

A Thousand Distant Radios

Woody Skinner

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In his short story collection, *A Thousand Distant Radios*, Woody Skinner showcases a deft sense of humor, a distinctive voice, and clever, imaginative premises.

"The Knife Salesman" is a superb piece of absurd comedy. The narrator begins the story talking about a seemingly mundane life leading training workshops for students looking for side jobs selling knives. As the story escalates, he becomes a knife-wielding celebrity, a cross between a rock star and motivational speaker who draws huge crowds, inspires stabbings by his fans, and begins plying his knife skills in overly elaborate displays of blood sport. The material may be dark, but Skinner's deadpan delivery keeps it funny.

For its comedic premise, "Atlantic Blue" is surprising in its earned emotions. A couple prepares for the birth of their first child; their doctor tells them, "Your baby is a fish." Skinner keeps the realism in his magic realism: the characters do their best to prep for an aquatic child, trying to find the best paint color and best bedroom equipment. Playing the familiar beats of pending parenthood against a seemingly silly circumstance, Skinner creates something weird and wonderful.

"Preferred Signals, 1985" flashes back to the early days of satellite television "in a place where cable didn't exist," with the life of the narrator's father told through the different channels he watched and their contents. "Weight" is a short piece about a girl's first sexual experience on her sixteenth birthday, a second-person telling of expectation and underwhelming result.

"The Wavering Grass" is told from the perspective of a cow, and is about her encounter with a bull and the resulting pregnancy. The cow's memories of the farmer imprint in her mind and drive unexpected action against him; they set the story apart.

For its variety of stories and clever, accessible prose, *A Thousand Distant Radios* truly stands out.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Debut Fiction 2017)

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