

500 Words or Less

by DJ Young

Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it and gnaw it still.

- Henry David Thoreau

The protagonist is doing something in order to attract your interest. He or she may or may not have a problem with someone else. Some one else may or may not be the protagonist's spouse or partner or mother-in-law. A dilemma is revealed. There is a complication that will lead to an ironic ending. Not that you know this. Yet.

A new character is introduced, someone with whom the protagonist shares a secret or a history or a secret history. The new character has information that will enlighten you, the reader, as to the ulterior motives of the protagonist (if any actually exist). A random meeting between the protagonist and new character results in either an ultimatum, revelation or comic mishap. A plot twist is revealed.

The personal stakes for the protagonist are laid out, in order of importance. An alternate outcome is hinted at, but given the lateness of the idea, is unlikely to succeed. A change of scene gives us a brief respite from the growing tension, though this is cut short due to an unforeseen meeting between the protagonist and his/her spouse/partner/mother-in-law, which results in an increase in the protagonist's blood pressure/heart rate/stress level (the physical symptoms of which are given in tactful detail).

The narrator makes a quasi-philosophical aside in order to better tie up all the loose themes of the story into one convenient (and oddly touching but unsentimental) metaphor.

Knowing the end is near, the protagonist makes various announcements or commentary to influence the passage of time, in order to fill the required word count. The spouse/partner/mother-in-law makes a confession or reveals a truth the protagonist was unaware of, a plot point that changes everything the protagonist was planning to do or how he or she feels about the events that have occurred. There is a new understanding that either heals damage done or adds to it. The result will be ongoing trauma or a release of it, depending on the intentions of the author and his or her personal involvement with the composed material.

The end itself will be little more than a flat summation of what has already occurred, minus the levity. A brief commentary on the uselessness of endings will be treated as a Great Insight and the final resolution leaves open the possibility of a sequel.

The reader will either ponder the distinctions of the story and be entranced by them, or move on with mostly indifference.

Fortunately, the story was free.

