

Taking a Job

by Elizabeth Hegwood

Teaching never occurred to me in college. I took workshops and wrote often. Friends and classmates, meanwhile, switched from studio majors to Art Education, or from English to Certification. Not me. Teaching high-schoolers would be all wrong.

Briefly, I enrolled in an education class after my friends pressed the idea that getting certified was good “to fall back on.” But “you shouldn't teach unless you want to teach,” the adjunct said the first day of class. So I dropped.

After I graduated, I increased my part-time hours at a local discount store. Mostly I straightened up, collecting sticky milkshake cups from the sock bins, organizing bras according to size and function (small bras were meshy and bright, meant to be seen, while larger ones were padded and flesh-toned, as sturdy and obscure as corsets), and refolding holiday linens. The place was always trashed. Men unwrapped dress shirts and left the crinkly plastic on the floor. Girls tore through the jeans, holding up hip-huggers and tossing them aside, sometimes looking me, in my oversized store-clerk vest, right in the eye.

The week after I was offered a promotion (Section Head of Shoes, they actually called it), I came home to a message on my answering machine from my grandmother.

“I saw Rosemary today,” she said. My grandmother is like Shirley MacLaine's character in *Terms of Endearment*, looks and everything. Rosemary was my seventh grade English teacher. “Apparently they're desperate for an English teacher at the high school,” she said. “I told Rosemary I didn't think you'd be interested, but maybe you are.” Click.

She was never one for drawn-out endings. A raised eyebrow, a cool word, and done was done.

Recently I, too, had abruptly ended a relationship with a man I loved very much. There went my plans to move to Santa Fe, where he had been weeks before, making notes. You should see. The

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sunlight plays--actively plays!--with the rock. I had stuffed the letters between books, unable to throw them away.

I called my grandmother.

Days later, I was perched in the principal's office at the school where I had graduated five years before. They wanted me.

I wasn't certified, I said.

"You can get certified."

I hadn't student-taught. In fact, I didn't know anything about teaching.

"But we remember you," they insisted.

I blinked.

I didn't have appropriate references. I hadn't taken college grammar. Although I had heard of Harry Wong, I didn't know educational jargon.

They nodded and nodded and led me through the buzzing hallway. Goth kids lingered at the lockers. Uniformed athletes huddled in the doorway.

Outside, the air was chilly and dull. I imagined sitting in front of a one-bedroom duplex, surrounded by the sharp shadows of late winter on a mountain above the desert, huddled in a blanket, scribbling on a pad. A stranger to everyone in the Santa Fe phone book.

The principal told me to get fingerprinted: A background check was all they needed.

