

The Codger and the Sparrow

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***“The Codger and the Sparrow* portrays the slow burn of an improbable union of opposites that sees itself through multiple highs and lows to ultimately secure a lasting friendship.”**

In author Scott Semegran's *The Codger and the Sparrow*, a 65-year-old widower and a sixteen-year-old boy meet while picking up trash in the woods outside of Austin, Texas. Their unlikely relationship plays out in incremental episodes and deepens over time to leave a lasting impression.

The story begins at Home Runs, a shopworn bar in an Austin strip mall where down on his luck Hank O'Sullivan is in the habit of drinking whiskey old fashions, now that his life is defined by tragic loss. Few know the gruff Hank's central wound, but when a loud-mouth barfly named Ernie, who nurses a personal grudge, vocalizes what Hank keeps secret, a parking lot fist fight ensues, and Hank is taken to jail.

Sixteen-year-old, Puerto Rican Luis is a latchkey kid. Being raised by a distracted and negligent single father, Luis would like to get the facts on his rarely discussed mother whom, Luis has heard, lives in Houston, Texas. Unsupervised and budding with artistic, untrained talent, a bout of aimless night wandering finds Luis in the wrong place at the wrong time and lands him in juvenile detention. The result is court ordered community service that takes Luis to public grounds on the outskirts of Austin, where his fate collides with Hank O'Sullivan, who is fulfilling the same community requirement.

The pair discover common ground. Luis and Hank both live in the planned development of Wells Point, on the north side of Austin, and when Luis asks Hank for a lift home one afternoon, he is delighted to discover he'll ride in Hank's pride possession—an eight-cylinder, hot-pink, 1970s Plymouth Barracuda with a black vinyl top, and black leather seats, and which Hank proudly calls “the Cuda.”

The pair's friendship develops when Hank, who is not technologically savvy, asks for Luis's assistance in locating someone online, and it is not long before they discover they both have the destination of Houston in mind: Hank to look up an old high school flame in hopes of offsetting

his loneliness, and Luis to change his home circumstances by springing a surprise visit on the mother he barely remembers, in hopes that she'll want to take him in.

When their trip to Houston in the Cuda is planned, *The Codger and The Sparrow* turns into a road-trip story replete with a cast of secondary characters, unplanned episodes, narrow escapes, dashed hopes, vandalism, and full reveals of the main characters' backstories.

The story's dialogue is comical and uses age-appropriate language as Hank and Luis seek to bridge the gap between their different experiences and generations. Hank is old-school and encourages Luis to put away his cellphone and learn how to read a map, while Luis impresses Hank with the efficiency of his phone's Global Positioning System.

Semegran gives the main characters nuance: "Hank's propensity to not curse—no matter the circumstances—was legendary at this point, and his colorful replacements for the run-of-the-mill vulgarities offered whoever was listening respite from profanity." As for Luis's aspiration of becoming an artist, Hank sees that Luis's trademark on his drawings is unique: "At the bottom right corner of the drawing was a plump little cartoon bird, sitting slightly askew, like a signature."

The lengthy and painstakingly detailed third-person descriptions favor the minutiae of setting and set up dialogue that is cursory in comparison. Hank and Luis are trying to connect as the story alternates between hijinks travelling scenes and what rattles through the characters minds, as the three-part story builds to its conclusion.

Because Hank and Luis's friendship is strained after fruitless, weary episodes on their road trip, the pair take an unspoken reprieve. When Luis eventually goes in search of Hank, he hears from Hank's neighbor that, once again, bad luck has found Hank at the hands of Ernie. In a gesture of triumph over adversity, Luis visits Hank and their friendship is repaired when they let bygones be bygones.

The Codger and the Sparrow portrays the slow burn of an improbable union of opposites that sees itself through multiple highs and lows to ultimately secure a lasting friendship. Character intensive and visually descriptive, it's a humanistic story of disparate souls overlooking each other's shortcomings in their quest to ultimately connect.