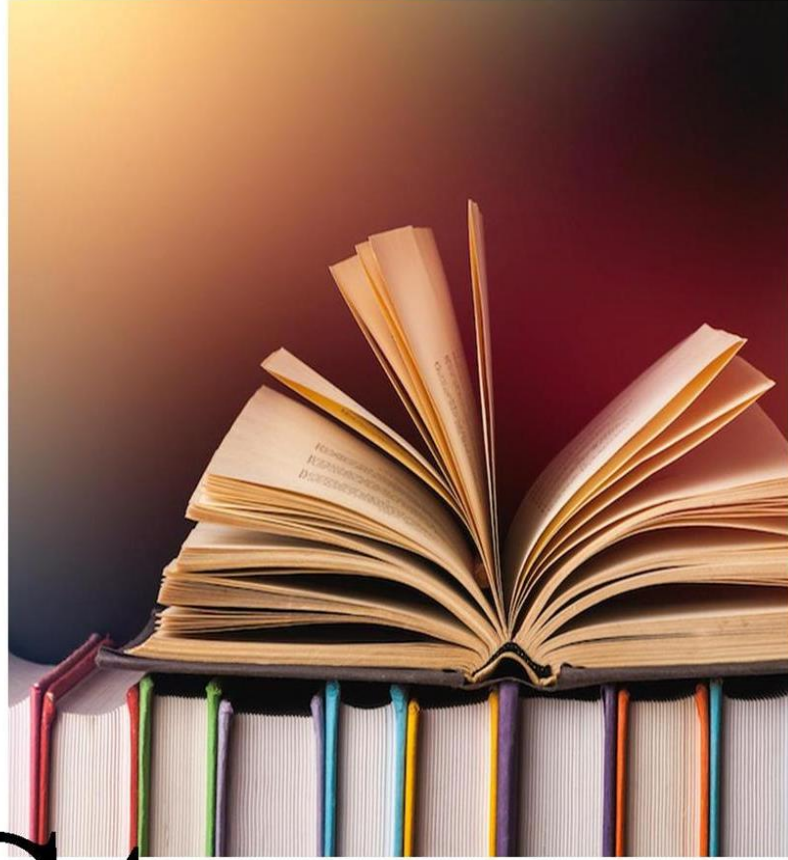


The Society of Southwestern Authors



# Story Snacks

Volume 2

FREDERICK, ROSALEE AND ELAINE

by  
Judy Newton

*I'm losing my mind*, Frederick thought as he looked across the dinner table to see his dead first wife sitting next to his very much alive second wife.

Rosalee and Fred met and married while he was in college. The marriage lasted six years before Rosalee ran off with the chauffeur. In those days Rosalee was plump and sweet like a plum. That's what he'd called her, "my little plum." Now there was no sweet meat clinging to those dry white bones as she sat silently next to kind Elaine, who never lost her decorum.

In the old days Rosalee would be gesturing wildly as she relayed a story about the most adorable portly little man in a cheap grey suit and bowler hat, to whom she sat next to on the trolley. He was a quantum physicist and told her all about virtual particles, quantization, and exchange fields. Even though she didn't understand anything he said, she found him absolutely fascinating. It just as easily could have been a story about a game of stick ball she had played with street urchins. It didn't matter. People were equally interesting and infinitely exciting to Rosalee. He had to admit this new silent Rosalee was an improvement over the giggly talkative girl to whom he had been married. *It is funny how the very thing that attracts one to a person can later be so repugnant*, he thought.

It was Thursday night. Frederick and Elaine's date night. Separate bedrooms, and their mutual desire for orderliness and routines, put a damper on any spontaneity in their love life. Elaine, who had never experienced the ecstasies of love, was eager to get her marital duties completed. To Frederick's credit, he attempted to please Elaine in the early days of their marriage, but he soon realized the thing that pleased her the most was to get it over with as quickly as possible. It had taken him a while to adjust to prim Elaine after those nights and days of debauchery with Rosalee, but he was now comfortable with his and Elaine's arrangement. However, since Frederick was not a demonstrative person, she never got much physical contact and realized, as of late, she enjoyed his touch.

