*I Only Cry with Emoticons*, by Yuvi Zalkow rev. by Araceli Macias

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Yuvi Zalkow is a writer, software developer and uses his artistic skills to make videos on YouTube. His debut novel is titled *A Brilliant Novel in the Works*. He’s published a number of short stories and received an MFA from Antioch University. His latest novel, *I Only Cry with Emoticons,* follows a 45 year old man named Saul who spends his days hating his job at a high-tech company he helped build, while working on a book about his dead grandfather that he’s been writing for longer than his 7 year old son has been alive. Saul struggles with self sabotage and selfishness combined with an inability to connect despite having technology all around him. The novel expresses this disconnectivity through his at times hilarious attempts to make meaningful connections.

Zalkow’s writing allows Saul’s interiority to develop his character, while also deepening readers' connection to Saul. A lot of time is spent in Saul’s thoughts, whether they're as small as concluding that a self-flushing toilet is passive aggressively judging him or as large as struggling to understand his relationship with his deceased mother. His inner thoughts allow for relatable, comedic moments as well incredibly profound, emotional ones.

“I don’t know how to be. A part of me wants to dive right in and take in all that she is, and another part keeps running back to the other she, my ex-wife, the mother of my kid, a woman who already knows exactly what to like and what to dislike about me.” (145)

This paragraph emphasizes how Saul himself becomes a point of tension. He often stops himself from making a decision in fear of what could happen. When he starts a complicated relationship with a woman named Kitty, he fears their relationship will end badly and hurt everyone involved, including his son, so he decides to end it. However, by choosing to distance himself from her, he ends up causing the exact situation he was trying to avoid. His indecision creates problems for everyone around him and further exacerbates a feeling of disconnection.

Zalkow continues this theme of disconnection by including fractured relationships with three different generations of fathers. All of the men in Saul's family fail to do the one thing that could solve some of the strains in their relationships, communicate.

“I wanted my dad to be more involved in my world when I was a kid, but maybe I’m getting too involved trying to protect my boy’s world. I’m doing the same thing by doing the opposite thing.” (133)

Interestingly, the novel Saul is writing about his dead grandfather mirrors his own life. When Kitty pushes him to rewrite his grandfather’s story through his own perspective, he includes a character named Catty in his book that helps push his grandfather towards his decision. The novel becomes a way for Saul to connect with his past and explore his own fears.

The end of the novel reminds us that change is intertwined with growth. Moving on despite wanting to hold on allows room for improvement. It also reminds us that real connection doesn't always occur through deep conversations or big moments. Instead, it's the small, seemingly forgettable moments that can linger in our memories for a lifetime.