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Review of The Guncle

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It has been several years since Patrick O'Hara left his TV sitcom and retired to Palm Springs. All is peaceful routine for Patrick, a single, gay man, until his sister-in-law (and bosom friend) dies and his brother checks himself into rehab, leaving Patrick in charge of his nine year old niece and six year old nephew. Maisie and Grant know their uncle is gay, thus the moniker "guncle." In the tradition of Auntie Mame and Travels with My Aunt, Rowley's (Lily and the Octopus) latest explores the relationships between young and old, between grief and acceptance, and between stagnation and growth, all while challenging the expectations of convention. Under Patrick's unorthodox tutelage, the children are exposed to an entirely new way of looking at life, while Patrick, through the agency of niece and nephew, finally comes to grips with his own grief. Under the influence of comic dialogue to make Neil Simon jealous, the novel's serious undercurrent of loss gives way, in the end, to a warmth that will make readers smile.

VERDICT: A funny, gentle tale of family and friends and a salve for the wounds they often cause.