

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #49 - May 2000

Table of Contents

Issue #49 - May, 2000

4 WORD STORIES

The Grand Illusion

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> 3
Maybe the grandest of them all.

64 WORD STORIES

The Love Triangle

Bennett Nathanson <ToBennett@aol.com> 4
Three points to pivot upon, but only one matters.

128 WORD STORIES

I Would Not Be Alone

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> 5
Inspired by the music of Patti Smith.

256 WORD STORIES

The Blindman

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> 6
blind • adj., 1. lacking the power to see.

Frogs Always Get You in the End

Ian Ruthven <igr@dcs.gla.ac.uk> 7
With warts at the very least.

1024 WORD STORIES

Into Deep

Virginia Muzik <gingerstarlet@hotmail.com> 8
And I'd always heard that patience was a virtue.

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

Editor

M. Stanley Bubien
<editor@storybytes.com>

Editorial Assistant

Kevin Athey
<kathey@pobox.com>

Web Site

<<http://www.storybytes.com>>

Weekly Mailing List

1 to 2 stories weekly via e-mail
<subscribe@storybytes.com>

Back Issues (HTML)

Dating From April, 1996
<[http://www.storybytes.com/
view-month/](http://www.storybytes.com/view-month/)>

Back Issues (PDF)

Dating From January, 1999
<[http://www.storybytes.com/
view-pdf/](http://www.storybytes.com/view-pdf/)>

Story Bytes, Issue #49. Reproduction of this magazine is permitted as long as it is not sold, either by itself or as part of a collection, and the entire text of the issue remains unchanged. Copyright © 2000 M. Stanley Bubien. All stories Copyright © 1999-2000 by their respective authors. For submission guidelines, or for more information about Story Bytes, send a message to <editor@storybytes.com>.

**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

The Grand Illusion

M. Stanley Bubien

“**I** am in control.” [4]

The Love Triangle

Bennett Nathanson

She rushed to the bar. He was waiting.

“I’ve left him.”

“For me?”

“For us. So we can be together.”

“For good? You left me once before.”

“He made me. But I never stopped needing you. Craving you. I’d give anything, everything for you.”

“You will,” he gurgled, as she drew him thirstily to her lips; her love on the rocks... with a twist. [64]

I Would Not Be Alone

M. Stanley Bubien

The headache won't stop. Even when I rub my temples. Ice doesn't help. Aspirin. Nothing. Thoughts of him keep intruding. Oh, If it wasn't for those words...

"You promised you'd never leave," I had whispered, grasping at his fingers as if they were straws.

"I have no choice."

"Why?"

He tried to run fingers through his hair—so golden once, now thin and stringy—it was like wind in a field of weeds. His eyes, though, still pierced to my very soul.

"Not now." I said. "Never."

"I always..." He whispered, making a futile attempt to squeeze. To hang onto life? Maybe. Or one final gesture, his last comfort. "Love you..." his breath faded.

My temples. I rubbed and rubbed. If it wasn't for those words. Oh... [128]

Inspired by "Libbie's Song" by Patti Smith.

The Blindman

M. Stanley Bubien

We rushed the doors. Like a storm. Thundered through. But the landscape, it stared back at us. Perplexed. Empty. “Yes, I have,” the old lady had answered. Just moments before; from the front row even. She creaked to her feet. But once up, stood there like a tree.

“Outside.” Smith, her name. Suitably plain. “Him, it was.”

“Aye?” Pastor O’Shanahan drawled, spiritual in a singularly Irish fashion. “Our Lord? Out there?” He pointed, anticipating a blinding thunderclap.

“Asked for some money, he did. Sure thing. Right at the entryway!”

Eyes toward the heavens, a smirk, a nod. Understanding. That was me and everyone else. Unified. Of one mind. “Blindman Joe. He’s,” I explained. “Always there before Church,” Nancy Hannon went on. “Meetings. For a handout,” Miguel Garcia Rodriguez continued.

“But he drinks it away,” Lady Smith finished. “I know.” She shrugged. “I talked to him, I did.”

“And you gave the money?” Rhetorical question. We all saw her. She and the Blindman who saw too. They stood in the entryway, after all. Had to pass them to get into the Meeting.

“Him,” she said, a tree still, yet touched by a breath of wind. She grasped at her handbag. “It was.” And in her hand, she produced the Book. Open. A specific passage. And she made to read. But everyone knew. Heard it before she started, so many times before.

And the desire. Inspiration. From such words. Sweet to the tongue. But fleeting.

We were turning, then, desperate. Of one mind. Unified. We rushed the doors. [256]

Frogs Always Get You in the End

Ian Ruthven

Once upon a time, upon a lily-pad in the middle of a sparkling pond, there lived a large, green frog.

One hot summer's day, a princess set sail across the pond. As she glided past the lily-pad, the frog raised his head and called to her.

"Kiss me," said the frog, "upon my forehead, and I will turn into a handsome prince."

"Not likely," replied the princess, wrinkling her nose, "I rule my own kingdom, I lead my own armies into battle, I make my own laws. I need no prince, handsome or otherwise. What else do you have to offer?"

"Kiss me," said the frog, "upon my forehead, and I will grant you great fortunes."

"I think not," snorted the princess. "I maintain a balanced budget with good economic growth and sensible interest rates. Your great riches will devalue my currency, send inflation soaring and cripple our exchange rates. Is that the best you have to offer?"

