

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #43 - November 1999

Table of Contents

Issue #43 - November, 1999

8 WORD STORIES

I'll See You in Hell!

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> 3
I think that's supposed to be a threat.

128 WORD STORIES

Something Beautiful

Patricia Craigen <craigen@sympatico.ca> 4
It's surprising what we see when we open our eyes.

The Wave

Patricia Craigen <craigen@sympatico.ca> 5
The ocean washes in, and it washes out.

512 WORD STORIES

Come, Share

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> 6
How large is your roof?

1024 WORD STORIES

Cut

Glynn Sharpe <tcurwen@stn.net> 8
A rapturous moment?

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

I'll See You in Hell!

M. Stanley Bubien

And next thing I know, there he is! [8]

Something Beautiful

Patricia Craigen

Seeing the old woman startles me. I stare openly at the soft aging line of her chin and at her hair, much grayer than I remember it to be. The worry lines on her brow deepen. I want to reach out to smooth them away. Then I see a smile that accentuates the laugh lines around her mouth. The stories of a full life are written all over her face.

A man enters the picture. He stands behind the woman's chair, leans down and puts his arms around her, kissing her hair. His hands are heavily veined and wrinkled but I can feel their strength. I place my hands on his.

As I study the reflection of my husband's face, our eyes meet, and I see something beautiful. [128]

The Wave

Patricia Craigen

Silhouetted against the pre-dawn sky, she haunts the sand. When she reaches out, the ocean responds, caressing her as she moves into its touch. She bows her head, chin to chest. Her arms fall to her sides as she sinks to her knees, one motion.

I watch, brittle and expectant.

And then she rises, effortless, lifted by light. Her body finds a tidal rhythm as she dances with early morning breezes.

I wait for her to turn, to see me.

As the first sun of the new year breaks the surface of the ocean, she turns and waves. I step forward, then stumble, startled by shattering shells beneath my feet.

When I look up, she is waltzing down the beach, her footprints washing away in the outgoing tide. [128]

Come, Share

M. Stanley Bubien

First I will speak of good times, then the bad, though, most certainly, they stand so closely together.

After my wedding, when my fiancée became my husband, we celebrated. I invited family and friends into my house, and in my joy I said, “Come, share with me!” And they danced in circles upon the living room floor, splashing champagne glasses together with songs for the occasion.

The twins were born later, son and daughter. My husband cradled them, one in each arm, and it lit my eyes like the sun. Family and friends visited. I waved them to my bedside, “Come, share in the miracle of life!” And the same light shown in their eyes as they gazed within the bassonettes.

Through the years, we celebrated more mundane milestones. We called it the “family room,” and never did that seem more appropriate than the Christmas when my daughter cried in my voice, “come, share!” to the friends who had no family of their own on this blessed day. And, lest I forget, the Thanksgiving where the turkey barely fit into the oven, yet barely fed those we loved as they gathered at our table—certainly my son attending with a flock of football players did little to alleviate the situation!

Later, much later—yes, it took twenty-five years to learn why it was a “silver” anniversary. Shoulder to shoulder family and friends stood, as my husband and I grasped a single goblet, lifting it with the cry of “thank you for coming, thank you for sharing.” And though beneath our covered porch, still the sun reflected off the aged heads of these loved ones, and their hair streaked with the color of that precious metal.

Oh, but in that time it all seemed to go to pieces. Not once, but so often—and we picked them up, those fragments we called our lives. Yet it is certainly the first that I remember. No, not the reason for the pain, and not the cause of the sorrow—that has slipped by-the-by. I recall, instead, the family, the friends, in their offer of aid. And I put my foot down. “Go! What happens under this roof, stays under this roof.” Thus, I dismissed them, knowing my self-sufficiency in enduring a pain that was entirely my own.

Yet they did not heed, and did not go, instead coming closer still, all the

while more entering from the threshold. Within the living room that had once been a dance floor, they stood still. In the family room that gave comfort to the lonely on Christmas, they gathered. Within the coolly silent kitchen, and upon the empty table, they leaned like weary travellers. And still more, undaunted by my dismissal, until family and friends brimmed into the bedroom, poured onto the patio.

“My house! My house!” I cried. “You cannot fit!”

But as a chorus, those whom I loved, still seeking entrance under my roof, replied to my painful time, “But you invited us.”

