

**SHORT STORY-  
WRITING: AN ART  
OR A TRADE?**

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Short Story-Writing: An Art or a Trade? by N. Bryllion Fagin

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# SHORT STORY-WRITING

*An Art or a Trade?*

*by*

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## CHAPTER I

### OVERTURE

Moods may be uncomfortable, and sad, and painfully disturbing, but, on the other hand, they make pleasant music occasionally. Here I sit in the dusk, looking out into the street that is ordinarily so familiar to me, but has suddenly become blurred and weirdly mysterious in the gathering murk. A veil is over my eyes, which see the familiar houses across the street, the young poplars in front of them, the few passers-by. But my mind does not discern these objects; it sees far subtler things—floating, flimsy, evanescent. The dusk is in my mind, evoking thoughts, illusions, pictures—and speaking, questioning, singing. The dusk is an overture to the things I have set out to say, playing innumerable variations of my theme, whispering in every note: "Stories, Stories, Stories!"

There are so many stories afloat in the world! Every door and window and curtain and shade has a story to tell; every clod and tree and leaf; and every pebble of a human being washed by the waves of life. And how many of these stories have I helped to be told? And how many have I helped

to be maimed, mutilated of soul? Yes, and how many have I helped to kill?

For I have been teaching, for a number of years, the "Technique of Short Story-Writing," and my guidance and judgment have meant life and death to countless stories born in the breasts and minds of trustful people. I have been the great discourager and encourager of genius and quasi-genius, and I know my hands are not without stain of literary blood.

I am not reproaching myself. Among the many hundreds of men and women who derive their daily bread and clothes and gasoline by directing the story-fancy of the country's million or more literary aspirants, I class myself among the most conscientious and least harmful. The share of injury I may have contributed has simply been the unavoidable accompaniment of being engaged in a profession grounded upon the popular belief that literature is a trade, like plumbing, or tailoring, or hod-carrying, and requires but an understanding of the stupendous emoluments involved and a will to learn. That it is in the interests of the profession to foster and perpetuate this popular belief needs no elaborate substantiation. But that the belief itself should be based on a measure of solid truth is a sardonic phenomenon calling for enlightening discussion.

Professor Arlo Bates in one of his talks on