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In these twenty-one comically gut-wrenching stories—highlighting schemers, dreamers, losers, boozers, stolen televisions, professional wrestlers, self-mutilators, compulsive masturbators, shoe fetishists, and a dead cat named Johnny Thunders—BRIAN ALAN ELLIS delivers a debauched world where sex is empty, life is meaningless, addictions are required, and nobody can ever get it together.

The Mustache He's Always Wanted but Could Never Grow: And Other Stories Details

Date : Published December 5th 2013 by House of Vlad Productions

ISBN : 9780615918327

Author : Brian Alan Ellis

Format : Paperback 120 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction



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Melki says

At first I didn't care for these stories. Tales of woe concerning soured relationships and dead pets? I wrote crap like this in college. Then I was body slammed by *Loco Mask II*, a story about a man unable to handle his mother's relationship with a professional wrestler. It made me smile and giggle. And most importantly, it gave me hope that even though I am a decrepit old hag, I could one day win the favors of the fair Adrian Neville.

Maybe then I could get him to stop tucking his hair behind his ears. Dude, you look like a sugar bowl!

There were plenty of other good stories that followed. I smiled and giggled some more, but mostly I was thinking about Neville. I remember there was a really good one about a clown and a poet in a bar.

There is some fine, fine writing here, though I would not recommend it for everyone. If you're a fan of the usual "ladies book club" books, I'm pretty sure you're not going to like these tales of reprobates, alcoholics and losers. It's not exactly the feel-good read of the year, but definitely worth a look for the more adventurous.

Sheldon Compton says

Brian Alan Ellis is writing with as much freedom as anyone out there.

Nathaniel Tower says

If you're easily offended, turn back now. If you like your fiction to have some grit and plenty of vulgarities, then Brian Alan Ellis's "mustache" collection is just the thing you've been searching for your whole life. This little book is filled with hilarious, absurd, dark, and offensive stories. It's hard to believe that Ellis could squeeze so much into so few pages.

I'd list the best stories, but that would just be a list of all the stories in here. Do yourself (and Brian Alan Ellis) a favor and buy this book. Sure, you'll be a worse person with a horrible outlook on life, but the few hours of entertainment the book provides will more than make up for that.

Rodney says

This is entertaining and memorable storytelling that I really enjoyed. From the gut and raw, humorous tales are laced with poignant moments without ever trying too hard. "Ideas for a One-Act Clown-and-Poet Play"

was absolutely amazing. The utilization of the two characters to relay so many profound, relevant life concepts really spoke to me. For those who have enjoyed Scott McClanahan or Bukowski, this is with them in terms of quality. Recommended!

Jason says

An interesting collection of short stories by Brian Alan Ellis, this is the first thing I've read by him and I think it is quite a good introduction to his work. I've not been blown away by them but I have enjoyed reading them. He has taken some pretty selfish and despicable characters and given each of them a voice in their own stories and because these characters are so horrible it does make it difficult to pick a favourite story...seeing as I wanted to give so many of the characters a slap. Easily the most hated character was Christopher from "Cutter" an excellent portrayal of a drunk who is a complete arse!

I enjoyed the very short stories, barely a page long as they almost felt poetic at times, "Drinking in bed with Zadie" is the best example of that. The most disappointing story in the book was the one the book was named after, that was a real shame because it is such a great title I was expecting something stunning.

This is a great intro into Brian's writing and I'll be checking out more of his stuff.

Becky Schmitt says

these stories reminded me of myself of versions of myself from alternate realities, but all of us still with major depressive disorder. existentialism in everyday, life experiences without it being right in your face. it made me laugh, and think "what even is reality or human beings? is my life is a tragic comedy for aliens to laugh at?". any book that makes me do that gets five stars. read the fuck out of this book

Arthur Graham says

Outstanding work — a bit like Bukowski, but funnier. Not sure there's much higher praise I can give.

Holly (Holly Hearts Books) says

I really enjoyed this book. The author tells it how it is. What we all really think and are afraid to say out aloud. Each story is truly believable (and maybe even relatable) with a twist of sick humor. It made me chuckle under my breath quite often. The funny sarcasm and silly puns the characters bring in each story is pretty entertaining.

So if you want a corny laugh about the sucky things in life, I'd recommend this book to you.

Zac Smith says

a few great riffs mixed in with some predictable bukowski worship. losers talk about sex and smoke cigarettes, and there's often an air of 'oh how shocking' but nothing is that shocking.

but some of the stories really stand out (usually the longer ones), like LOCOMASK2, with their humanity and realism and sadness. but the high number of 1-2 page flash fiction stories gets tiring, especially when they're all pretty similar.

but i'm interested in reading more of his long-form stuff.

Ben says

Work that speaks to a people that normally get so little attention: the blue collar, under-employed denizens who haunt grim, dead-end neighborhoods, bars, and couches, as they try to figure out how to get laid, fix their fucked-up relationships, find work, or care for their damaged family members, all of whom exist in some near dank netherworld, that so many of us scurry by on the way to somewhere else.

