

The Society of Southwestern Authors



Story Snacks

Volume 1

A Leap of Faith
by Christine Gross

Emerging from the subway, Michael started home, still stinging from his rejected EMT application.

“Mister! Help!” A boy dangled a toddler from a third-floor balcony.

Michael’s heartbeat jumped as he raced towards them. “Don’t drop her!”

“There’s a fire!” Terror twisted the child’s features as flames surged behind him.

“Hold on!”

Michael yelled to a passerby. “You! Call 911. Tell them to bring the aerial boom!”

“It’s too hot!” The boy gripped his sister’s dress, her pink baby legs flailing.

Michael gestured frantically at two teens zooming by on scooters. “Little help!” But their blasting music obliterated his cries.

He scanned the yard for inflatables.

“It’s coming through the door! It’s burning my shirt!”

Michael couldn’t use his jacket as a life net alone.

The boy screamed. Michael centered himself and opened his arms. “OK – drop her!”

The toddler tumbled down. Michael grabbed her, flexing his knees to distribute the load, and straightened up slowly, breathing hard.

He directed her to a bench. “Stay right there!” Distant sirens blared.

The boy leapt over the railing. Michael caught him and they crashed to the ground. The boy bounced up, and Michael’s head hit the ground.

Silence. Blackness.

“Michael.” The chief paramedic waved a penlight before his eyes. Michael winced. “I think I broke my arm.”

“So you were the first responder.”

“I was the only responder.”

The chief laughed. “We’re taking you in for an X-Ray. Next week, come see me at the station. I have something for you.”

Shakespeare Sucks

by Bobbie J. Herring

“Daughter, why won’t you go?” Linda said. She went to the hot plate, dropped mint leaves into the water. The antique, enameled kettle was special to them both when they had tea and talk time. Yet, Anna sat in silence at the kitchen table behind her. Linda leaned against the cabinets, gazing at the backyard garden.

“Mom, I can’t leave Bob for four weeks. I love him.”

Linda filled two gold rimmed teacups, one had bright red roses on it, the other lilies of the valley. She set the roses in front of Anna.

“It’s nice to have you home to visit. We’ve shared mother-daughter moments for nineteen years with these cups. Apparently, it’s not been often enough. You’ve been moody.”

“It has nothing to do with us, Mom.”

“Last week you said he’s not exactly your soul mate but just think Stonehenge, Warwick Castle, Scotland. All the places you always wanted to see.” Linda pressed forward. “Even Shakespeare’s birthplace. You’d pass that up?”

“Shakespeare sucks.” Anna said. They both laughed. Linda had sent that message to Anna’s on-campus email after she’d tried to read some of his writings.

Linda never understood nor liked Mr. Shakespeare, her daughter’s favorite literary laureate. She received her daughter’s response email filled with gobbledygook-typed cussing symbols defending Shakespeare’s expertise.

“Anna, if things are right between you, and what’s his name, Rob, uh, Bob, he will be there when you get back. Besides, he’s eighteen and hasn’t shown any interest in college. You’re in your second semester of your 3rd year, an honor student! Doesn’t that tell you something?”

“But the trip is over \$4000, Mom.”

“You’ve been chosen to represent the English Department. The college will pay for half of the cost. Your dad and I will work overtime. We’ll get a loan. It’s educational, maybe some of it will be tax deductible.

Before you were born, your dad and I lived in Alconbury, England for months near the military base. When we went anywhere, we looked for the Beatles in pubs and on street corners. Everyone talked just like them,” she paused, “don’t pass up this opportunity, Anna.”

“The Beatles?” Anna rolled her eyes.

Linda picked up the paper that lay on the table. Anna had sent it home a month ago. It was from the English Department about the educational trip.

“It says, ‘Professor Louise Smith will escort honor students on a literary tour of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.’ It’s for undergraduate credit. Look, it says in her own handwriting that you are a gifted student, you qualify for the \$2000 funding for overseas study. It covers airfare, meals and lodging in historical homes. You are already blessed with a full scholarship for Columbia University. We WILL afford this trip for you.”

Anna leaned back and squirmed in her chair. She took a deep breath.

“I can’t go Mom.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

She looked at her nail-bitten fingers. “I’m pregnant.”

HELP
by Nannette Palmer

“Rock Hill Suicide Help Line. This is Shirley. How can I help you?”

“I’m ready to do it, Shirley,” he said.

“What’s your name, sir?”

“It’s David, and I’ve had it.”

