

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

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Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

The Most Hateful Words Ever Heard in this Room

M. Stanley Bubien

“**I** feel so much hate in this room!” [8]

Thanks to Bob Siegel.

Je Ne Sais Pas Pourquoi

David N. FitzSimons

Brigitte Bardot flew into Scotland to save a dog's life. Elsewhere millions died, but not dogs. [16]

Giving the Seedlings a Hand

Hong-Ming Lu

A man of the state of Song was worried about his seedlings growing too slowly. He pulled up the seedlings one by one and came home exhausted.

“I am tired out today. I helped the seedlings to grow,” he said to his family.

His son hurried to the fields to have a look and found that all the seedlings had shrivelled up too quickly. [64]

Think Good Thoughts

M. Stanley Bubien

“**T**hink good thoughts,” she said. Sound advice, or so it seemed. I, however, had a better answer—well, “answer” wasn’t quite right—but something better to offer, surely. I simply needed do as she: speak the word before the class.

I held my peace, though. Afraid to offend? Possibly. Considering the situation? Certainly. For it was our last meeting, and the professor missed due to an illness. Unspecified illness, but requiring surgery—that much we knew. Parkinson’s disease, requiring cauterization of his cerebrum—that much I guessed.

“I won’t be here next week,” he had told us in an uncharacteristically hushed tone. “I... um...” he gazed downward, “have an operation.” His hand shook as he wiped his brow. I’m sure everyone thought it nerves. But that same shaking I saw in private conversation early-on. Nothing conclusive, but familiar with Parkinson’s, even then I assumed he suffered the disease’s ravages.

“Remember, think good thoughts!” she repeated in a fearless, inoffensive manner.

Ah, again my chance. I swallowed, licked my lips, cleared my throat, sniffed—all gestures designed to postpone speaking the most politically incorrect of words. I cleared my throat again, truly intending to say it this time.

And nothing came out.

The classroom emptied instantaneously, yet silently I remained, having made elaborate effort at collecting papers. All alone I sat, clock audibly ticking, florescent bulbs bathing me in light.

“I failed you,” I whispered, head on desk against folded hands—doing the very thing I could not say. “But, Lord, help him. Christ, please heal him...” [256]

Padre

Richard K. Weems

We have the youth gathered for evening snack (bread pudding—donated, on the verge of the inedible) when in comes Padre, and of course the whole place goes to hell, though we wouldn't go saying something like that.

Ch'kai was busy plucking raisins from the square in front of him, using his fork for only a moment when we'd remind him to, then plunging his hand right through the dollop of Cool Whip. He'd extract a custardy lump and leave it on the table, not once for once mentioning his boyz—not once that his boyz were coming to get him soon as they put their nine millies on those Rogues, not once that we better not see him or his boyz on the street after making him wash and keep shoes on his feet and keep his hands out of his food because he was Bones, he was East Coast, not once promising Adina and Tamarina their names on gold chains and phat sweats in his boyz' colors when his boyz came through, that he and his boyz better not find out what we drive (those of us who could afford a car), because he was warlord for Bones and could do what he wanted. Even if we were just trying to help, we better not cross him once his boyz came or he was going to bitch-slap us. He wasn't even thinking of throwing his unwanted raisins before Padre, collar unbuttoned as always, enters the scene and then goes and asks Ch'kai when his boyz are coming to get him, and again we have to go through Rogues macing his mother, cutting his girl Sabitha's earlobe, rolling two of his boyz for their rock.

Ch'kai's hands flying in expression. Bread pudding and Cool Whip hitting the table and Eishon and Adina and Jennifer, who keeps rocking and sucking her thumb, and our plastic dinner Jesus and Yan'Ner and Yan'Ner's baby boy, Oluwatosin, and even us occasionally, all the way against the wall.

“Ch'kai, Ch'kai, Ch'kai,” we start, but now the ruckus is up.

“We must bring the ruckus to all you mutha-effas,” Eishon raps (obeying one rule, at least: no cursing), and there's little we'll be able to do for now: Adina and Tamarina are digging in with their spoons for solid chunks for catapulting.

Padre makes his rounds, not bothering to brush at the pudding spots

clinging to him, the counter assault now underway—raisins in flight. Most of all, though, it's Padre's name bouncing around right now, though we have the feeling something more and something more serious has to be coming. It's moments like these we get scared even though we're only out to help these kids and these kids know it and treat us kindly for the most part, even Ch'kai, but still: when the ruckus is up, it doesn't take these kids too much to go too far. These kids have been pushed that far—farther—all their lives.

But there's Padre, the high school dropout who lived in the subway for a year.

There's Padre, with his rap sheet—breaking and entering, fencing stolen goods, forgery.

Padre: patting heads, squeezing shoulders and addressing everyone warmly, personally and by name like he's known them all for years, though we can rarely ever keep a kid on track more than a couple months. We wonder sometimes if Padre gets scared too, but he won't show it if he does. He's had kids rip him off, trash his house—one even stabbed him—but still he drives the van and nabs kids off the street away from their dealers and pimps and addict friends & relatives and stepfathers and mothers' boyfriends (Jennifer's made her go down on him so often she still can't look at a hot dog without screaming). Padre brings them to us, who give sanctuary—a bed, three square meals a day and an evening snack—and we get them to take showers, brush their hair, show them how to care for their babies (so many with babies), and we clean their scars, clean their scars, any scars, any way we can, but still these kids can scare us.

Padre even touches Darwin, large and dark as night and just as cold and scarred in every way possible, and Darwin nods his head so slightly it could be that he's not doing it at all and it's just us thinking just for a moment that maybe someone can get through to him.

Padre takes Oluwatosin, five months old, and smiles at him and makes him smile before giving him back to Yan'Ner and then touching Yan'Ner's four-month swollen belly lovingly.

His eyes close.

And we know what for, for it is clear and pure and as if we were doing it ourselves, and we are: sending a blessing through the mother's ugly but donated flower print dress (made, in all honesty, for someone at least thirty years older) and through her swollen flesh and womb. It is a blessing for knowl-

edge, that this child know of all the ones who have gone back to the needles & pipes and the alleyways and the cold, back to street corners, back to their gangs, their boyfriends who are still going to drink and drug and hit them and knock them up and take no responsibility for it any of it, back to old, liquor-reeking queens for maybe just a bed for the night and stale English muffins in the morning, but more likely for more smack, more rock, more blow, more crank. A blessing for this child to move beyond all that and to help lead the others up and out of where they are now, and we'll keep helping, damn it. We let Padre remind us to keep touching and blessing and feeding and giving all we got and closing our eyes and wishing hard, wishing so damn hard.

Jennifer takes her thumb out only long enough to smile, her teeth pushing outward from nineteen years of thumb-sucking, and call out, "Padre," without making eye contact, never making eye contact, but at least the smile is genuine. [1024]