instead of owning a Michelin-starred restaurant. Priya is a doctor but hasn't cured cancer and is struggling to find work-life balance. The only one out of their friend group to find their destined success is Suki, with a makeup company that has landed her on the Forbes 400 list. But when the group (minus Suki) reunites at their twenty-fifth high-school reunion, they realize dreams don't have to have a shelf life.