

# Story Bytes

**Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.**

Issue #50 - June 2000

# Table of Contents

*Issue #50 - June, 2000*

## 2 WORD STORIES

### Death of a Duck Hunter

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> ..... 3  
*We all gotta go some time...*

## 8 WORD STORIES

### The Impossible

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> ..... 4  
*I've heard that life is filled with impossibilities.*

## 128 WORD STORIES

### How Did He Hear?

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> ..... 5  
*There's a saying: "He who has an ear..."*

## 256 WORD STORIES

### Putting Responsibility Where It Belongs

B.J. Lawry <bookery@centurytel.net> ..... 6  
*What a strange concept.*

### Tell Me Where It Hurts

Victoria Arico <varico@jlc.net> ..... 8  
*Is it what you say? Or how you say it?*

## 512 WORD STORIES

### Anything Was Better Than That

M. Stanley Bubien <bubien@storybytes.com> ..... 9  
*Some are born coal miner's daughters, some are coal miner's sons.*

# Story Bytes

Very Short Stories  
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better  
than sound bites.**

# Death of a Duck Hunter

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M. Stanley Bubien

“**D**uck!”  
“Where?” [2]

# The Impossible

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M. Stanley Bubien

“**L**et me give you my unbiased opinion here...” [8]

# How Did He Hear?

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M. Stanley Bubien

**Y**ou gotta admit it was crazy. This grey-haired old man sat there hacking into his clenched fist. But in his other hand—get this!—a wisp of smoke trailed skyward from a smoldering cigarette.

Hack, hack, hack...

See? Crazy. But, believe you me, the story ain't finished!

As I passed, I held my breath. Yeah, yeah. Like I was going to catch cancer from him!

Hack, hack, and more hack...

“Smokers,” I mumbled—you know I had to say something. “They get what they deserve.”

Now it turns really nuts.

Hack, ahem, *A-HEM*...

“Nonsmokers,” he replied, tapping his watch. “They get what they deserve too. Eventually.”

I turned beet-red.

But can you blame me? I mean, with all that coughing, how'd he hear me? [128]

# Putting Responsibility Where It Belongs

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B.J. Lawry

“**S**top staring at me,” I said. “I have a right to stare at you.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m protecting my integrity. I have to be careful what you put into me.”

“Oh, you and your pride.”

“Listen, I’m lovely. I’m buxom and delicate with a long, slender leg.”

“You have a flat foot.”

“That shows I have stability. More than you give me credit for.”

I got up to go to the kitchen.

“And don’t bring back that Doctor Pepper!”

I returned and flopped on the couch, glaring at the glass, which, of course, was glaring back at me. “And what am I supposed to bring back?”

“Oh...” A graceful sort of sway took place in front of my eyes. “How about a nice French champagne, perhaps several hundred years old.”

I laughed.

“Don’t you think I’m worthy?”

I laughed louder. “I bought you at Walmart, you...”

“Crystal, darling. Crystal.”

“You’re not crystal, you snob.”

“They said I was crystal.”

“They fooled you.”

I tipped the bottle and barely touched the inside with Doctor Pepper.

“Ugh!”

“You’ll like it.”

“How can I like anything so... crude!”

“Make believe you’re slumming.”

“But it... itches!”

I drank, sputtering when the fizz hit my nose.

“I told you it was bad.”

I wiped my face.

“Go back to the kitchen and see what else you can find.”

“I’d better go to the store.”

“Dom Perignon is good.”

“You drive me to drink.”

I swear that glass laughed. [256]

# Tell Me Where It Hurts

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Victoria Arico

“It started out like a meteor shower,” I said. “Only not a cool summer evening meteor shower, I mean like red balls of fire slashing through outer space, like in a comic book, with balloons coming out of the sky going ‘ZAM!’ and ‘ZOW!’”

He nodded.

“And then around midnight it was like my body was a whiskey barrel half full of icy sea water and like ten cartoony fish are sitting on the edge of the barrel, fishing. Not warm fish, I mean like fish that were frozen and now they are just thawed, you know how that is? You can touch them so long as they are running under tepid water but otherwise you would singe your fingers with frost? Okay? So anyways, these cold cartoon fish are hanging their fishing poles into the water and they have no bait, it’s just their fish hooks in the water and every now and then the barbs stab the side of the barrel and scratch themselves free again. You know what I mean?”

“So I got out of bed ‘cause I thought maybe it was gas and then all of a sudden it was like all the fish got together and wrenched their hooks into the sides of the barrel and then jumped off the other side with their fishing poles, you know?, hanging all their weight on the line, and it was like, YOW!”

He nodded again.

“Yup,” he said. “Sounds like a muscle spasm.”

It’s so nice to have a doctor who speaks English. [256]



# Anything Was Better Than That

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M. Stanley Bubien

Anything was better than that. “Any damn thing,” I said, pausing for nerve before bursting through the doors. The lift ride had been long. And I’d figured we’d be crammed together like lemmings, herded into the mine below, but it was just four of us, my Daddy included.

“No worries, boy.” The tool pusher had said, triggering the lantern on his hard-hat. “First time down’s the worse.” His light beamed across my clenched fists.

“You’ll be gettin’ used to it right soon,” my Daddy told me.

I grinned and tried to believe him, but he sounded muffled and distant. Damn!

I plugged my nose and equalized. They’d warned me, but I didn’t believe that either.

The lift whined and screeched, and we shuddered to a halt. The tool pusher swung the gate open. I dug my fingers into my hands with excitement, but instead of stiff pain stabbing my palms, I felt four soft tips. I’d cut my nails the night before on the advice of my Daddy. “That black dust gets in everything. It’s impossible to get out.”

I peered out of the lift with a nod. This deep below the surface, the air reeked of earth, and the sour taste of coal settled on the tongue. It was cold, too, but motionless, except for the gang of miners just beyond the gate, waiting for us to unload so they could return topside. They swayed, leaning upon each other as though each man alone lacked the strength to hold himself upright.

The sight made me open my hands. Black dirt clouded their faces and overalls. Their eyes, though, that’s what got me. Was it the light? I couldn’t tell. But as I searched, nothing gazed back except the purest, emptiest blackness.

“Let’s go, son.” My Daddy’s voice. He’d stepped off the lift and stood

with the others.

And I saw his eyes too.

“It’s okay.” He gestured down the tunnel. “I’ll show you the ropes. Like I promised.”

I shook my head.

He stepped forward, but I backed against the lift’s wall. “No way in hell.”

“You need this job, son.”

He was right; I did need it—High School not having been to my taste. But I refused to budge.

“C’mon out,” the tool pusher growled and grasped my wrist. “They’re waitin’ on you.”

I pulled against him, but he held fast.

My Daddy reached for me. I looked him dead in the eye. And I made my decision.

I kicked the tool pusher in the groin. When he hit the ground, I buried another boot in his ribs. That got him out of the lift. I slammed the gate and punch the button, sending the cables whining.

“I got you this job!” My Daddy hollered after me. “What’re you gonna do for work?”

That was the last I ever heard from him, but to this day, I still think of him staring upward through the darkness.

And anything was better than that.

“Any damn thing,” I growled and burst through the doors, rushing the nearest teller with shotgun raised. [512]

*Thanks to Johnny Cash.*