

Joe Bruner
Fiction Workshop III
Workshop Submission III
Workshopped 11/19/2015

*So this time I decided to do a couple super short pieces. This is modeled more after the flash fiction style of writing. There are two stories, they're both complete, and this is intended to be all that you get in each story. Is it enough? Does it work? Are there some (or both/none) that feel like that need to be longer stories? And of course, anything else too.

Just a Good Scout

Noah stood at the window staring out at the dark, wintry night. Snow was falling fast and furious in the hollow florescent light from the lamp post. He was worried that the roads would be too slick with slush and ice to try to make it back home. It was a worrisome predicament, especially since he didn't even want to be here.

He had never asked to be here. This particular night he was looking out the window of his town's local LDS Church. It was the location that the regional Boy Scout district used to hold Eagle Scout Board of Reviews. Basically the group of three men, strangers whom he had never met before, presently deciding whether or not he would earn his Eagle Scout rank. Of course, he already knew the answer: no.

Noah thought about everything that had led him to this point: the adventure, the friendship, the kiss, wondering if he regretted any of it. He wasn't proud of much of it, he had made many mistakes and crossed several serious lines, but would he choose to do any of it differently if he could get a second chance? After all, he had never wanted his Eagle rank.

His older sister, Sarah, had been his role model. She had been the one to teach him how to kayak, had encouraged him to go rock climbing and rappelling for the first time, and even had volunteered to go sky diving if he agreed to join her. It was difficult for Noah to express just how much he loved his sister, usually crediting her with being the reason he could step into the

unknown with unquestioning (and stupid) bravery. She had helped him achieve goals he was proud of, but then he had cried every night for two weeks after she went to college last year, and felt suitably embarrassed (or so he felt) after that.

As the snow outside thickened and became a thick, white sheet falling heavily and snugly over the houses and streets, he thought about Gabriel, who must be waiting anxiously by his fireplace for the Eagle rank verdict.

Noah had never wanted a boyfriend. But Gabriel, who refused to be called anything but Gabriel, stuck by him, no matter how hard Noah had tried to shake him. This amused him to no end. It's not that Gabriel was desperate... no, it was more like he was a bee that will keep coming back for honey, no matter how hard you try to swat it away. No. More like a fly that keeps coming back to decomposing beef. That seemed more appropriate.

Noah loved Gabriel more than almost anything in the world, even almost more than Sarah. Gabriel had been there to rescue him when his kayaked got stuck in a flip that had almost ended very badly. He had been there for him when Sarah had left for college. He was the one, even, who had convinced him they should come out for their Eagle rank reviews.

Suddenly a noise from back in the room startled Noah, and brought him back to the reality of excruciatingly waiting in the lobby for the inevitable decision. But it wasn't his committee emerging. It was the other Scout's, Jake or something like that. Jake was in a different troop in the district, but he recognized him from school. He was a flute player, or so Noah thought. It sounded familiar at least. He was kind of cute, and Noah wondered if there were any other flutes he played, perhaps more the kind you would find under the bedsheets. But he shook the thought from his head. He couldn't tell what the committee was saying to him, but the answer was evident by the grin that broke out on his face. It made him look like a cute young

boy, not a near-legal adult, Noah thought. He turned away, but not before catching the thumbs up gesture from Jake at him, obviously signifying good luck.

Noah stared back out the window. The storm was rapidly slowing down, the snowfall already back to a gentle, if steady, stream from the sky. Jake's gesture stuck in his mind. It had been very similar to the first memory he had of Gabriel.

It had been a warm, sunny afternoon in late April. The Troop had decided to do a high ropes course, and he was getting harnessed into a zip line. He felt confident, proud even, as he could show off some of his experience with Sarah. He saw the guys down below, and just before he confidently soared down, he saw Gabriel, one of the new guys, grin and give a double thumbs up.

Later that night, around the dying embers of the campfire, after everyone else had gone to bed, they shared their first kiss. And it had kind of taken off from there. Embarrassed by the secret he was now keeping, he had never wanted a boyfriend, at least not from his first kiss.

Outside, the storm had come to a complete standstill. The snow, fresh and powdery, sat completely stiff, sparkling in the cold, harsh street light. There wasn't a puff of air, though the world looked tense, waiting for that single gust to come in and shake everything around, like the inside of a snow globe let loose.

Finally, Noah heard the other door open, turned, and crossed the room to greet his committee. His Scoutmaster emerged with them, looking very agitated.

"Hi Noah," the silvered hair man, who had sat in the middle said. He didn't look terribly excited. "I regret to have to tell you, that because you disclosed your sexual orientation with us, and that your orientation is at odds with the Scouting policy, we have decided to not grant you the rank of Eagle."

Noah's mouth was dry, but he managed to speak. "It's ok. I appreciate the consideration. I never really wanted to be an Eagle Scout, honestly. I didn't want to be the best. I just wanted to be a good adventurer, a good friend, a good Scout." He shook the man's hand and walked away, feeling proud of himself.