Shirley picked up her pen and began controlled breathing. She silently prayed, “Jesus, be with this man, help me help him.”

“David, what’s going on? Why do you feel it’s time?”

“Because I’ve tried to live this way, tried to release these feelings. It’s just time to move on.”

“David, are you alone, dear?”

“No, my wife is here. She doesn’t get it at all. Such a bitch, doesn’t care how I feel. She thinks I’m a plague, a coffin she drags around.” His inhale was choppy.

“David, I’m here for you. What are you feeling?”

“I’m bound in this wheelchair for life. I feel alone, and life is too hard. I’ve become obscure, just a shadow of who I was.”

“David, it sounds like you’re a deserted ship without a harbor to rest in for a while....” Shirley inhaled deeply. She heard the desperation and hoped she could break through his misery.

“Yes, Shirley. That’s it, and the harbor I see is dark, hidden by a constant barrage of anger, daggers. There’s no harbor, just a void, a nothingness that shrouds me. I just can’t. I gotta go.”

“David, please stay with me. Let me be a light for you.”

Click. David was gone.

Pulse racing, Shirley redialed the number from which he had called. No answer. She called her supervisor over and relayed their conversation. She felt a blanket of guilt begin to wrap itself around her but stopped it. She stood, inhaled deeply and was reminded she’d done all she could at that moment. She would wait thirty minutes and redial. She shook her hands out, as if trying to get something sticky off her fingers. It was the chilling sensation of failure.

She reviewed her training and replayed David’s words, felt his angst and wanted to call the police or a social worker immediately for a home visit. No, wait a while.

“You followed procedure, didn’t try to force a plan on him or tell him the police were on their way. Right?” her supervisor asked.

“Yes, ma’am. It’s just that...”

“I know.” Her supervisor put her hand on Shirley’s shoulder. “He didn’t mention the words suicide or gun. We’ll call him again.”

Shirley turned to her desk and silently prayed, "God of Love, King of kings, guide me in all I do. Allow me to exalt you as I try to support all who reach out."

"Rock Hill Suicide Help Line. This is Betsy. How can I help you?"

"I'm David. I wanna talk to Shirley."

"David! This is Shirley. I'm so happy to hear your voice."

"I did it," he said.

"Did what, David?"

"I killed her. I'm better now."

When No Means Yes
by Sharon K. Miller

Elsie dropped into the chair, pressed one foot against the stool and rocked backward. She drew in a deep breath and stared at the cracked ceiling. A muddy river of brown stains flowed across the plaster from one side of the room to the other. She was tired, bone tired, and her fingers hurt like hell. But the laundry was done and on the line. She'd filled all the big kettles with water, heated them on the gas range, then hauled them to the washing machine on the back porch. The kids were at Janie's house because carrying boiling water with six kids under foot was dangerous.

When she'd finished the whites and the colors, she started on his work pants. That's when it went wrong and her hand got caught in the wringer. By the time she got hold of the release, her hand was caught the full length of her fingers, and her wedding ring was cutting into her flesh.

Her fingers were purple and still swelling. She needed to get the ring off. She spit on it, clamped her jaw tight and struggled mightily to push it over her knuckle. "Jesus God almighty!" It finally came off.

Holding the ring in her good hand, she turned it so the sunlight dappling through the tree outside the window shone on the inscription inside. "E & J Forever"

"Shit, if I'd a known what kind of forever this would be, I'd a chased that son of a bitch out of the house the first time he showed up."

She had just graduated high school—no thanks to her mother. She was determined to go to secretarial school in Baltimore and get a job. She wasn't looking for a man. Well, not exactly. If she couldn't win Howard then she wasn't interested in anyone.

But one Saturday evening Jim showed up at the barn dance down by the creek. He'd driven all the way from Baltimore. She wasn't impressed. He was tall, reasonably handsome, with dark hair and a cocky expression. Didn't take long to see he was as cocky as the look on his face. Bragged about himself and dominated the conversation. And his hands. He couldn't keep 'em to himself. Every girl that danced with him—Elsie included—got patted on the rear end. After one dance, she kept Hilda between her and him.

The best part of the night? Howard offered to drive her home. She chuckled at the memory. Bernice was livid.

Not a week later, she came home from a church meeting to see his car in the yard and him sitting in the parlor smoking and talking to her parents. She said hello and went straight upstairs. But he kept coming back, charming her mother and insisting Elsie go out with him. He wouldn't take no for an answer.

And now, here she was pregnant again because, goddammit, he still won't take no for an answer.