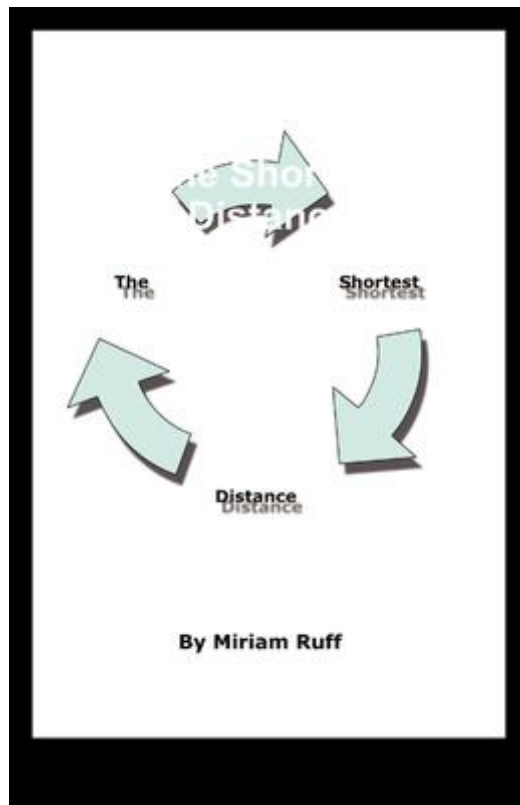


The Shortest Distance - Miriam Ruff



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“The Shortest Distance” is a compilation of stories that represents a bit of a departure from my previous publications, not so much in tone or content as in presentation. The pieces are not exactly poetry, nor are they standard prose; they’re certainly not screenplays, but nor are they essays. They can probably best be called a variation on the classic short story -- while they incorporate that format’s required beginning, middle, and end, they reside in a focused moment, rather than the movement of time. The book’s first section contains what I call “ultrashorts.” If you’ve never heard the term, you’re not alone. It’s a fairly new form, and, to be honest, I haven’t seen much of it done by anyone else; as a result, I’m pretty much making up the rules for it as I go along. The purpose of the ultrashort is to convey an entire story with as few words as possible; I chose

quite arbitrarily -- 150 words or fewer. While it might seem that the small figure would make it easier for a writer to quickly jot off a story or two, that's not the case. When you are limited in the number of words, you do not have the luxury of writing full descriptions. You have to choose each word, each phrase, with care, making sure every part contributes effectively to the story as a whole. And even if you particularly like the way you described something, and you desperately want to keep it, if it doesn't fit your purpose or it doesn't advance the story, it has to go. Brevity demands a sense of ruthlessness. The book's second section contains two pieces that form a bridge between the ultrashort you've seen before and the "mini" format you'll see later. The story I chose for this purpose is called "Trapped in Amber." I wrote it first as an ultrashort; then I wrote it as a slightly longer piece, to see what would happen if I had a few more words at my disposal. I have presented both versions here. Is one form better than the other? Can the stories achieve the same result with their different scales? Only the reader can determine that, and I leave it for you to discover for yourself. The book's third section contains "mini" short stories. Slightly longer than the second version of "Trapped in Amber," these stories fall somewhere between 400 and 600 words. The longer length allows for more detail, but not much more, especially when you consider that the average magazine short story contains about 7,000 words! That means writers still need to be extremely frugal with their descriptions. One note about this section: Many of these mini stories were written when I worked for the ARISE Foundation, an organization that deals with incarcerated youth, specifically in the areas of anger and anger management. As a result, you may see a more of a connection between the stories in this section than to or with those in the rest of the book. As always, I love to get feedback from my readers, so feel free to speak up. It's okay if you need to read things several times before you can comment; sometimes in a first glance we miss the details we find on a second pass. Cheers, Miriam Ruff

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