Book Review: My Friends
By Fredrik Backman

My first exposure to author Fredrik Backman came about two years ago when I read "A Man Called Ove." Having enjoyed that introduction, I looked forward to his latest work, "My Friends."

I'm happy to say I wasn't disappointed.

"My Friends" is a heart-warming story that blends several themes: belonging, coming of age, and daring to be different. There were just a handful of issues I had with the story, but they're minor and I'll get to them later.

As the narrative unfolds, one of the world's most famous paintings, *The One of the Sea*, is being put up for auction. Just about everyone who looks at the painting sees a magnificent expanse of the sea. But Louisa, a teen on the verge of turning 18 and an aspiring artist in her own right, sees what most people miss: three youth sitting at the edge of a long pier in the corner of the painting. She's been fascinated by it for years.

Ted, a close friend of the artist and one of the youths in the painting, buys the painting back for the artist, at great expense, and through a series of events (I won't give anything away here), instructs him to give the painting to Louisa. Why? The artist tells Ted, because "she's one of us."

What follows, over the course of a lengthy train excursion and several edge-of-your-seat incidents, is an unfolding of the lives of the youths in the painting. About 25 years earlier, in a distant seaside town, a group of teenagers found 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 found in each other a reason to get up every

morning, a reason to dream, a reason to love. The painting grew out of those summer experiences.

"My Friends" is a funny and moving story that may start a little slow, but it consistently gains momentum as it progresses. It's nearly impossible not to get caught up in the teenagers' lives, and the character development is strong, so envisioning yourself in their place is easy to see.

What disturbed me (and again, these are minor details) is there's no timeframe to the story. There's no indication of location or dateline, only the repeated reference to the sea. But what sea? Where and when? It may seem trivial, but I think it would be helpful to understand the time period the characters lived through, not to mention the specific geography.

In the end, though, 4 out of 5 stars for "My Friends." It's extremely well written, and worth the read.