And one-by-one, they offered embrace, like my husband had in cradling our children. [512]

Cut

Glynn Sharpe

I'm not sure whether it was the purr of the soft music or the swirling lights that woke me up, but wake me up it did. I quickly opened my eyes, my head still glued to the pillow, and let my waking mind decide for certain whether or not I was dreaming. I wasn't. Sitting up on my elbows, liquid light streaming through the closed blinds and exotic music oozing into my ears, I looked towards my sleeping wife for any signs of stirring. She slept on, unmoving and slack jawed. It hit me suddenly, like an unexpected bomb blast. Excitement and instant understanding grabbed me by my shoulders and shook me from my lethargy. It was time! Finally, the waiting and the unquestioning loyalty was to be rewarded. Years of emptiness and longing were roughly shoved aside in a heart beat.

I slipped out of the bed as quietly as I could and inched my way towards the window. I tentatively pulled the middle blind open an inch and was stunned by a shooting curl of coloured light that struck my forehead like a warm punch. The music around me raged and became almost deafening. I wasn't sure what to do with my hands, shield my eyes or cover my ears. They remained steadfast at my side, neither willing or able to move. I needed to settle down and relax or I was going to lose myself to hysteria. Stepping back and closing my eyes, I took a deep breath and let the light and music caress me. It rushed around me and through me like a wet breeze. A warm jolt of electricity raced through my veins and filled my being with a sense of belonging that I had never experienced before. All of life's petty fears fell from me like dead skin. The light and music urged me on. Up and out Glynn I thought, up and out. Giddy with anticipation, I tugged the blinds open with a single pull. They roared up and the room became a fish bowl of rushing colours and maniacally fragmented notes. Balls of spinning light bounced and skipped off my wife's sleeping face and then hovered there, taunting her. Still she did not move. Her breath bubbled out of her mouth and floated above her like shimmering balls of translucent lead.

The window screen was the last remaining obstacle to the freedom I had dreamed of all my life. I pulled a chair underneath the pane and steadied myself for my triumphant ascent. I heard her groan and wake up.

“What in the hell are you doing,” she whispered, her voice hoarse and dry from sleep.

“Nothing sweetie,” I said, “go back to sleep. I’m just getting some air.”

“On the fire escape?”

“Yeah, just for a minute Doc,” I replied, “I promise.” I couldn’t stifle an escaping giggle.

It was our last good bye. Looking back at her, I was seized with a sense of guilt. I was beginning to feel awful for leaving her behind but she just wasn’t a believer. Where I was going, there was no room for ugly pessimism. God knows she mocked me, and at times even laughed in my face for all that I held on to. This life and our marriage, I had explained to her, was so temporary. She just couldn’t see it our way. I shook off my shame as easily as a wet dog dries its dripping coat.

I climbed out of the window and shimmed up the fire escape to the roof. The roof was only a few feet from our bedroom window and on some nights it really was my only escape. The night sky was alive, a moving entity of dancing light was led by an orchestra of unearthly instruments and angelic voices. I stood up and took it all in. I inhaled it, ingested it and became part of it. My body swayed with the rhythm. Looking around me, I could see that I wasn’t alone. People of all shapes and sizes were standing on their roof tops as far as my eyes could see. Smiling to the point that my face hurt, I waved to them. They gestured back with unbridled enthusiasm. Believers one and all!!

I remained fixed there for a moment, intoxicated with all that I saw and felt, before I realized that I was dancing bare chested in the cold. My hands instinctively went to cover my naked midriff. Hoping to generate some heat, I clapped my hands on my arms. It wasn’t enough. My human body was beginning to freeze.

“Tracey, “ I shouted, still dancing. I could hear her feet shuffle as she stumbled to the window.

“Why are you screaming?” she whispered, unable to mask her anger. “You’ll wake up the neighbourhood.”

“Sorry sweetie. Will you be a doll and hand me out a sweatshirt please? I’m a bit cold.”

“Oh come on,” she pleaded, “come back to bed.”

“In a minute,” I said, growing impatient.

Her thin white arm shot out the window with a sweatshirt. A rainbow of

colours swarmed the cloth and clung to it like barnacles off a ships rusting hull. I bent as far as I could to grab it, but couldn't reach it.

“Could you stand on the chair by the window Babe and reach out just a bit more, please?”

“Oh for Christ's sake,” she growled.

I heard the chair squeak across the floor. Again her arm flew out the window with the shirt. It was quickly saturated with pinks and blues and greens and it hung limply from her tightly balled fist. From my knees, I grabbed my shirt and threw it over my head and shoulders and stood up, ready to get back into the groove. My eyes scanned the horizon. To my absolute horror, the lights, the music, all my brothers and sisters, were gone in the blink of an eye. A cold wind slapped my face and open mouth with an iron fist of ice. Crippled by shock and desperation, I pulled my fingers through my hair and thought to myself, oh boy, this can't be good. [1024]