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The Dogs

O Thiam Chin

Keyline

Haunted by a childhood tragedy, a man looks back on his past and rediscovers a new meaning to his life.

Description

In *The Dogs*, Guan, a middle-aged man, decides to move back into the flat that had once belonged to his late father, who had died in it a few months back. He sells off his old flat and, in the process, estranges himself from his own son, who is at a loss over his father's sudden decision. While trying to settle in and to make sense of the new surroundings, Guan slowly gets to know the residents of the block and becomes acquainted with a neighbour, an old lonely man who dresses in his dead wife's clothes. As Guan explores and discovers more of the estate he lives in, through his long walks, he starts to have flashbacks about his past, vividly remembering his childhood in a kampong in Singapore in the 1950s, and his close friendship with Heng Chong, a schoolmate. He recalls the pranks and games they played, the mischief they got into—prowling the Sembawang Hills estate and setting the dogs free from the big houses in that estate—and the secrets they shared, one of which was the mysterious death of Heng Chong's baby sister who died during birth, something which set the boys on a quest to find the truth behind it. As they delved more and more into their investigations, the friendship between them was slowly tested, gradually revealing the cracks that began to tear them apart. The arrival of a stray dog in their kampong, one that the boys adopted as their own, soon proved to be the catalyst that sparked off a chain of events that led to the dissolution of their friendship, and the unforeseen death of a loved one that cast a long, indelible shadow over Guan's life subsequently. As Guan looks

back into the past to find the answers to the mystery that surrounded this tragic death, he also comes to a clearer understanding of his present predicament and learns to cope with his own personal losses and find ways to redeem himself from his past acts. In the act of negotiating his past and his pain, Guan finds new hopes in his solitude, and a new life he's slowly building with hard-won resilience, fortitude and purpose.

Sales Points

- √ The novel covers themes that resonate strongly Asian readers -- family ties, fatherhood and the debt of truth and lies.
- √ The novel goes further to explore the complications that can arise out of one man's desire to find purpose and meaning even in his twilight years, and the deep, prevailing sense of loneliness and being out of touch with the world at large, even though one could be surrounded by other people and distractions of all sorts. In an aging society, this condition is very real.
- √ Weaved masterfully in this novel, is a painful ongoing struggle to deal with one's traumatic past and to find a way to the truth at all costs.

Author Bio

O Thiam Chin's short stories have appeared in literary anthologies, such as *Best New Singaporean Short Stories Volumes 1, 2 and 3*, *A Rainbow Feast: New Asian Short Stories*, *ONE - The Anthology: Short Stories from Singapore's Best Authors*, and *Malaysian Tales: Retold & Remixed*, as well as in *Manoa*, *World Literature Today*, *The International Literary Quarterly*, *Asia Literary Review*, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Kyoto Journal*, *The Jakarta Post*, *The New Straits Times*, *Asiatic and Esquire (Singapore)*. Thrice longlisted for the Frank O'Connor Short Story Award, he is the author of *Free-Falling Man* (2006), *Never Been Better* (2009), *Under The Sun* (2010), *The Rest Of Your Life And Everything That Comes With It* (2011), *Love, Or Something Like Love* (2013), shortlisted for the 2014 Singapore Literature Prize, and *Signs of Life*, which was published in 2019. His debut novel, *Now That It's Over*, won the inaugural Epigram Books Fiction Prize (EBFP) in 2015 and also the Best Fiction title at the 2017 Singapore Book Awards, and his second novel, *Fox Fire Girl*, was shortlisted for the EBFP in 2016. He was an honorary fellow of the Iowa International Writing Program in 2010, and a recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award in 2012.