

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #40 - August 1999

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Story Bytes

Very Short Stories
Lengths a Power of 2

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**Story Bytes better
than sound bites.**

A Short Trip in the Woods

Bill Glose

“**W**hat bear?” [2]

Reincarnation

Carlton Mellick III

I have been reincarnated into many things, many times. I started out a mere quack-duck and died to exclaim a howl-wolf. Then into a maple tree, which was BIG and drip-murky, and into a race horse, which was fast-fast, into a kite, into a marble. Then I was a spooky house, a bowl of oatmeal, a space shuttle, a sentence of twelve words. I was reincarnated into a cough, a sandwich, a song, a lightning bolt, and a light bulb. Then a piece of paper with a love letter written on it, a bulldog's fart, a fatal Q-tip accident, a dance performance, a brilliant idea, a fat man jumping, a leaf in the water, an echo. But I am usually just a typo that needs to be erased... [128]

The Anesthesia Would Wear Off

M. Stanley Bubien

“**B**aby killer!” They warned me I might hear something like that. “Don’t believe it,” they’d said, “it’s a lie.” I laid in my bed, staring at the ceiling. Today, in the speckles, I made out a man’s face. His mouth was open wide, crying out. Yesterday, I saw an airplane with wings that looked too short. Day before that, a unicycle on a bent tire.

“Baby killer!”

Sometimes I see the same things. The crying face, that’s new. But I’ve found that airplane a bunch of times. I liked the idea of flying, I think, even if its wings never got any longer.

“Baby killer!” she had screamed, sitting in the silent crowd as the nurses escorted me from the clinic. I had chosen general anesthetic—I hate pain, you know—so I was pretty wobbly. And all those people in the way, they made it a lot harder to get to my mom’s car.

“Baby killer!” that woman screamed—just once, because three protesters jumped up and pushed her away fast.

Four weeks, I think, maybe five. My dad told me every day. Even when he came just to check on me. Or when he begged me to get up. Or reasoned with me. Or cried.

Maybe that was his face in the ceiling! No. I liked my daddy’s face better. I tried to turn the ceiling one into his, so it’d be something nice to look at.

But I really wished that woman would stop screaming. And I wished the anesthesia would wear off. [256]

And I Walked onto the Battlefield

M. Stanley Bubien

And I walked onto the battlefield. As I marched between the lines, bullets whipped by, rockets lit overhead, tanks threw shells each toward the other.

And I halted in the battlefield. The breeze blew, ruffling white trench coat, though its gentle wafting drowned by the din.

And I opened the coat. Cradled there, within right arm, the tiniest of forms, barely three months amongst our world.

And I waited with her there. Guns, rockets, tanks, all paused in their barrage, as each in time spotted the naked child, fell slowly, fell silent, fell until only the breeze spoke.

And I lifted her aloft. Her voice came gentle, at once quiet, but gaining volume, gaining strength, gaining light until the battlefield rang with song as my fingers caressed sensitive skin about her neck.

For she laughed.

And soldiers holding guns, from side to side, whipped heads up.

For she laughed louder.

And soldiers launching rockets, from side to side, eyes lit wide.

For she laughed louder still!

And soldiers driving tanks, from side to side, threw hatches open.

And each, at once heavy, but lighter, lighter in futility, lighter in hope, lighter together the soldiers laughed too. For they remembered. Some of raising their child's joy, others wiping their child's tears, others again, simply their child.

And the din died, as one by one, they turned aside, turned away, turned back to the lives they had left.

And I knelt in the battlefield, my daughter and I, alone.

For she laughed her magic.

And I laughed too. [256]

Now that He Doesn't Stand There

M. Stanley Bubien

It was awful when my husband stood there, watching—and now that he doesn't, it should be easier.

"I'm not finished," I'd told him a month ago as I dabbed brush into palette. "Don't say anything."

"I won't say a word," he replied. Always the same. Always. "Not a word."

I drew arrow-straight lines of green for palms, mauve to mimic jacaranda over our garden, and skin-like hues as empty earth. For me, painting, like film-making, remained an experiment.

"Can I just say one thing?"

I sighed. Always, always.

"I liked the squiggles better yesterday," he pointed toward the fronds. "The squiggles. They worked." And he drawled on and on about how and why and where they incorporated with the weave, nodding within his half-straight collar, gesturing with one sleeve rolled up.

"Damn!" I cried, cutting him off, brush pointed toward the kitchen. "Go make some lunch. Burgers or something! But leave me alone."

With those mischievous eyes, and on the edge of a smile, he marched away like a short-order cook.

I turned again to the canvas, but instead of dipping the brush, I rested on an arm, pushed nose close, leaned away, cocked my head. A sneaking feeling came upon me.

"Damn it," I mumbled at those unnaturally straight fronds. Always, always.

I hated him being right!

But I still cried after the heart attack took him. A month later, I sought consolation in painting—which should be much easier!

I glanced behind and sighed.

But now that he doesn't stand there, it's awful. [256]