

The Society of Southwestern Authors



# Story Snacks

Volume 3

## **SABLE**

by Bobbie J. Herring

Smooth, dark and cozy, the sable was lovely draped around the shoulders of a lady of wealth as she fondled an emerald and diamond necklace. The sable was a gift from Howard, her husband. It was 1948 when she gazed at the evening lights reflected along the Potomac River from the balcony of the very private and luxurious Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

This same sable was never worn after 1965. It was kept on a broad-shouldered hanger with a lavender sachet and a shawl covering.

Yet, today, it was donned by a parched, decrepit little lady who stood on the downtown corner of Main and 1st Street in Yuma's scorching hot sunshine. She wore stained and scuffed tennis shoes, carried a large tattered bag stuffed with clothes, crackers and her lifetime memorabilia. But why, on a 117-degree day, as images of palm trees and sand dunes shimmer off hot asphalt, would anyone wear a sable?

The locals knew her as Greer. The story went around town that her green eyes were like the actress, Greer Garson.

Greer showed up at every Farmer's Market, Historical Festival and swap meet. There she sampled sliced oranges, diced tomatoes and dates, all from local farms. She savored fried nopalitos from young tender prickly pear cactus pads and tortilla soup in a simmered tomato base with chopped chicken, corn, lime and cilantro in tiny, white two-ounce paper cups. Most vendors tolerated her, though she knew when to move along.

Unsure of who she really was, many sellers listened to stories she told of her glory days in her penthouse near the Potomac, and her husband flying his brand new 1960 de Havilland Beaver from the Canadian factory to Georgetown. Eventually the couple flew to Yuma and never left. They liked the weather.

In 1965, Howard left her alone and lonely when he crashed in a farmer's melon field. He died inside the de Havilland, near the Colorado River where it met the Gila River, two waterways that were Yuma's lifeblood.

Years later, her pitifully inadequate pension was unable to keep up with the rising cost of living. With two other poverty-stricken derelicts, she rented a bedroom in a dilapidated home built in 1905. It

was on the city's list to be demolished. Occasionally, a vagrant slept on dirt under the foundation where he'd dug out a crude shelter.

This week she would hock her emerald and diamond necklace to pay the rent. When Howard gave her the necklace, he told her the emeralds were not quite as brilliant as the love he saw in her eyes, but the green sparkle was close to that same green.

Greer stood on the edge of the festival today, wearing that lovely sable over her shoulders and spoke with an imaginary suitor. When she heard Howard answer her, she cuddled into the sable, lowered her eyes and, ever so slightly, smiled demurely.

Theirs was an unending love. She would join him soon.

## I WANT TO TELL MY SECRET

by Nannette Palmer

"Hey, Mom. I have a secret to tell you," Chrissy said.

"Oh, Honey, I'm in a hurry. Got a meeting. Tell me later. Okay?" her mom said and kissed her thirteen year old on the forehead.

Chrissy's mother volunteered for Duke University's Blue Devils where her brother, Jim, played forward, and her father litigated the university's issues.

"Okay," Chrissy said and went upstairs to crawl back in bed. The house was quiet this afternoon.

Her dad came home from golf, made a refreshing glass of iced scotch-water and eased into his recliner.

"Hi, Dad," Chrissy said. It was three o'clock, and she was still dressed in Beyoncé flannels and Jim's jersey. Her uncombed hair and plump little-girl form looked trampled upon in so much fabric.

"Hi, Chrissy. How's my girl?" He turned to look at her. "You feeling okay, 'Punkin'? Looks like you're ready for winter, and it's seventy outside."

"I'm fine, but I have a secret to tell," Chrissy said.

"Yeah, Honey? What is... Oh, get there, great shot!" he cheered the golfer on TV.

Chrissy grabbed a Coke and trudged back upstairs. Her dad was lost on the links.

Her mom returned at four, kissed her husband's bald head and went into the kitchen to start dinner.

"Mom, can I talk to you?" Chrissy asked.

"Of course you can, dear. Anytime. I'm always here for you."

"Okay. Well, guess what?"

"Listen, I don't have time for guessing games. And why are you dressed like that? You look horrible. Go shower and change. Your brother's coming home for dinner."

Chrissy turned, head lowered and started upstairs.

"Wait. Go tell Dad to start the coals for steaks," her mom ordered.

Chrissy rolled her eyes and trudged into the den. "Dad?" she said.

"Yeah, baby. What's up?" His eyes didn't leave the screen. He yelled at the golf ball to slow down.

"Mom, he's having an emotional moment with a golf ball."

“Well, you march back in there and take his drink from him. You’ll get his attention,” Mom said.

Chrissy went back into the den and picked up her dad’s scotch.

“Hey, what’re you doing?” he asked, black brows stitched together.

“Mom said to start the charcoal for steaks.” She handed his drink back and dragged herself back upstairs.

At dinner, everyone was talking at the same time to no one in particular—Jim about the game next week against Carolina, Mom about being a Blue Devils Lady and Dad about Duke’s odds for the championship.