That night, when Frederick crawled between the sheets and reached for Elaine, he let out a gasp. Over Elaine's shoulder, he saw Rosalee propped up on an elbow wearing a red beret pulled low over one eye. She flashed him a smile and whispered, "Freddie, I'm here to help you add a little salsa to your stew, a little rhythm to your blues, a little spice to your life. I think with more effort, you could get Elaine to resonate and reverberate to the rhythms of love, to sing arias like a Mezzo Soprano."

HANDLE WITH CARE

by

Bobbie J. Herring

Weston set his cowboy hat aside and placed his name plaque in its slot. What he first saw were her hands folded across from him on the bank's cashier counter.

Her knuckles looked thirsty and hinted of harsh dish soap from work as a dishwasher. Rather, he hoped the creases and splits beside the nails told of working in New Mexico's hay fields or stock yards hustling beef for the local meat market. The town's economy ran on cattle and horses.

As an ex-rodeo champion, his hands used to be that rough. He imagined holding hands with her, but his were pale, finely textured and too smooth. Though he took note of an empty space on her ring finger, he hadn't even seen her face. Nor had she seen his wheelchair.

"Good morning Miss. How can I help you today?" he said, pushing the cash drawer shut.

He looked into her eyes, as blue as the Pecos River. She was lovely.

With a smile like the sunrise glows, she lifted her chin to indicate his wheelchair.

"My brother is in a wheelchair. How are you gettin' on?"

He could not speak, could barely breathe.

In fast-paced flashes, his mind went on a tangent of scenes. If he could hold her hands, he would gently press mink oil into those chapped lines to warm and soften them. He would caress them with the care he gave his leather craft.

For her, he would work harder at his hobby making bridles and saddles studded with turquoise insets in silver. The turquoise was from the now closed Sleeping Beauty Mine near Globe, Arizona. He was fortunate enough to acquire good deals on the most sought-after Robin's egg blue stones. The ranchers and miners who had stockpiled the rare gemstone before the mine was closed, were his friends.

Weston's former rodeo buddies knew of his last ride on the Son of Bodacious, a 2-thousand-pound bull who splintered his left ankle and destroyed the other knee.

He had been world champion but was now well paid for his famous parade saddles. That lucrative side business would buy her all she needed, and a couple of quarter horses or maybe a whole herd. It would be nice to have them romping and whinnying in his now empty corral.

In the evening he would place her feet in his lap to massage them and relax her. But what was he thinking? He was thinking he was in love. Should he ask her out to dinner or for her phone number?

Maybe they could share his lunch. Would it be enough? He had two good sized ribs slathered with BBQ sauce from grilling last night. But what if she was a vegetarian? What then? Things were getting complicated.

She leaned towards him.

“Want to meet me for lunch across the street at The Cuttin’ Horse Café?”

He felt his head nod. He stuttered.

“Yes-s, yeah. Really? Great.”

## FALTERING FRIENDSHIP

by  
Bobbie J. Herring

One of them was lying. Normally, both students were cooperative and respectful. They caused a ruckus in the school's hallway, so I made them sit in opposite corners of the room while class continued. When I asked about the problem all they would tell me was, "It's Timmy's fault." "No, it's Daniel's fault." To make this puzzle even more confusing, they were best friends.

Both were eleven years old. Daniel was a little taller than Timmy and was missing a front tooth. Timmy was smaller framed, and his face was speckled with freckles.

Today, they hated each other. They avoided looking into each other's eyes, or mine. When they did look, they glared. We had just finished our in-room schoolwork and the other kids headed home. Both boys stood before me at my desk after school hours.

"Should I call your parents, or can we work this out between you two?"

Timmy slouched. Frowning, he quickly looked over at Daniel. "He won't let me have a turn."

Daniel put his hands on his hips and **puffed** out his lips.

"Maybe we can talk it out. Tell me, Daniel, in one word, how do you feel about this?" I asked.

