

Story Bytes

Very Short Stories - Lengths a power of 2.

Issue #57 - January 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 Unforgiven

M. Stanley Buben

“**I** can forgive, but I’ll never—ever!—forget.” [8]

One, Two, Three... And So On

W. Eric Martin

After I've closed my book and turned off the lamp and kissed you good night, lightly, on the top of your head so as not to wake you, I lie down and start to think about how many more days we have left together. Though the numbers are infinite, I know—and not merely because sleep is overtaking me—that I cannot count forever. [64]

True Love

Christine Malvasi

“**W**hat the hell—flower wallpaper?” He wanted a manly room, with ducks flying above the bed, quacking over the earth tone carpets and lampshades carved into the shapes of power tools.

“They’re fleur-de-lis—signs of royalty. They’re as pretty as the irises of my eyes, right dear?”

He had lost. Whenever he tossed sleeplessly in her comforters, he would suffocate in flowers.

That night, his wife’s snoring sounded like a car being turned inside out. He stomped towards the kitchen to drown out the Hurst Tool in his bed. He kissed the refrigerator, forgetting flowers and grinding metal as he felt the coolness on his face. He stared at the stacks of his wife’s Tupperware-alpha-betized according to casserole type. He left the door open. She hated that. [128]

O For the Wonderful Love

M. Stanley Bubien

I knew I shouldn't be playing "Amazing Grace" so loudly. But what self-respecting Christian is going to tell you to turn down a hymn at a Bible meeting?

"My favorite," I grinned, voice raised to carry above the music. "I love this singer, she's so wonderful. Wait till her version of 'Softly and Tenderly'!"

I couldn't hear it over the stereo, but Pastor James smacked his lips. He lifted the CD cover from the table. Completing his examination, he replaced it and rapped my shoulder, punching his thumb toward the kitchen.

I frowned, but followed.

Once inside, Pastor James clapped his hands together and tapped his knuckles against his puckered lips. "I'm not sure how—," he hesitated, furled his brow, and said, "You know, I've been told that singer's a lesbian."

"What?" I blurted. "You're kidding."

He shook his head slowly.

"I... but—" I clamped my mouth shut, having a sudden, unexpected revelation: I was playing a lesbian musician at a Bible meeting! And that wasn't even the worse part. Wiping palm down my eyes, I mumbled, "It's the only Christian CD I like."

"Your Classical—"

"Modern," I corrected. "Contemporary."

I stared at the floor silently as music drifted in, a breathy voice declaring "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness..."

"I guess I should take it out."

Pastor James rested a hand on my shoulder. "That's not..." his voice trailed off to a sigh. Drumming his fingers against my coat, he shrugged, "Can you just turn it down a little?" [256]

She'll Never Admit

M. Stanley Bubien

Our annual Christmas party. My husband Harry and I threw our first as newlyweds, and we've have kept it up for almost twenty years now. The idea was to be nontraditional: no green, white or red attire allowed; no gifts; and the food... Suffice it to say that last year we had sushi, and the year before, pollo asado.

"I can't wait to taste tonight's selection!" Marjorie Gunderson said, grasping her husband's sleeve as if it were a leash.

I made a zipping motion across my lips.

Marjorie grinned, and taking her husband into tow once more, she replied, "it's terribly interesting how everyone seems the same, yet after so many years, we've all grown—"

"More mature," I cut in.

"Ah ha," she winked. "I was going to say 'wiser,' but your solution will do. By the way," she scanned the nearest guests, "where's Lucie?"

"I expect her any time now," I said, sounding as robotic as I felt. Harry had cajoled me into inviting Lucie, even though we hadn't spoken for five months.

"I know what she did was wrong," Harry had said, "but you are best friends."

"Were!" I replied. "She'll never admit she was wrong."

"That," Harry had scolded, "is a two way street."

Marjorie squeezed my shoulder. "Robin?"

"Sorry. Just a little reminiscence."

She raised her eyebrows and gave her companion a tug, "come dear."

As they retreated, I realized that I had forgotten to take their coats. I stepped after them, but the bonging doorbell halted me.

"Hello Robin," Lucie said, fingers clenching her coat at the collar.

"Cold tonight," I replied, as the door thudded behind her. "May I take this," I indicated her jacket.