There was a moment of chewing and cutting silence. Chrissy jumped up from the table and waved her arms. “I’m not pregnant!” she erupted.

Jim’s jaw dropped, Dad sat up straight and pulled his head back as if his daughter was too close to actually see and Mom’s eyes flew open, hand to her chest.

Chrissy sat. The stillness in the room was so complete, it felt eerie. “I started my period today,” she whispered.

## THE COURT OF A MURDER OF CROWS

By Norita Filz

We owned a cabin on the central coast of Oregon. On most Friday afternoons we packed up the kids, the dog and cat and headed for the beach. Then late on Sunday evening we'd drive back to town.

One of the rewarding things about being at the coast house was the murder of crows that lived in the National Forest across Highway 101. We inherited "The Murder" from the previous owners and welcomed their frequent visits. For those that want to know a murder of crows is a term used for the flock since the Fifteenth Century.

I began to save cooking grease for the crows in empty tuna fish cans. Sometime early in this phase of our relationship with the crows I started to call them. I shouted, "Hey Guys, hey guys" a number of times in rapid succession. They quickly learned that this meant food. Crows are social and always live in large, loosely related groups. They have a complex social structure and rules of behavior.

As the years went by we noticed a pattern of behavior emerge: a single crow would land on a post and wait for the others to arrive, hopping up on the can, taste the contents, look around at the others and caw a few times. This was the signal all was safe and they could eat. We started to call this crow the "Taster" since it was a routine that never varied. We learned from their initial contact with the food in the tuna can that crows are quick learners. Taster hopped out, in a sideways motion, stuck his beak into the soft grease and plunged in up to his eyes. He quickly hopped sideways over to a tuft of grass and carefully wiped the grease off. He hopped back to and ate a bit more, then called the gang in for the feast. They became so used to us that we could walk among them without them flying away.

One incident that will stick in my mind forever happened six years into living on the coast. Every Saturday morning I would set out the cans of grease. As usual Taster was on the post. Then a strange thing happened, Taster flew down and started to eat. I called the crows again and they soon came. However they did not begin to eat. A large one began to caw and others formed a rough circle around Taster. For several minutes there was cawing and wing flapping. As we watched from the living room window we never could have guessed what happened next. The leader flew up several feet from the ground and then came down on top of Taster. A scene of mob violence took place as all of the crows pecked at and beat Taster to death. Then they returned to the circle and the leader cawed a few times; two large crows came forward, picked up the body of the dead crow flew over the edge of the cliff on which our house stood and dropped him into the ocean below. They all flew away. No one stayed to

eat. The next day the flock had a new taster. We realized we had witnessed justice delivered by Crow Court.

## SPELUNKING THE WRONG PATH

by Bobbie J. Herring

Jay shouted out for his friends. They had gone on ahead on a path in the cave he did not want to take. He wasn't much for following others anyway. It had been quite a while since he'd heard their voices as they got farther away. He wondered if they were lost.

"Dave. Charlie. Jack. Can you hear me?"

Only his own voice echoed back to him.

Jay's flashlight flickered then faded completely. The cave went totally black.

He took a step, tripped, then fell on a sharp rock that jabbed his calf and impaled him. He grabbed his leg, pulled upward and loosened it. It was excruciating. Warm liquid soaked his hand. He stood up, tried to walk, but crumbled to the cave's floor.

Jay paused, disoriented. He cringed as he stretched out his legs. He leaned back against his backpack cushioned from the rock wall. A chill came through his jeans into his glutes.

He felt around, picked up a small rock. His hand and fingers turned cold as he tightly gripped it.

He turned his head right then left, paused in each direction, held his breath to listen. All he heard was a disturbing silence.

He let the stone roll out of his hand. It tumbled noisily past his legs, became eerily silent for a long time. Ping, ping, it struck solid walls way down in the subterranean world. Finally, it stopped pinging and settled in a place far below. He knew only the space where he sat, nothing more. Now might be a good time to panic in this world of nothing: no light, no sound, no colors.

Could he retrace his steps while remembering the drop off on his left, where that little rock ended up? Or would it be on his right? My God, he might die in another tumble.

His heart thumped deep inside his chest. He felt tired and chilled but struggled to stand up. Dagger-like pains shot up his leg. He sank back down and tapped his flashlight to see if it would work again. It didn't. It made a scratchy, eerie sound against the wall. He crawled, inched forward, unsure where to go. Moments passed, maybe an hour. How could he know?

The darkness that filled his sight made him sleepy. His body ached. Fatigue set in, heavy and cold as a concrete block. He felt everything was futile then lay on his side, put his head on his hands and sobbed until he dozed.



He heard something and sat upright. He was trembling, but in the womb-like darkness he felt hopeful. Earlier, he almost tossed his useless flashlight but now he struck it on the wall and yelled out for his friends. He waited.

They answered back in taps. They were so far away he could sense them yelling but could not discern what they said.

He hit the wall constantly and yelled that he couldn't walk. Soon he saw a glow from their flashlights coming towards him.