"Mad."

"Now you Timmy, what do you feel?"

"Madder."

"Okay. Tell me in a few words what this is all about. Daniel, you first."

"The new one," Daniel mumbled.

"He won't give me a turn," Timmy said.

"Aha, could this "new one" be Diamond, the new girl?" I asked.

"I just wanted to talk to her. He kept getting in between us," Timmy said.

"It wasn't your turn yet. Besides, she likes me."

"She would like me better, if you would go away. You used up our recess time."

“Boys, I want you to look at each other. Go on. I’m waiting. Turn and face your best friend. Now, make faces at each other. I give you permission to do this until you’re tired of it.”

Timmy started off by crinkling his nose and snorting like a pug dog. Daniel pulled his mouth wide open with his fingers, made his eyes bug out and stuck his tongue at Timmy. Timmy put his hands under his armpits, flapped his elbows like a chicken. He pushed his head forward and back and clucked. Daniel crinkled his forehead, pushed his **puckered lips** outward. Timmy placed his hands on his cheeks, crossed his eyes and moved his lips like a fish. Soon, they got the giggles.

“Now, gentlemen, shake hands. Let’s end this nonsense. Remember, to have a friend, even one good friend, is a marvelous thing. Don’t ruin it.” They flopped their arms over each other’s shoulders and left the room like nothing had ever come between them.

The next morning, Diamond walked in with her left arm looped in Burt’s and her right hand daintily resting in the bend of Curt’s elbow. I saw Daniel and Timmy look at each other, roll their eyes and shrug their shoulders in unison.

LOST TIME  
by  
Nannette Palmer

They showed themselves at sundown in my dining room, initially as two lead-blue forms. I wasn't frightened, mostly fascinated. They reminded me of deer come down from the mountain to drink at the creek behind my house. Deer, lit by the tiny crest of light coming through my sliding glass doors.

I dropped the dish towel and watched, as the ghost of Grandpa Kaplinski in tattered jeans pulled a chair from the table for Grandma Viola Ruth to sit. Grandma's ghost was short and wide in a yellow-flowered housedress. She held her red nail polish-painted Nescafe snuff jar. Her mouth was a straight line, and her almond shaped eyes were half closed. Grandma gave me a gummy smile, then spit into her jar.

Grandpa Kaplinski, tall and thin, had died in a coal mine at age fifty of a heart attack. When money was tight, he worked double shifts and slept in the miners' camp. "I stopped sharing time with my kids, and my hands were always dirty," he said.

"After my husband died, I just sat on the couch and watched game shows and soap operas on TV," Grandma Viola Ruth said, and spit into her jar again.

I was stunned by their being in my home and wondered how my Dad's deceased father, a ghost from Pennsylvania, connected with the ghost of my maternal grandmother from Georgia.

"I never even saw a TV screen. We didn't have them in coal country then," Grandpa said. "My great pleasure was to hunt deer, rabbits and birds with my boys and watch my girls giggle."

"I used to enjoy long walks and read magazines about Hollywood stars and make snap peas," Grandma said. "We sold our time, girl, to absent-mindedness. We lived unconsciously." She shook her head slowly.

"Yeah, I never went to a movie or even ate a candied apple," Grandpa Kaplinski said. "And at no time did I hold my great granddaughter or even ride in a taxi cab. Such a pity," Grandma said.

"Do you hear us, child? We lost living time. You're being robbed by lies you tell yourself that time will wait for you to live outside yourself. Your empty time floats by like a river pushing your days downstream," Grandpa said.

Then, they vanished. Poof. They were gone, and the dining room chair was left pulled from the table.

I opened the slider and walked onto the patio to clear my head. It was a dark night, the rain splashed hard on the ground, and the alarm from the fire station sounded indicating lightning was in the area.

I stepped out from beneath the patio's roof to feel the rain and was struck by lightning. I was left in a pile of smoldering remnants.

Now, why did I do that? And why did those ancients sit on their asses for so long before coming along to wake me up?