"Kiss me," said the frog, "upon my forehead, and I will grant you dazzling beauty."

"How very flattering," sneered the princess. "I may be plain but beauty does not last. Personality counts."

"What do you want then?" demanded the frog, used to altogether more old-fashioned princesses.

The princess thought hard, and leaned close.

"I want to be happy," she whispered, and kissed the frog upon his forehead.

"You refused love, riches, beauty, and yet you want happiness from kissing a frog! This isn't a fairy tale you know," laughed the frog, diving clean into the clear, blue pond. [256]

Into Deep

Virginia Muzik

To this day, he waits on the sand. Staring out over the waves as the white foam rolls in and tickles his toes. The water's coldness registers in a small part of his mind that isn't consumed with the memory. He could be standing on hot coals and still, he wouldn't move. Wouldn't even shift from foot to foot.

There was once a pattern to his vigil. Each day, he stood on the beach at the same time, peering across to the horizon. Watching. Searching. Waiting. At the same time every day. Six o'clock, regardless of the season.

That's what time it was when she first came to him.

Three seasons have come and gone since and as the weather cooled, he decided to vary his guard. He's been there at dawn. At noon. At midnight. He's charted the cycles of the sun and moon with his patient pattern. Shooting stars have dropped through the blackness at night. Clouds have darkened the sky and rain obscured his vision. He's even been there for a lunar eclipse. But he wouldn't know. These are superfluous.

Tomorrow, he'll go there again at night. Eleven. He might catch her then. He sighs and turns to walk away from the water, looking back, and looking back. Just in case.

"I chose you," she told him that first time. "I knew you would wait for me."

And he knew too. He would walk to the beach and stare out to the horizon until the sea became a glittering blur in the foreground. He knew he was waiting. Searching. Asking.

On a May evening she came. As the sun slipped down between the pale and deep blues, she saw him come to the shore. She watched a smile play at his lips as the waves broke gently and swirled at his feet. Her heart swelled as she prepared to meet him.

Blinking in the confusion of that twilight time, he noticed a stirring of water midway out near the island. A breeze whispered at his ear and made his skin goosepimply. He tasted the fine layer of salt left behind on his mouth as his gaze stayed fixed and he waded further into the surf. Adjusting his eyes to

the steel blue haze of early evening, he watched as the slippery vision rolled in with the next wave.

Her long golden hair swam in the shallow water and caressed his calves as she knelt in front of him with an arm stretched up. A shudder surged through his body as he took her cold hand and helped her to her feet. She came up to his shoulders, this tiny, blue-skinned sea nymph, and laughing gently at his puzzled look, she answered his silent question.

“These legs appear when I will myself to the shore. What use is a tail on land?”

He covered her nakedness with his jumper, which itched her clammy skin, and they waded onto the sand.

“Do you know that we willed this to happen?” She asked, as they sat on the sand.

He wanted to nod in agreement. Wanted to let out a self-assured “yes.” Instead, he stared out to the blackness. But he did know.

There were long silences in their togetherness. So much he wanted to say. So much she already knew. She touched his face softly and traced around his mouth with a finger. “Speak,” she beckoned without a sound.

He didn’t. Instead, he sighed and slipped an arm around her waist and drew her closer to him. They stayed this way until the moon was high in the sky. Casting his eyes now and then over her delicate form, his heart was full with something like love. His head heavy with thoughts he could not express. The silence was broken only by their breathing. Sighing.

And then she left him.

“Tomorrow, at dusk,” she said. He nodded.

The next night, he was there with a dress for her and a towel to dry her wet skin. Again, the tide rose and she swam in to him. His own heart swelled as she again stood before him. She smiled warmly, touched by his thoughtfulness, as she tried on the aqua blue gown.

“It matches my skin!” She giggled, bringing a smile to his lips too. He wrapped his arms around her and held her for an eternity, feeling her coolness fade. Soon, her skin softened into a rosy golden tone. “Please stay,” he thought.

“I’d like to show you my world,” she sighed, looking deep into his eyes. “But I wonder if you are ready.”

Startled by her frankness, he was again struck silent and returned her searching gaze. He shrugged.

“Try?” She asked.

And again, she left him.

“Tomorrow, at dusk,” she said once more.

On the third night, when the tide was highest, she came in with a wave that rattled his lanky frame. He laughed nervously as salt water sprayed his face. His feet had sunk deep into the sand and he tried to free himself as she languored invitingly in the shallow surf. For a moment, he was seized by a resistance. He stood his ground, ankle deep, against the pull of the undertow and she was drawn out deeper as the sand was dragged from around his feet with the tide. He hesitated. But when another wave brought her closer, she touched him, and he let go.

That night, he went with her to her world, where his breath didn't matter. Feeling safe in her cool embrace, the ocean welcomed him with a depth of promise and for a while he lost himself in trusting her. But the deeper they went, the dizzier he became. Dizzy with the pressure of the deep. His need to breathe returned with an urgency that frightened him and when she saw this, she let him go, seeing him safely to the surface.

She nodded as he started saying, “you answer questions I haven't yet asked.”

“When you're ready, I'll return,” she promised, with a deep sadness in her voice.

“How will I know when that is?” He asked aloud.

But she was gone. [1024]