

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #59 - March 2001

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Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

Pure Reflex

M. Stanley Bubien

“I love you too.” [4]

Curve of Wind

Richard Denner

Rosco and I wait for the fishermen to return. I sit at a wooden bench near the store at Mt. Baker Resort and watch the clouds change shape. Rosco has my belt around his neck and an eight foot tow chain hooked to a tree. Dogs must be on a leash. Ducks and rabbits are loose.

An attractive teenage girl wearing white shorts and a pink short-sleeved top sunbathes in the light breeze. I see one cloud as Tristram reclining and a small round cloud as a cup he is proffering to Isoude. The girl listens to her Walkman and glances my way from the crook of her arm. I cannot reduce her pubescent curves to mythological planes.

A tall, burly boy with his gray tee-shirt cut along his ribs comes carrying an armload of boxes and kicking a couple across the grass to the fire pit. A dramatic and disruptive act.

Above them the clouds move ahead in a larger current. The breeze off the lake takes up the huge cardboard ashes from the fire and sprinkles them on the girl. "Thanks, Ron," she says, getting up and shaking her towel. "I'm just trying to help out," he replies from his red pickup truck.

A couple of tame rabbits hop by. Rosco can't even lift his head with the weight of the tow chain. The rabbits disappear under the porch of the store. Still no sign of the fishermen. The cloud that was Isoude has become a free spirit and will not drink from the cup. [256]

Hunger Pains

August Remier

Man, I'm hungry. There was nothing to eat in the house so I ordered a large pizza and ate the whole thing: but I'm still starving. So I searched for something, anything, to eat. Couldn't find a thing. Not a slice of bread, not a cracker, not even a crumb. I scoured the cupboards, the fridge, the seat cushions, the floor, behind the stove—nothin' I had to look elsewhere.

That's when I ate my pride. It was too hard to bite or chew, so I swallowed it whole. Nearly choked on the damn thing, but I managed to get it down. It wasn't enough though, I wanted, needed more.

So I boiled my self-esteem. Each mouthful more bitter than the last. My stomach growled for more.

I whipped up a bowl of pity. Creamy and sweet, it went down easy.

Love? There hasn't been any of that around here for a long time. No, I stopped looking for that. Instead I drank my tears and belched my apologies.

Then I found a bit of hope. Stale and moldy as it was, I took a bite. That was a mistake, I couldn't keep it down. Just made room for more.

Confidence was a tasty morsel: meaty and juicy.

That was it. There was nothing left. I've eaten it all and it's left me so I can't get out of bed (having doubled and redoubled my size). But that's OK; I don't need to go anywhere. I'm not hungry, for now. Tomorrow it starts all over again. [256]

Kissing It Goodbye

Gary E. Holland

I noticed him huddled against the cacophony of combat near the door of our communications bunker wearing army green boxer shorts and boots without socks. The first onslaught had rocked him from peaceful sleep into wide-awake nightmare. He scrambled to grab what he could in the dark.

I took cover next to him as rockets and mortars enlightened the midnight sky, disemboweling the mud filled earth. Our landing zone was being overrun from two sides at once, our bunker line a chaos of gunfire where desperate men fought desperate men to the death.

“Doc,” I yelled. “What the hell you doing out here—waiting to get whacked? You better take cover in the trauma bunker.”

A large hunk of shrapnel slammed into a sand bag impaling itself just above him. Clods of red mud splattered the side of his face. He recoiled, cringing tighter into a ball. “I’m waiting for a call,” he said. “I’m taking the ambulance onto the bunker line.”

I glanced at his ambulance—a canvas covered jeep with the red cross of mercy painted bull’s eye on its side. His medical aid bag lay humbly on the passenger seat. Stretcher grips protruded out the back. A rocket exploded nearby silhouetting the sitting ambulance like a duck. Doc’s head sank still lower between his knees.

“But the enemy is pouring through there like ants,” I told him. “It would be suicide!”

He raised his eyes slowly without looking at me. “Yeah,” he said, trying to clear his throat—then mumbled hoarsely, “I know.” [256]

A Different Kind of Careful

M. Stanley Bubien

“I’m a practical man,” I said, lightly fingering the vodka-rocks our waitress had so lithely delivered. “The end-result: one very dead Mexican.”

“Somebody owes,” my associate chuckled, “so you come to me.”

“Inevitably, Mr. Mike.” He had demanded I call him that, “Michael,” even though I knew his real name was Mario. Avenging-angel imagery, I figured; understandable for an assassin. Besides, we all have our eccentricities, so I went along. After all, why spoil the man’s fun?

“Cash up front,” he grinned. “Twenty-five thousand.”

I lifted the briefcase ostentatiously onto the tabletop, angled it on-end, and tottered it into his awaiting grasp.

He scowled, darting eyes the only sign that he was casing the bar for onlookers.

“What’s the matter... Mike?” I bit sarcastically into his name. “Paranoia doesn’t bode well. Maybe I should...” I rapped the briefcase, but he snatched it away with both hands and pushed it beneath the table.

“Too”—his eyes darted again—“public for me.”

“Not one for hiding in plain sight? It’s a wonder you haven’t been caught.” I lifted my glass and winked. “Cheers.”

“I’m careful,” he pulled his own drink close. “A different kind of careful.”

I smiled and raised my glass higher. Drawing it to my lips, I downed the vodka in one long swig. I replaced it in the ring of moisture it had originally occupied on the black table and scooted toward the edge of the booth. A cold, hard grasp fell across my knuckles.

“I don’t mean to be rude.”

I stared at his hand, but he refused to release me. Shrugging, I slid back into my seat.

“I did a little checking,” he said, leaning near. “Learned a bit about you and your Mr. Rodriguez.” I raised my eyebrows, and he flashed a brief, teeth-revealing grin. “The way I hear it, a shipment went bad.”

“Coast Guard,” I said, bringing my palm in front of his nose and dropping it deliberately like a sinking leaf.

He nodded slowly. “Here’s the thing. I hear it’s you who did the running for Rodriguez. Not the other way around.”

“Add well-informed to your list of talents.”

Tapping his glass, he got to the point. “Your deal went south, but you’re after him?”

I inhaled. In the expanse it took my lungs to begin biting from lack of oxygen, I couldn’t come up with a single reason to hide such information from the man—he had as much to lose now. “I dumped the load. So the Mexican wants me to pay for the whole lot.”

“In that case, I’d usually be talking to him, not you.”

“Ah, I’m a practical man. He wants more than twenty times what you’re getting.”

Michael shook his head and scowled.

Taking the opportunity for what it was, I scooted out of the booth, and, lighting to my feet, brushed my coat straight. “Twenty times,” I mouthed silently at him before departing toward the entrance. Along the way, I made sure to bump three separate patrons and pay a noisy compliment our waitress. Can’t be too careful. [512]