



Tales of the Foreign Service: Life on the Edge

Jack Tucker

CreateSpace (May 26, 2016)

Softcover \$20.00 (294pp)

978-1-5331-8806-9

These stories bring to life a world that most will never see, where native populations, eccentrics, inveterate drifters, entrepreneurs, and foreign service workers meet.

Nine memorable short stories set in locales ranging from Washington, DC, to Azerbaijan make for an enjoyable read in Jack Tucker's *Tales of the Foreign Service: Life on the Edge*.

Tucker, a former member of the vast US foreign service network, bills the stories as fiction, inspired by the people he knew, or knew of, while serving in a variety of overseas postings. Affairs of the heart form the core of each story, and a blend of exotic settings and everyday desires proves to be both addictive and highly accessible.

The book's narrator, whose name and curriculum vitae match the author's, is the unifying voice that relates each story. Within the stories, he functions as a minor player at most, sometimes merely the recipient of someone else's story. Brief and distinctive character sketches allow for a wide range of personalities, all of whom hold attention.

The narrator's perspective is detached and keen, and his dispassionate observations make him the perfect Scheherazade for these tales of love and passion gone wrong, or more rarely right. While all of the stories revolve around themes of love and passion, the material never seems thin or repetitious.

Some stories are classic heartbreakers, such as that of the Christian and Muslim lovers in "Lost in the Caucasus," while others could be subtitled "Expats Behaving Badly." "Saving Tommy Hacker" traces the unlikely romance between a prudish aid worker and a notorious bad boy, while an abandoned mistress who refuses to be cast aside blossoms, Pygmalion-like, into a sophisticated wife and distaff diplomat in "Dominican Dilemma."

Compact, vivid writing brings locations from El Salvador, Melbourne, Washington, Egypt, Santo Domingo, Azerbaijan, Baghdad, Riyadh, and the old Soviet Union to life. Well-chosen atmospheric details and just enough references to well-known events give the book a behind-the-scenes feel.

Local support staff, national and international businessmen, and a vast floating community of expats from just about everywhere are represented. While active members of staff in far-flung embassies and consulates seldom figure into the core stories, their presence is felt throughout. The actual business of foreign service is realistically portrayed as a blend of bureaucratic processes to be endured and sensitive public relations to be managed with care.

Tucker brings to life a world that most will never see, where native populations, eccentrics, inveterate drifters, entrepreneurs, and foreign service workers meet on a face-to-face level. Fans of travel adventure, the novels of Graham Greene, and contemporary world events will find *Tales of the Foreign Service* well worth their time.

SUSAN WAGGONER (August 17, 2016)

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