

# Book Review—*We Won't Be Kissing* by Chris Dungey

Reviewed by Peter J. Stavros

In *We Won't Be Kissing*, (Amazon Kindle) Chris Dungey takes the reader through the life of Hector Fritch, the protagonist and sometimes narrator of these twenty linear stories, from the first offering, “The Early Bird in Winter,” in which Hector, as a youth, finds that having slept late on a snow day has caused him to miss out on being the proverbial early bird in procuring snow shoveling work to earn Christmas money, through to his later years where money seems to still be an issue for him, with Hector almost poor and living on the pension of a nearly bankrupt auto factory.

Mr. Dungey excels in creating a world of nostalgic innocence for Master Fritch growing up in the quaint village of mid-1960's Celeryville, Michigan, where a boy could ride his bike home from football practice (until traffic picked up after five o'clock), the townsfolk turned out for the visitation of one of their own who had been tragically struck down by a drunk driver, and the Celeryville Lanes served as a popular hangout for date-night bowlers who “drank in their rented shoes while waiting for lanes to open.” Some of Hector's biggest problems back then were being forced to hug the newly widowed Mrs. Milner who “smelled like more flowers but kind of sour underneath, with mothballs” and not being able to watch anything troubling like *The Twilight Zone* before bed.

Hector must also deal with the shenanigans of his little brother, Chick, who, in the delightfully cringe worthy “Equation,” has injured himself while rubbing the pet hamster against his bare nether regions while singing *Love Me Tender*. Mr. Dungey vividly sets the scene when Hector arrives to the bathroom after hearing the boy’s shrieks: “Hector skidded to a halt in the doorframe and beheld a scene of apparent carnage. Dime-sized splats of blood dotted the bathmat. There was blood on a towel and Chick’s clothes. The linoleum, in a pattern of squares meant to look like tiles, was splattered as well. Chick stood above the commode, bleeding from the tip of his penis. His face was contorted with pain as he daubed with toilet paper at a hidden wound.” Once Chick is attended to, the brothers amusingly concoct an elaborate scenario to keep Ma from finding out.

However, life turned out a bit less idyllic, and whimsical, for Mister Fritch—at one point, with his 401K taking a hit in the market, he finds himself trying to sell the wedding band from his first marriage. A noteworthy entry from this time frame is “Brush” in which Mr. Dungey creates gripping tension and white knuckles suspense when Hector’s foot becomes wedged beneath a thick oak trunk while attempting to clear a trail at his hunting lodge, rendering him immobile while he waits for Chick—now with his chance to save the day—to rescue him as a bear wanders nearby. “After a few more of what Fritch imagined to be grub-rooting sounds—more silence. Then came more cautious movement, edging closer through the saplings and ferns. Silence again. Was it listening? Sampling through its snout the local news on the night air? Fritch couldn’t breathe any shallower.”

Hector Fritch’s tale comes full circle with his 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion in the aptly titled “Reunion,” which brings this book to a satisfying conclusion. Through these stories, Mr. Dungey paints a portrait of the boy inside the man, adding depth and character by inserting Hector into

various settings and scenarios as he tries to establish his place in the world in and around, but never truly far from, the familiar and comfortable Celeryville.

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**REVIEWER BIO:** Peter J. Stavros is a writer and playwright in Louisville, Kentucky, and the author of two short story collections, *Three in the Morning and You Don't Smoke Anymore*, and *(Mostly) True Tales From Birchmont Village*, and the novella, *Tryouts*. More at [www.peterjstavros.com](http://www.peterjstavros.com).