

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #60 - April 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.**

The Final Battle Part I - The Half-Deaf King at the Negotiating Table

M. Stanley Bubien

“**E** h? Peas? Ach! Never!” [4]

Let It Go

M. Stanley Bubien

“**Y**ou done it. I say it’s done with!” Fingering warm steel, I grasped my husband’s shaking hand. “You can’t take it back. Let it go.”

He still trembled, but he’d lost some of that clamminess. Finally!

“There, there,” I began, but sounded a little too much like the doting wife. “Ah. You’ll be fine.”

He sniffed and wiped his nose. “Yeah, uhm,” he stammered. “It’s like, uhm. Like spilled milk.”

I swear, I almost laughed. Spilled milk! Man, what a dolt! ‘Course, I’d never say that to his face. “That’s it,” I agreed.

He remained silent, but he’d stopped shaking.

“Alright,” I lifted the magnum. “When I drive over, you toss this in the river. Think you can do that?”

He reached for the barrel and nodded. [128]

For Steven Meincke.

Leaving Sarah Behind

Glynn Sharpe

We buried Sarah today but she'd been gone from us for years. She was fifteen when she started experimenting with drugs. A little pot, some hash, some trouble at school, and she was gone. Days away from home became weeks, which became months, which trickled down into years. We scrambled frantically to find her but she had disappeared without a trace. But we remained hopeful.

Still, I was a bit surprised when my mother phoned to tell me that she was bringing Sarah home. Someone had found her body in a sleeping bag downtown in an alleyway.

The days leading up to the funeral felt murky. I tried to conjure up memories of Sarah but couldn't. I'd buried her so many times in my mind. The years apart had a way of making her seem unreal. Almost like she never existed. But she did, and she was gone now for good, and she wouldn't be coming back.

Mom and dad insisted on an open casket. Sarah's face looked bloated beyond recognition. Her skin, despite the make up, was red and blotchy.

We carried her casket up a small hill to where she was to be interred in a Mausoleum.

I was the last to leave. I started my car and looked up the hill to the Mausoleum for the last time and saw the casket sitting there. Sarah was alone again. I turned the car off and trudged up the hill to be with the sister I loved so much that it made me numb inside. [256]

Color Commentary

Lad Moore

It was the first new car Mary Kay and I could afford after six years of marriage, so we did our careful shopping.

There, on the lot, under the nighttime amber lights, was the prettiest silver Oldsmobile I ever saw. I couldn't wait for the next morning to find a salesman. I had to have that very car.

It didn't take long. "Mike" wore slicked-back hair and a three-piece suit, and had enough deal pads on his desk to put a new car in every garage in Texas.

He was quick to point out the options on the car, the features that were new to this year's model, and the changes in the warranty. That was important, but the silver color had already sold me. I told Mike about my earlier visit to the lot.

"That silver paint shined back at me like a fashion mirror," I said. "Under your lights, I knew that I had found the secret of the origin of pearls." I had carelessly tipped my hand to a waiting predator.

Mike noted my strong enthusiasm for it, and my lack of interest in the other cars on the lot. He began a pitch about the luminescence, the lifetime wax-free overcoat, and most of all, the newness of the color for the Oldsmobile line. It was poetically called *Aztec Silver*. Aztec Silver! The name spoke volumes. I closed my eyes and imagined the awe that would surround us at valet parking—maybe at the Ritz. We would arrive to shiny moonglow pavement—in tux and flowing gown with a decadent neckline. Mary Kay would step lightly onto the red carpet—her breasts looking like the filled sails of a brigantine.

We drove away in a cloud of happiness.

We moved to Oklahoma, and three years later, with a growing family in tow, decided to look up Mike again and trade for a new car. I was pleased to find him at his old desk, in a gray sharkskin suit with a red tie, and that ream of deal sheets at his side.

Mary Kay picked out a blue station wagon with enough room for us all, and Mike and I got started with the haggling. Unlike before, absent were the

motions of a Maestro schmoozing his debut. He was dealing on a station wagon, not a romantic coupe.

“I can allow you \$1100 on your car,” he said apologetically. I was shocked. My Olds was worth so much less than what I paid for it. It was still so bright and shiny! I had kept it waxed, kept it serviced, and it had low miles.

Mike leaned over close to my ear as if to share a secret or a for-men-only joke. “See, the trouble is, it’s the color”, he said. I was puzzled. I recalled his original pitch—and my glee over the Aztec Silver. I told him I didn’t understand.

He leaned over again, this time closer—“You know,” he said, “Nobody likes *Coffin Gray*.” [512]

The Final Battle Part II - The Steadfast Soldier and Just Cause

M. Stanley Bubien

Across the country, the call rose: War!
“Finally!” Enneyman saluted the image of his half-deaf king. “A just and noble cause!”

Dutiful soldier, he, Enneyman fought through the years, as both victor and vanquished, yet eternally steadfast for the cause of king and country.

“Chin up, Private!” A battle-hardened Enneyman cried to the recruit, “Pick one of the bastards for yourself, and hit him with all you’ve got!” With that, Enneyman scrambled up the trench-face, leapt beyond the edge and into the fray.

Such bravery bore him to the very end.

“Target!” Enneyman barked, driving his mechanized monster battleward. “Fire!” he cried, and the Tank’s mortar boomed.

“Sir!” screeched the Lookout. “Incoming!”

“Out!” Enneyman ordered, “Go! Go! Go!” He launched himself through the bulkhead as the missile struck.

Reeling beside his freshly-dead vehicle, boots covered in blood, Enneyman eyed the oncoming horde. There, upon a brief rise, fought a hulking figure, muscles flexing and the Green Beret upon his brow flashing in the sun.

“You’re mine!” Enneyman grinned, and striding over to the Tank, he ripped a weapon free. With the Gatling gun, Enneyman loosed a barrage of bullets, shredding himself a path of bodies. Reaching the base of the hill, his ordnance expelled its last—but never would Enneyman divert from the target. Dropping the useless weapon, he unlatched his belt, and his blade flashed like a thunderbolt. But a glance stopped him dead.

With a wide, broken-toothed smile, the Beret was waving Enneyman upward.

Enneyman grinned and raised the knife. “Onward!” he laughed, and

continued slashing. Fate, however, intervened, and Enneyman's knife became embedded within the jugular of a particularly bony soldier. Thus, bare-fisted, and covered head-to-toe in the crimson of other men, he crested the hill and stood face-to-face with his enemy.

Without hesitation, he leapt—and so, too, the Beret.

The two met midair, the impact resounding like a sonic-boom, and they clasped together in a death-grip, rolling and tumbling into a shallow bunker. Colliding with a wall, Enneyman felt his enemy's breath expel itself in a quick, painful gasp. Taking the advantage, he wrapped the crook of his arm about the man's neck. But in that instant, Enneyman went flash-blind; the ground swept out from beneath him and the roof collapsed upon his head.

At last the final battle fell silent.

Yet, by some miracle, Enneyman remained alive. Hours or days, he knew not, but eventually, his hands cast enough stones aside, and he emerged.

“The sonsabitches nuked us.”

Enneyman spun. There knelt the Green Beret, a vision of blood and soil that must have mirrored Enneyman himself. And beyond, where soldiers and mechanized battalions once milled, a barren wasteland as empty as glass lay.

The Beret nodded, understanding Enneyman's expression. “Kinda makes you wonder why.” He lifted a canteen. “All this, and for what?”

Enneyman accepted the offer and brought the sloshing container to his lips. But he stopped just shy of swigging. “For me, it was simple,” he shrugged. “I mean, I hate peas.” And, as his enemy nodded, he kissed the canteen. [512]