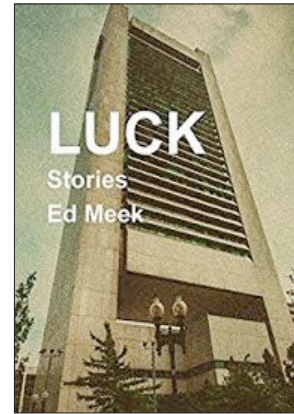


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Luck: Stories. By Ed Meek (Tailwinds Press-2017)

Review by Doug Holder

ALFRED HITCHCOCK SAID AND I PARAPHRASE, “ Fiction is real life with the boring parts cut out.” And very few words are wasted in Somerville writer Ed Meek’s new collection of short fiction “Luck.” Meek, (Maybe a little like Raymond Carver), is not a fancy writer. There are no flourishes of magic realism, no David Foster Wallace-like endless stream of consciousness, no complex dialogue—but man does it pack a punch. And not just a punch, but a sucker punch, because the beauty of these stories sneak up on you, and bitch slap you out of your complacency.



Consider his story “ Kickboxing with Ingrid.” Here a hapless adjunct professor (And God knows I know that territory) has a midlife crisis, and gets involved with a requisite blonde undergrad—to rekindle his dying flames. But often in life and in many cases this book—fantasy fails to meet up to expectations. As this academic consummates his relationship with the girl—some surprising changes occur,

“ I felt myself falling into her and I closed my eyes. I should have kept them closed I guess, but I worried I’d come too soon, so I opened them and looked down at her face and the oddest thing happened. It was if I was looking at an entirely different person. Her head seemed suddenly too big, her face square and distorted, misshapen like a warped melon. She was grimacing a bit and there was a look of fear and submission in her eyes...Where was the beautiful girl I had been obsessed with?”

Later after the affair led to his dismissal from his job, and an unexpected illness, he arrives to lick his wounds at the “Sevens” bar on Beacon Hill in Boston (I have hoisted more than a few there) and has a moment of painful self-recognition while waiting for a pint of bourbon from the barkeep,

“I got to the Sevens early. I ordered a pint of bourbon while I waited. In the mirror I saw a wiry old guy with grayish brown hair. When he raised his hands to drink, his hands trembled.

*Jack came up behind me. He gave me a double-take. “ What the hell happened to you”, he said.
I cackled and wiped the beer off my mouth with my sleeve.*

Another great story is “The Fall of Iran.” Meek places a young teacher (Meek told me he taught in Iran for a stint) and his girlfriend around the time of the fall of the Shah. The demise of the couples’ relationship in some ways follows the demise of the regime. The story also gives us a fascinating insight into Persian culture. Suffice to say, that you should never

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say you love an expensive, cherished rug in a host's abode—because you will cause him or her a great deal of pain.

In another standout “Out West” the author has a character face the myth of the old west and himself—when he moves to Montana.

Meek know how to tell a story. He has his own understated voice—as true as when you chew the fat with him and in his writing. I can imagine having a beer with him at the Sevens as he orders a drink. “Make it straight. No chaser.”