

Robert Scotellaro, *Measuring the Distance* (San Francisco: Blue Light Press, 2012). 107 pp. ISBN 978-1-4218-8650-3

Robert Scotellaro's flashes end with a punch, the kind that takes one's breath away, be it from a joke, twist, unexpected detail, intriguing observation, blunt statement, or profound observation.

The mostly male protagonists encounter all sorts of Others, from the Snow White who does children's parties and adult shows to the Pretzel Girl from the circus whose twists one can only imagine. A noir quality gives to the stories a sense of foreboding, that no matter what the protagonist decides, they are probably doomed. The world has conspired to set the most unexpected tests, and the compression of the short-short form adds to the sense of confinement. But the imposition of external forces creates 'dreams so big they could buckle the walls', 'heads ablaze with drama'; and part of what makes this collection so pleasurable and painful to read is the sense that an escape is not really an escape.

Measuring the Distance contains sixty-one stories that, in length, only reach a page or so, but they still pack a wallop. The encounters – such as finding Jesus in the middle of the road, or a pile of discarded, rotten Jack-O-Lanterns – consistently have a sense of the unfamiliar. However, the desires that arise out of the carnival-like atmosphere feel archetypal. They are instantly recognizable: the desire for something, anything, other than what Fate has dealt out.

These are flashes that burn for a long time afterwards. Like the girl attached to a bicycle being ridden across a tightrope, far from anything that can save her if she should lose her grip, the characters hang on, as tight as they can, for as long as they can.

And encountering them at their most interesting and challenged moments, we hang on too, right there with them.

Randall Brown

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