

Fraser Sutherland

Patricia

His fists sank thumping into the heavy bag: a sack he'd filled with sawdust and hung up out in the woodshed because he wanted to get into condition. When he finished his workout he looked at himself in the mirror. He liked the look of hard muscles on his body, the shining sweat.

He liked to look at Patricia, too. She was fourteen, and her hair was black, all the blacker for the glints of brown you could sometimes see in the light. She had clear skin and always a slight flush beneath her cheekbones, nothing to do with the Avon lady. Her lips were red and full, but just a little too soft. At fourteen she was an appealing thing, as if she were growing fast while her stomach stayed flat. Her hips were slight and the bones of her wrists and ankles small. She worked hard in school.

15 He watched Patricia — no one ever called her Pat — as she changed day by day, the whole of her, starting him each time he looked. He was changing, too, and his voice often surprised him. She lived next door and he came to see her quite a lot. They would play cards or play catch with a rubber ball out in the yard. Once, when they were playing Auction 45's in the living room he was in a funny mood and put a card right down on her knee as she sat close to him. "Don't impose," she said, and he took the card away.

One Saturday he came around to her house. Her father 25 let him in. Patricia and her mother would soon be home from the hair-dresser's, though. That was all right. A few minutes later the door opened and Patricia walked in, her hair done up in a high Italian style. He gasped because she was so beautiful, so unassailably beautiful. The sweat beaded on his forehead, 30 and he retreated soon afterwards. She was too beautiful for him to stay.

There was going to be a spring dance down at the school and he thought a lot about asking her to go. One day a few

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weeks before the dance he spent an hour talking with her about a number of things which didn't matter at all. 35
"Would you like to go to the dance with me?" he said finally.

She started to talk about something else. Then he felt flustered, and ruffled, and bothered, by this ploy or stratagem or whatever it was. He broke in to say, "What about the dance?" 40

He wanted an answer.

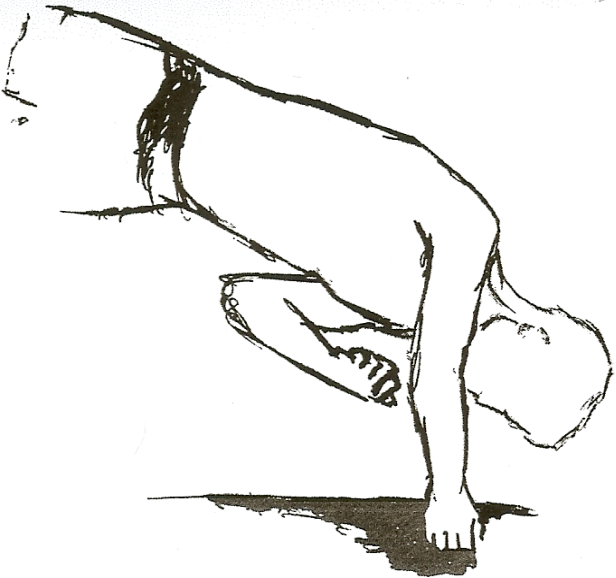
Blushing, as though there were no other way of doing it, she said, "If I go with anyone, it won't be with you."

"I see," he said, and left soon after.

He went to the woodshed to punch his sack of sawdust. 45 He didn't go to the dance, and neither did she. The final exams were very close and she, too, had a lot of work to do.

(498 w)

1974



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What is a Short Story?

Joseph Bruchac

The Ship

I was a small boy. We were on board a steamship on a resort lake. As we went by the shore the captain would announce to the passengers details about the cottages on the banks.

"This is the estate," squawked the loudspeaker, "of the owner of the Algonquin Motor Lodge." A hugely windowed mansion with great pillars.

From the docks and the steps of bathouses people waved as we passed.

"This is the summer home of the President of the Albany Savings Bank."

I lifted my small arm and waved back.

"This is the summer home of . . ."

"You notice they don't tell where the poor people live," said a man wearing a worn blue shirt to the woman and child behind him. I noticed the woman's clothing was out of date and uncomfortable looking. I noticed the woman's hair was thinning and her face seemed to be worn thin like sandstone by wind. Then I noticed she was my mother.

I kept waving at the people on beaches and on floats, in boats and in the water. Then a little girl went by in a huge power boat driven by a man whom I knew must be her father. I waved . . . but she didn't wave back.

I looked up at my mother. "Little girl didn't wave."

"She didn't see you."

"But I waved to her. Why can't she . . ." My mother interrupted my words with a weary wave of her hand.

"Look around you!" she said.

I looked. The boat was full of mothers and children. They leaned over rails and dangled through portholes. All around were children my age, younger, older, in varying degrees of happiness and sorrow, good clothing and bad, clean faces and dirty. And each of them was waving, thinking the returned wave from the shore was for themselves alone.

(303 w)

1972/73

A Short Story Recipe

What are the typical features of a short-story? Collect your ideas in your group and produce a 'text-recipe' for writing a short story. What ingredients do you need? **How do you use and combine them** to create a successful short story?

Ace your next Short Story

No Soaps, Please!

Tips for writing a short-story

- **Little 'action':** Most of the best short stories include very little 'action'. They concentrate upon what happens in **a few days, hours, or even minutes** and **focus on the experience** of one or two people. Don't tell people's life stories.
- **Be truthful:** The reader must believe what you're telling him/her. Avoid exotic events and dramatic developments. Start with everyday experiences – if possible with an experience you have had yourself. Change little details as you need them.
- **Describe your main character(s) vividly.** Bring them on by showing rather than telling how they feel about certain things. Show how they walk, talk and dress. Think about the way they behave in typical ways (e.g. fidgeting, striding up and down, pacing up and down, chewing gum, humming contently...) Do they speak in full sentences or are they using short, abrupt phrases? Do they use slang or formal language? Give your characters fitting names.
- **Describe the setting:** Create a sense of time and place. Decide on the time of year, the weather and think how these affect your place. Use colors, sounds or even subtle smells to create a multidimensional, plausible background for your story. You can easily add 'color' by using brand-names (e.g. He jumped into his Porsche or on his brand-new KTM mountain-bike...), place-names (towns, streets, shops...).
- **What is the problem:** Before you start writing you **MUST** know the basic problem that your character is going to have. The problem will be more realistic if it is a small, everyday problem that your readers will be able to identify with. (e.g. feeling left out, feeling embarrassed...)
- **Short, sharp, ending: What does your character learn?** This is called the 'epiphany' of the story. The epiphany can be a very small, seemingly unimportant moment of insight. Don't exaggerate-- your character needn't change the world in a day. Don't spoil your story with a cliché or a sensational ending.