

Celeste & Chris

By Manjula Stokes

Book Summary

CELESTE & CHRIS tells the story of two friends coming of age in the 1960s. In their isolation from others, they redefine the terms of the oppressive society—religious, social, racial, economic, sexual—in which they were raised. Celeste’s mother is overbearing. Chris’s parents dote on their son but remain ignorant of his queer identity. Chris and Celeste form a bond that helps them survive the warfare they undertake against their world’s strictures.

Due to a high school prank gone wrong, Chris’s parents believe their laid-back parenting put him on the wrong path. They overcompensate by sending him to military school. While there, Chris begins an illicit affair with his art teacher. Celeste runs away from home with the intention of rescuing Chris. On her way, she’s picked up hitchhiking by a charming Vietnam War draft-dodger. Both Chris and Celeste find their sexual liberation comes with stipulations and disillusion.

The emergence of riskier desires threaten the bond between Celeste and Chris, even as they realize the complicated and dangerous nature of their situation. As things devolve, the friends must come to terms with the perils of their illusions and the price of freedom, and imagine a future for themselves and each other.

About the Author

Manjula Stokes has studied with many esteemed authors and participated in excellent writing conferences including Community of Writers, Bread Loaf, Tin House, LitCamp, The Writer’s Hotel, and Summer Literary Seminar. She has been published in *Southern California Review*, and *The New Guard*. **CELESTE & CHRIS** is her first novel. Stokes lives in California. During the pandemic, she adopted a tiny dog who keeps her company while she writes.

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