

Booze Hounds

By

Ian C. Smith

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...* Ian C. Smith writes with a quiet honesty that can be appreciated by all, and “Boozehounds,” is an intricately layered story of writerly self-reflection for not only the reader but any writer that has often had to live hard in the attempt to create.

It will not be hard to notice that the story most certainly centers around the impacts of alcoholism and the cost that those who are more than likely to go overboard face. The work is not one of condemnation, but of subtle tragedy and acceptance. While oftentimes writers write about writing, this piece packs more into its short read than most and the depth of which Smith creates is as impressive as some of the other work we have also published at Fleas on the Dog. Our narrator is a writer telling the story of another writer recounting the dualistic nature of happiness and tragedy that faces us within our daily lives and the way in which those two forces slam up against each other when we least expect it, would almost always have rather it gone differently, and altered the course of our paths indefinitely.

In reflection, we write the stories that come to mind from what we see every day. There is no requirement that the subject matter be a realistic portrait, but there is a requirement to demonstrate a shared humanity by which we can see beauty and pain as they are bound together in all of our lives.

I believe that “Boozehounds” achieves this particular goal; I believe that Ian Smith’s work is perfect fodder for any reader or writer to delve into; and I believe that if you take the time to read this story you will not only be better for it but become a more creative person for having reflected upon the experience of how life, as manically up and down as it is, is “all material.”

Five Stars.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (*for the love of language...*)

The writer, when teetotal, said of his magnified, unsuspecting characters – a jogger, couples, cops, a busker, belligerents in a fracas – that as they stepped within range, faces haloed by neon, he snared their silent actions, triggering back stories matching the drama in his head.

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I read about a fiction writer sitting in darkness in rooms he rented above a shop overlooking the street – what he called *the nightmarket* – watching through the only windows he cleaned, drinking cheap champagne for quick effect. The traffic's hum accentuated loneliness, despair, he said, inventing plot, dialogue, behind the foggy breath of unsuspecting strangers he saw, their lives transformed by marriage, death, and other calamities as he sipped, binoculars looped around his neck, bottle, ashtray, atop a portable heater that reeked of scorched dust when ignited.

Floundering through wayward youth that should have been happier, I was best man at a wedding, the groom a workmate who preferred drinking to women. One nuptial duty was escorting the maid-of-honour, wife of a well-known sportsman I never met. We were to link up, a small after party following the reception that was held the same time the sportsman competed in a nearby city. My first public speech looming, and never having met someone who lived a lavish life, I needed alcohol even before the ceremony.

Leaving the church's sanctuary, life's clock hands ever circling, we processed to the gaiety of Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* through dust motes towards sunlit open doors and thunderbolt news. The sportsman had celebrated victory in a bar with fellow warriors before driving inter-city. They had not travelled far before he struck, and killed, a pedestrian. Our proposed post-reception drinks rendezvous fell apart like the new marriage, and our friendship, later, that distant day's fragmented events, their disappointing aftermath, though vivid then, dimming as other days did their relentless thing.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: 'The writer at the beginning is based on Ray Carver, who, in the final sentence, becomes Alice Munro, with the 'fellow writer' Margaret Atwood. The wedding, the sportsman, the accident, all were part of my young life. The rest is creative writing.'

AUTHOR BIO: Ian C Smith's work has been published in *Antipodes*, *BBC Radio 4 Sounds*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Griffith Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Southword*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.