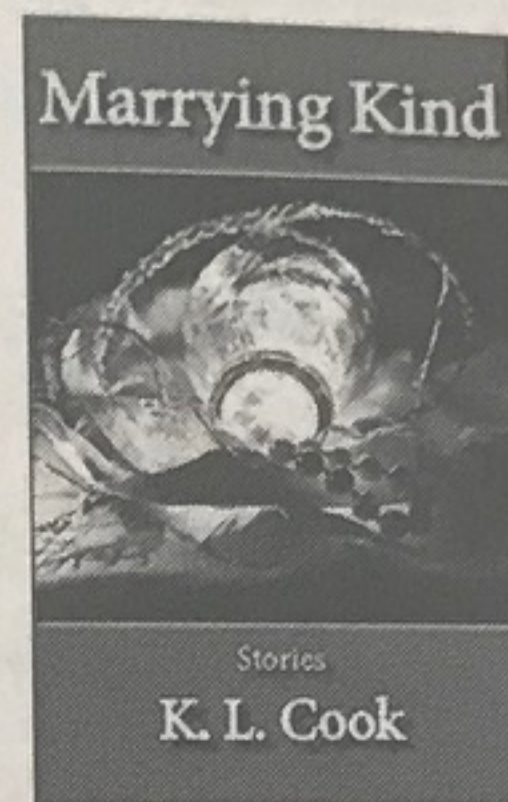


To Own the World

By Allison Field Bell

Book Review:

Marrying Kind, by K.L. Cook,
Ice Cube Press, 2019.



KL. Cook's new collection, *Marrying Kind*, builds a world of stories that connect and overlap, contrast and unsettle. It is a multi-generational book, with some stories displaying a multitude of voices: fathers and sons, daughters and mothers, wives and husbands. For Cook, marriage exists as a condition of lovers, families, colleagues, professions, canines. It is an act of devotion, one that is lodged in the human spirit. From a teenage boy discovering Shakespeare for the first time to a long-married woman coping with the loss of her husband, Cook's characters are complex and nuanced, reminding us of what it is to love.

What is so compelling about *Marrying Kind* is the lens through which Cook forces the reader to examine a character's actions. In the story "Barbarians," the narrator watches a drama of irreparable proportions unfold before her. The reader experiences characters collide with or embrace the confines of their lives. A young boy is helpless in the face of his mother's impending and life-altering conflict with his stepfather. A prematurely grieving husband turns away from his former fiancé and their child and then makes the same mistake with his dying wife. "I am already on the road," he says, "a one-way street, heading away." The collection blurs the lines between what devastates us and what keeps us whole.

In *Marrying Kind*, place exists not just as the setting of a honeymoon, or the exotic refuge from a former life, or a stroll through campus, but with real stakes in the world of story. With landscapes ranging from Las Vegas to Florida to West Virginia, Cook invites the reader to imagine place as a defining extension of character. A married couple tries their luck and their love in Vegas.

An economically devastated professor battles a fish on the Florida Coast. A dean experiences place as a psychological movement from the high desert of Arizona to the cold and green country of West Virginia.

Marrying Kind also enters into a particular conversation about masculinity and how it influences relationships. For Cook, masculinity is as complex and nuanced as our current political atmosphere, including the pressures of male relationships with women, male egos, their careers, and the places they inhabit.

Ultimately, through his stories, Cook reveals what is universal about the human experience: the intellectual passions, the shape-shifting natures of families and couples, the hope-filled prospects of a future just beyond the horizon. As one of Cook's characters puts it, "I want us to move in the world like we own it." *Marrying Kind* is an elegant portrayal of that yearning, one that leaves the reader filled with empathy and self-reflection, the great feat of all worthwhile fiction.

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