"No, no!" Lucie blurted. "I, uh, I'm still a tad chilly. Let me warm myself, and I'll put it away later."

I nodded once.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

I went stiff. “What?”

“Sorry for being late.”

“Oh,” I sighed.

Her eyes darted about, taking in her surroundings. “You did a wonderful job decorating.”

“Thanks.”

“So, what is it this year? Some pork dish, according to Harry.”

“Kalua pig.” For twenty years, she was the sole person I’d confide in. How could I break that habit now?

“Hawaiian! Serving poi too, I take it.”

“Exactly.”

“Hmm.” she mumbled.

“What?” I prodded.

“Well, I’m pretty sure that’s a Christmas dish on the islands.”

“Nonsense.”

Before she could argue, a rap on the door resounded. “Please excuse me,” I brushed past to greet our newest arrivals.

At dinner, Lucie and I sat at opposite ends of the table. The caterers had already revealed the roasted pig to a round of applause. They then proceeded to cover our plates with taro leaves and steaming slices of pork, placing bowls of poi to the sides.

Poi. I requested this specifically—with explicit instructions to heap a double portion for Lucie. And Harry thought he alone had convinced me!

Attempting to savor the moment, I turned first to Marjorie Gunderson, grinning expectantly. However, as she spooned the outmeal-like substance into her mouth, she raised her eyebrow with a look of interest. Harry nudged my shoulder, but I ignored him. She was smiling!

“Robin,” he said, nudging me a second time, “here.”

I accepted the china absently.

“For your poi.”

I was grasping a sugar bowl.

“Compliments of Lucie. Actually makes the stuff edible!”

I glanced over, and Lucie waved a hand above her sweetened poi, laughing as Marjorie and her husband smacked their lips.

I clenched the napkin in my lap. Harry leaned over and whispered, “talk to her!” But I gave a single, abrupt shake of the head.

After that fiasco, I succeeded in avoiding Lucie the rest of the evening. Almost.

When I had finally shown the last of our guests out, I dragged my feet over to the sofa and flopped into the cushions. Harry sat across from me, shoes off, rubbing his arches.

“All in all, a successful evening,” I said.

Harry blinked, and the toilet flushed in the foyer bath. I jumped to my feet just as Lucie stepped out, cradling her coat.

“I’ll go clean up,” Harry said, heading toward the kitchen. “Good night Lucie.”

Neither of us acknowledged him; we simply stared in silence. I certainly wasn’t going to be the one to speak first!

A dish crashed, and both Lucie and I jumped. “Harry!” I screamed, heart pounding.

“Sorry,” came the muffled reply.

I shook my head, but Lucie began to chuckle.

“Sure, go ahead and laugh,” I growled. “It wasn’t one of your dishes!”

She managed to squeak out “No,” but this caused her to laugh even harder. Finally, when she realized I was not sharing in the moment, she swallowed and wiped her mouth.

“Come now,” she said, serious once again. “Certainly you can see the humor...”

I crossed my arms.

She inhaled and glanced toward the door.

Leave! I thought. And good riddance too!

But instead doing what I’d silently asked, she stepped off the foyer and onto our living room carpet. “How long have we been friends, Robin?”

“More than thirty years.”

She nodded slowly. “We’ve been through a lot. But this...” She sighed and frowned. “You know, I never wanted to hurt you.”

“Well, you did.”

She remained still. “Look, I just wanted to say—”

“Spare me the platitudes,” I told her.

And once more, we stood in silence. But instead of a waiting on another

broken dish, Lucie stepped forward, reached into her coat, and produced a small wrapped package.

“No gifts!” I raised my palm. “It’s the rules.”

Lucie shrugged and placed it in my hand. “Consider it a token of... my friendship.” She hugged me briefly, and departed.

Somehow, I kept myself from opening it until bedtime. Inside, Lucie had wrapped a necklace with a ruby, my birthstone.

“What’s that?” Harry mumbled, propping himself on his elbows.

“It’s from Lucie. But...”

“But?”

“I didn’t get her anything!” I said, swallowing over a lump in my throat.

Harry kissed my cheek. “There’s always tomorrow.”

“Mmm, yes,” I replied, and the lamp light sent beams of crimson through the ruby and down my wrist. [1024]