More - <http://bentanzer.blogspot.com/2014/09...>

Michael says

Ellis writes the kind of fiction that makes you appreciate life a bit more. The writing style is the hook and he fills each of these stories with characters we probably knew at some point in our lives, but never realized how sad their lives were. If you're looking for something beautiful and inspiring you're reading the wrong book, and should look elsewhere. Despite the weepy, and often depressing theme, it's the way he writes that hooks you in. He has a talent for writing odd stories that are bleak, but somehow it all works. I've read a few of his books. and they all tie in to a feeling of loss, and gloom. These are stories for the lost and broken. Love isn't what it's supposed to be and a man sets out to cheat on his wife knowing how it'll turn out.

In Mustache you see that there is no hope, nothing turns out right, and who knows, maybe Ellis should see a psychiatrist so his stories would be less dark and way more fun. Of course if he did that, the soul of his work would be gone, and he wouldn't stand out as much. Fact is, the guy writes like a man depressed, and it all works out for the reader. if you like you're fiction weird, and bleak, this is the perfect collection for you. Grab yourself a beer, and a sandwich and enjoy the ride to sadville population Brian Alan Ellis.

Danger says

This is trailer-park existentialism.

This is Harmony Korine's 'Gummo' if there were a sliver of heart in the center of its dead chest.

This is the love song sung by every lowlife loser spending their days dragging tired bones across the gray face of Earth.

This is the microscope that displays, in dazzling color, the ugliest (yet oddly comforting) side of mundanity.

This is a damn good collection of short fictions by a damn fine writer.

(Plus it's called The Mustache He's Always Wanted But Could Never Grow. How fuckin' cool is that title?)

Jen Harris says

I really don't know what I expected with this book. I thought it would be funny but it was really just depressing.

Lori says

Read 2/22/14 - 2/27/14

3 Stars - Recommended to those who enjoy reading about the downward swirl of bottom-rung humanity in the toilet of life

101 Pages

Publisher: House of Vlad Productions

Released 2013

Brian Allen Ellis doesn't have much hope for the human race. He doesn't see us in vivid technicolor. Rather, to him, humanity is drenched in darkness, hidden in shadow, and exuding guilt and sin.

Scraping the absolute bottom of the barrel, we find him shining a light on the squirmly, dirty, shifty souls he discovers buried down there. Fetishists, a dead cat, drunkards, the cripplingly depressed, and self-mutilators all cling together and hang separately in this collection of short (and shorter) stories.

In my opinion, the stories that bookend the collection - *Crumbs of Love* and *The Sailboat/Hatchet Painting* - are the strongest of the bunch. In the former, you have a dude sitting on the couch, absolutely in love with life and his girlfriend. When he opens his mouth to tell her this, she jumps down his throat and shatters his feel-good buzz. She's a bitch, this chick, and we can see it plain as day. But our poor ole dude is so love-struck, and now so panic-stricken at the thought of her not loving him nearly as much as he loves her, we just can't help but shake our heads. Cause we've all been there. At some point, we've all been sitting exactly where he sits, mouth agape with stupid ridiculous semi-blubbering shit driveling out of our mouths. In the latter, we meet two people (pretty sure they are brother and sister) chatting away meaninglessly about what's been going on in their lives. We learn about the sister's second ex-husband who used to crash at the brother's apartment (before the sister met and married him). The guy was an artist and we're given the rundown on the rumored sale of his one and only masterpiece - an unremarkable painting of a sailboat with a hatchet stuck through it that contained some remarkable "ingredients".

Stories like *Eulogy for Johnny Thunders*, which is about a dude, his ex-girlfriend, and her mother standing graveside in varying degrees of mourning over the untimely death of their cat; *Leftover Heels*, about the pair of shoes an ex-girlfriend leaves behind and the things one lonely man does with them; *Lunch Lady*, where a husband has a bad reaction to his wife's new 'do; and *Delia Done Wrong*, where a guy who planned to cheat on his girlfriend while she's away on a trip gets what he wants, and worse, hold their own and help to set the tone of the remainder of the collection.

Not all of the stories reach that same caliber, though. I started and then stopped reading *For Pain with Sleeplessness* and *Loco Mask II* because they just weren't grabbing me. And for all the awesomeness of its title, while *The Mustache He's Always Wanted But Could Never Grow* was short and well written, it was simultaneously disappointing.

For all their faults, Ellis doesn't paint his characters in a poor light. He isn't asking for your pity. He's simply pulling back the sheet and saying "see, see this stinking, festering wound of a human here? see how handsome he can be?", bringing the ugliness of human nature to the surface so it too can find its moment in the sun.

David says

In stories centering on people who are apparently at rock bottom, you wouldn't expect to feel a lot of empathy and identification. Sure, it makes for interesting reading, but you think what you'd feel is a "there but for the grace of" kind of thing. I don't feel that in these stories. What I feel is a surprising amount of that empathy and identification. Drunks, the depressed, people at the end of their rope. What Ellis knows and what we don't usually admit is that most of us are putting on a good show. Most of us struggle through the day and hope we can keep putting one foot in front of another, regardless how good a show we put on or how together our lives may seem. You'll be pulled in by the grittiness and the destitution of the characters' lives, but I doubt you can escape the feeling that these are contemplations on how we manage to keep moving in life and the situation we find ourselves in. You might find something that helps you through the night. Plus, there's a mustache in the front you can cut out and wear. Can't beat that.