The Boy Scouts are for Fags

There's this guy in our Troop, Nathan, who drives me absolutely fucking insane. I mean, can you say sissy? I mean, everything from the way he walks, to the way he gestures his hands annoys the hell out of me. What irritates me the most, however, is his voice. It's so high-pitched and weak, just like the way he flops his wrists. Whenever I have to listen to him talk, it's like the whine of a gnat in your ear that just never goes away.

There are moments where I feel kinda bad for him though. Often times as we're heading to sleep, and of course no one wants to tent with him. No one wants to sleep next to the faggot. And watching him walk on his own off to the side of the campsite always tugs something in me, but then Cameron and my other buddies all laugh it off, and I forget about it.

Weekly meetings aren't as bad, though we still treat him rough. But God Damn It! Can't he just walk like a man and talk like a man? I mean, couldn't he at least try to not be so whiny and flop his hands around so much?

This evening I'm feeling particularly aggressive. I just got out of soccer practice – not an overly masculine sport, but one that still gives me credibility – and our whole team left bent out of shape. I have a couple scrapes on my knees and elbows I'm nursing, and I wince every time I set my arms down on the table. I'm trying to review my Communications merit badge stuff real quick before the meeting starts. When Nathan approaches me, I ignore him, but I'm half-concentrating on him from the corner of my eye.

“H-hey, uh, Christian?”

“What faggot?” I snap at him, losing more control of my emotions than I had intended.

He quickly blushes and falls into a verbal heap of stuttering and his voice dropping to about the tenth of its volume.

I sigh, trying to sound both tired and annoyed at the same time. I close my book, using my pen to bookmark the page. “What is it Nathan? Spit it out.”

“I-I was h-h-h-hoping y-you might b-b-be able t-t-t-to help m-me out, t-t-teaching me... the bowline knot.” He spits out the last three words in one big rush, hoping maybe that I might forget he stuttered through the whole last sentence? I don’t know.

I too lower my voice, and I glance to make sure no Scoutmasters are in earshot. “Shit man, you gotta work on that stutter. It doesn’t help anything for you.” Again, he blushes, which for some reason annoys the hell out of me. He spends most of his time blushing. But knots were my specialty, and I thought I could teach him quickly. I stare around the room a second time to make sure none of my other friends are watching. “Sure, I can help you.”

I’m surprised as I sit with him, he picks up on the knot pretty quickly. Once he learns it the first time, he can do it several times with guidance and then has memorized it. He explains to me that he often learns this stuff quickly, but it’s hard for him between his disapproving parents and disapproving Scout friends to find those who are willing to help him.

I glance over at my book. I’m tempted to ask him what work he’s done for Communications and the five-minute speech we’re supposed to be writing, but in that moment Cameron’s voice cut through the room.

“Hey, you’re not helping that sissy are you?”

* * *

There’s this unspoken rule at school that we don’t talk about Scouts. We don’t let others know we’re involved. I’ve always wondered why a little bit, because I’ve always considered making fires and owning knives before anyone else a very masculine thing. I love showing off my knife collection.

The next day after this meeting, I pass by Nathan who glances at me. The moment I look over at him however, he lowers his gaze and speeds away obviously terrified. A part of me feels bad, something about last night made me think perhaps he wasn't so bad. I round the corner when I hear it.

There's a loud crash of someone slamming against the locker, followed by the clutter of notebooks and paper falling to the floor. This is a daily routine, and for a second I think nothing of it. Then I think about the night before, and realize I actually want to say something.

I rush back around the corner and see Cameron and a couple others ganging up on him, grabbing his stuff and shoving him around. I went for Cameron first and pulled him off.

"What the fuck man?" He says, confusion mixing into his expression when he realizes it was me. The others quickly stop once they realize Cameron was out. Cameron puffs up his chest and bulks up his size trying to get into my face. It's a move I've seen many, many times, but it's a new experience being directed towards me.

"Enough," I say, not smiling, not moving. "We do that to him every day. Give him a break. He hasn't done anything to you."

Cameron's expression goes slack. It would have been incredibly funny if I weren't afraid of about to be lashed. And so the lashing comes. "So what, are you a fag too?"

I'm prepared for a comment like that one, but it still stings. I wince, but keep staring Cameron down. "Dude, you've known me for years. You know I'm not queer. Why the fuck are you saying this to me?"

"Why the fuck are you defending that sissy?" He gestures down to Nathan on the floor, sniffling.

“I’m not defending him,” I say, fully aware of the ridiculousness of my statement. “I’m just saying lay off him. For one day.” I give him and the other guys a reproachful glare. We had attracted quite a crowd, but I don’t care. They part ways as I head out. “Come on, get up,” I say to Nathan, and we leave together.

“It’s because you’re a fucking Boy Scout, isn’t it? You’ve become a fucking goody two-shoes.” Cameron’s voice slashes through the space between us, driving a cold wedge into my heart. “Yeah, he’s a Boy Scout, and wears a uniform and badges,” he says to the crowd. He keeps going, generating laughter eventually.

I just stare at him, and then at Nathan. I see the hurt in his eyes, but I wonder how much of that is just me reflecting back at myself.