

The Problem with Relativity: Short Stories by John Sokol



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review by Irene Koronas

“...That was the only time I ever heard him really say it and maybe the only time I’ve ever known what it really meant and certainly the first time I ever saw how hard a man has to fall and how many people he has to take with him before he’s able to spit it out.”

Sokol drags us into his short stories, skeptical, unyielding, we come to accept the stories as our own. Usually, I review poetry books, and whether this book was given to me by mistake or has a purpose, there is no regret on my part. The characters jump at me, reveal their familiar presence. The battle worn, the inter-generational, the educated fall, the feisty reverses, and the pull:

“...Newton I recall, thought that space was spread-out, flat therefore universal. The post office, however, seems to have proven lately that space is relative. They’re holding a letter from Caroline in their space instead of sending it to my space. I haven’t seen Caroline at the university lately because she took her senior class to Washington for some literary reason. She promised she would write. She promised...”

Most of the characters are resolving, are trying to come to a resolution about a particular circumstance in their relationship with others and with self. Both are intertwined even when denial rides a plastic horse like premonition, like a child being abused:

“...Did you hear me, you little shit? Get outta that goddamn tree!”
He says the same thing, every time. I don’t answer. I just look him in the eyes and shake my head no. that always makes him even madder, so I expect i’ll be up here for a while, until he passes out, or until he storms out of the house, gets in that brown beater he calls a car, and goes to the bar until two in the morning...”

Every short story in this book is a haiku, it drifts along the shore, and the reader paddles in the direction the story sets. We end-up floating on images, startled by the sentences, we remain engrossed in conclusions; our minds raptured by the pull, the theft of being left with a short story:

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“ Horrible distrust developed in our family after that, and not all the hostility was directed toward me. Everyone was suspicious of everyone else. I swore on a stack of bibles that I hadn’t taken the camera and Marie said nothing at all. Mrs. Cuzman continued to call occasionally to ask if anyone knew anything more about the missing camera...”

A perfect book to carry with you when you go on vacation or have to wait in a waiting room. The stories will help the time pass and will lend a profound view from the authors perspective. A perfect book for those dark winter rooms, or on an autumn night when moonshine waftsthrough the windows. A perfect must read during any season:

“...When I try to figure out a way to resolve the inherent problems between Joanna and myself, I remember the main doctrine I took away from my readings of Hegel, that guy who maintained that all human relationships are based on a master/slave component, however blatant or subtle, however nefarious or overt. Each party assumes the role for which they are most naturally inclined, or they are subsumed into the role they play by the stronger will of the other. I often wonder if relationships of even the most equitable sort disintegrate if the initially accepted equation varies even a tad...”