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The fourteen fantastical stories in Magic For Unlucky Girls take the familiar tropes of fairy tales and twist them into new and surprising shapes. These unlucky girls, struggling against a society that all too often oppresses them, are forced to navigate strange worlds as they try to survive. From carnivorous husbands to a bath of lemons to whirling basements that drive people mad, these stories are about the demons that lurk in the corners and the women who refuse to submit to them, instead fighting back — sometimes with their wit, sometimes with their beauty, and sometimes with shotguns in the dead of night.

Magic for Unlucky Girls Details

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Author : A.A. Balaskovits

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From Reader Review Magic for Unlucky Girls for online ebook

Laurie says

This is a book of 14 mostly reimagined fairy tales- not Disney fairy tales, but grimmer than the brothers Grimm. Think Angela Carter's "Bloody Chamber" or Emma Donahue's "Kissing the Witch". These stories are feminist in a way; they explore the horrible ways in which women and girls are suppressed and abused, but they don't always offer hope. Girls turn on other girls in one and feed off the bodies of others in another. In "Eden", the one person with kindness in his heart is ripped apart by the women of the town.

These aren't pretty stories at all. Most are moving, though, and there is a beauty to the prose even as it describes horrible things. It turned out to be not my cup of tea, but I think it's very good. Four stars.

Kat says

Individual stories in this book are excellently creepy. When viewed in a collection they become predictable, the worst things always happen, things always take the darkest turn possible. I bought this book at a reading marketed as a sampling of "feminist lit." While a few are empowering they are empowering in the most problematic of ways. Feminist is certainly a misnomer. A good read for fans of the horror genre but certainly not for the squeamish or those who might become distressed by violent content. This book should probably come with every content warning imaginable.

Hope says

DNF after three stories. My time is valuable, and I've decided to longer plod through books that don't interest me or evoke any feeling by 30 pages or so.

I'm sure there are interesting stories in here, but the first three are disturbing and confusing. It felt like stepping into the brain of a psychopath on an acid trip. Not for me.

L.A. says

Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's patriarchy.

After Angela Carter, you wouldn't think fairy tales could be any creepier. Enter Balaskovits to say "Hold my beer." This collection of tales strikes deep at the heart of the reasons fairy tales were invented in the first place -- to teach a certain order to the world -- and exposes just how fucked up the expected order usually is, when it comes to a woman's roles and responsibilities. Like you didn't know that, I know. But it's one thing to know a thing, and another thing to see a thing up close.

While most of the stories are set in the nebulous elsewhere, a few are rooted firmly in our own world, which

makes them all the more terrifying. "Bloody Mary" is the best of these, in which powerless girls desperate to seize some semblance of control and ownership turn on one of their own instead of on the forces that oppress them. Because it happens every day in small, subtle ways, it's incredibly effective to see it happen so violently on such a large scale (and Joyce Carol Oates would definitely approve). "Put Back Together Again" isn't as strong as many of the others, but as the lead-off story it lets you know what you're in for, and mediates nicely between our own world and the mythical one underneath. "The Ibex Girl of Qumran" bides its time until the very end, delivering an unexpected splash of magic where the narrator -- and the reader -- really don't see it coming. "Suburban Alchemy" is the saddest, demonstrating as it does how magic can muddy the waters of what what would otherwise be pretty easily understood problems, if not easily solved.

Of the rest, most readers will recognize the tales on which they're modeled, and appreciate some new wrinkles that Balaskovits throws in (if there's an analogue to "The Romantic Agony of Lemon Head," it's a Baba Yaga tale I haven't yet discovered). If edgy, disturbing short fiction is your patrons' thing, this is a nice addition to the canon. Recommended for larger fiction collections.

Michael B Tager says

This is a weird, tremendous book of short stories. Fractured fairytales, where no one is happy for ever after, are a welcome complement to the saccharine stories we often read. While not all of the stories work--a few are a bit too experimental for my tastes--most do and some are absolutely exceptional. Eden, Suburban Alchemy, the Ibex Girl of Qumram, Bloody Mary and Juniper are so good, and equally, so unpleasant and thoughtful.

Caroline Bock says

This book of fantastical and often fantastic short stories by A. A. Balaskovits should be placed along Emma Donahue's *Kissing the Witch*-- it will on my bookshelf.

Balaskovits dives into fairy-tale re-tellings of Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, and shows the passion and deceit of mermaids in "Mermaids," one of the shorter stories and one of my favorites.

On the other hand, her longest piece, "Put Back Together Again," the first in the collection, I felt a bit ponderous, stretching for profundity when the setting of the ER and the main character's telling of hot July, gunshots, sex, and smoking into the night would have been enough.

Overall, I traveled through her stories on a cloudy, cool Friday afternoon in October and the journey was worth it.

--Caroline

KC Snow says

I've never been much of a fairy tale person. Not even when I was a kid. However, A.A. Balaskovits's fairy tails are up my alley. The only reason I didn't give this collection a five-star rating is that I just didn't connect with a few of the stories. Though, the stories I did connect with are five-star stories.

"Put Back Together Again" was strikingly real and oddly uplifting despite the darkness of the story as a whole. But the self-awareness of the characters was like a bright shining light in their bleak existences. I'll highlight my favorites:

"Eden" made me warm and fuzzy inside. The weirdo, loner, "horse-fucker" was undoubtedly the hero of the story and even though the reader doesn't learn much, if anything about him, we at least know he has a kindness inside him the rest of the town is lacking. A beautiful story.

"Let Down Your Long Hair and Then Yourself" was a girl power story that, despite my never hearing or reading the Rapunzel story, references in pop-culture have left me with a good idea of the original tale and I'm pretty sure Balaskovits made it better.

"The Ibex Girl of Qumran" was so texturally rich that I felt as though I would break free of my skin and be born an Ibex at the end.

"Beasts" was just fun. Another girl power story that takes on stupid fairy tales that always have women as victims.

"Bloody Mary" had some beautiful language regarding the darkness that many young girls learn to deal with in life. For the unfortunate, being hurt becomes so normal that hurting others that don't feel pain is something of a duty. I connected with each of the characters and felt each of their pains, even poor Mary. A favorite line: "Maybe she was one of those smarty-pants girls who skipped a few grades when she was a kid because her parents were pushy folk who believed the sun rose and set each day in blessing that they had managed to fuck and get a baby out of it." Though there are a few others.

Virgowriter (Brad Windhauser) says

A couple stories didn't work for Me but the majority provide intriguing updating of either a genre (like gothic) or a fairy tale (like Little Red Riding Hood). Interesting collection.

layla says

These are not the typical fairy tales you've come to know and love. They much more reflect the original stories written by the brothers Grimm than the Disney versions you grew up with. Each tale is quite dark and twisted, a concept I have always appreciated in theory but it seems am not the biggest fan of in practice. I think it's that I'm just too soft-hearted and weak-stomached to appreciate this book for all it is. I felt queasy during almost every story of the book, especially during the parts where animals were killed (I'm a vegan

and a very sympathetic/empathetic person so descriptions of animals being killed is a bit too much for me. There's an entire story that basically centers around meat which was extremely difficult for me to get through.)

None of this is to say that this is a bad collection, in fact it's quite the opposite. A.A. Balaskovits certainly knows how to craft a story. She weaves sentences together in such a way that you don't fully realize the impact the words you're reading are going to have on you until you reach the end and find yourself gasping. Even though the subject matter was too much for me, I enjoyed the reading experience because Balaskovits' writing was so enjoyable. I found myself unable to put the book down, upset stomach or not, because the way Balaskovits has written the stories made me want to continue.

The main draw of this book for me was that it screamed feminist, which it definitely is. The summary of the collection states "These unlucky girls, struggling against a society that all too often oppresses them, are forced to navigate strange worlds as they try to survive." and the stories show various women fighting back against their oppressors in various ways and Balaskovits makes no claim stating that one way of fighting is inherently better than another, which I really appreciated. I also appreciated that female/female relationships were portrayed here, as LGBTQIA+ themes are rarely present in fantasy and fairy tale worlds.

Overall, I'd recommend this book if you are someone who enjoys feminism and stories about strong women. If you're a fan of the original fairy tales written by the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen or have read and enjoyed Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, I think you'd really enjoy this collection.

N. Morgan says

There were a few standout pieces here, but the majority were dark and weird for the sake of being dark and weird. The gloom was grinding and unrelenting, and felt ugly, like voyeurism rather than commentary. It paled to Carter, whom the author thanks in her acknowledgements. I love dark stories and fairy tales (Darcy Steinke is a favorite, as are *The Bloody Chamber* and *Bluebeard's Egg*.) and Balaskovits is undeniably skilled, artful, with language, but this collection is poor *storytelling* which, when you're working with fairy and folk tales, rings not innovative but unsatisfying. I think she was hoping to subvert the genre by writing stories that leave the reader feeling hollow or disoriented, but I found that more of a betrayal of tradition than a fresh perspective.

Katharine Holden says

Relentlessly ugly.

Celene Fraticelli says

I would definitely read this one again.

Carla says

This book is like that strange old woman who lives alone in the woods and invites you in for a treat. Your skin prickles but you still want to see what's inside, whether horror or wonder. And this book gladly obliges you.

San Diego Book Review says

Reviewed by Kitty Forbes for San Diego Book Review

Fourteen fairy tales, rewritten and spiced up for the modern adult child in all of us. Magical and tragic with the original Grimm twists, modern day problems and the unlucky girls that need to solve them.

You can read this entire review and others like it at [San Diego Book Review](#).

Ace Boggess says

The stories in this collection are surrealistic contemporary takes on classic fairy tales, often so well disguised you might miss the fairy-tale aspects altogether and see these as a brutal glimpse of modern life. The prose flows smoothly and beautifully while, at the same time, carrying the reader through images and scenes that blur reality in Borges-esque fashion. All in all, this fantastic debut from A.A. Balaskovits is both entertaining and challenging. I have a feeling the second reading will bring even more surprises.
