

[The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

[Home](#)[About Us](#)[Interviews](#)[Fiction](#)[Poetry](#)["Our Stories" non-fiction](#)[Writers' Craft Box](#)[Writers' Contest!](#)[Exploration of Theme](#)[Archives](#)[Submission Guidelines](#)[Feedback & Questions](#)

Come in...and be captivated...

[Writers' Contest!](#)

By Denise Bouchard

Our local newspaper ran an article a few years ago about college entrance exams. Parents and children alike were voicing complaints about the new format. The new format consisted largely of essays which families found to be very difficult. They were comprised of a few very disparate words which had to be put into a short but succinct, coherent and interesting story.

We thought it would be a fun challenge to run a contest in the winter issue with our own set of words. We've chosen 1st prize, 2nd prize, and 3rd prize winners whose stories used the assigned words we listed. The winning entries appear below. **[Congratulations to Stephanie Haddad, Abigail Walters, and Lori Closter!!! Thank you to everyone who entered and we hope you had a good time!](#)**

The 1st prize winner, Stephanie Haddad, who told her story with a compelling grace and wit using all the disparate words, gets to design the next contest for our summer issue!!!

Below are the set of words/terms that had to be used for the winter contest in a short fiction story (word limit, 1,000 words) This was by no means, an easy task...

- *Three wisemen
- *Leather pants
- *Gettysburg Address
- *Petit Fours
- *Orthodontist
- *Madagascar Vanilla Beans
- *Easter
- *Dragon

Nana's Aid

By Stephanie Haddad

Squeezed snugly into the pew between my theologically enraptured mother and despondent teenage brother, I willed myself not to fall asleep during Easter mass. I feared that if I did, I'd most surely be snoring within five minutes, especially after the long day's travel from New York to Boston that I had just endured. It would have been nice if I'd at least had time to change out of my leather pants before attending a public worship service.

The priest's familiar voice rang throughout the church, delivering a speech in equal length to the Gettysburg Address, and almost as interesting. As he droned on, I could feel myself slipping. Father John, most fortuitously, raised his voice in an echoing crescendo to proclaim 'eternal damnation lest ye fight temptation by the devil,' or something like that. In any case, it was enough to set off Nana's ultrasensitive hearing aid. The whirring, bleating noise successfully jarred me from my peaceful thoughts of slumber.

"Alright, alright," she shrieked, banging the heel of her palm against the side of her head. "Damned thing. Shut up already!"

At this, even my younger brother, who had been previously engrossed in the conquest of another level of game play on his Nintendo DS, looked over at my beloved Nana. Evidently, family mockery was just a nudge more exciting than slaying dragons. He rolled his eyes at me before returning to his game.

I realized that the priest had actually paused and the whole congregation sat unmoving, collectively holding their breath. My mother was frozen with embarrassment, which was par for the course when my family traveled anywhere en masse.

Suddenly, I saw my salvation.

"Come on, Nana, I'll help you," I whispered, stepping over my twitching mother and ushering my grandmother toward the exit.

"WHAT? Can't hear you! This thing won't stop beeping in my ear," Nana replied, endearingly. Regardless, she followed me to the back of the church and outside into the crisp spring air. The side of her head beared

impatiently while we waited, as I ground my teeth just to bear the sound. Seeing as I'd just completed a three-year stint of orthodontist care, I decided I'd better put an end to this quickly.

As the door closed behind us, I could almost hear the congregation's collective sigh of relief. I sighed with relief too.

Reluctantly, my grandmother placed her malfunctioning octogenarian accessory into my outstretched hand. I silently thanked my mother for teaching me how to shut such devices off at the age of 11... In the fifteen years that my grandmother had been wearing this healthcare scam of a device, it had probably worked well for about five of them. The rest of the time it just made enough noise that no one could hear anything else, especially my grandmother.

When the noise cut off abruptly, I relaxed my clenched jaw completely and handed the hearing aid back to my grandmother.

"Here you go, Nana."

"Thanks, sweetheart. Now, what were we up to?" She stared at me blankly, head cocked to one side and hearing aid still in hand.

"Nana, you need to put your hearing aid back in," I said politely.

"Yes, OK," she did as instructed and then looked back at me for approval.

"OK, Nana, we have to go back in," I turned toward the large double doors tightly shut behind us. "Come on."

"Oh. I love Mass." Nana began excitedly. "Is there a pageant today? I hope

“I like them,” she said cheerfully, smiling at me. “Did you come back to visit me?”

“Yes, for Easter,” I said again. Conversation with Nana was sometimes like beating my head against a brick wall. Seeing as she used to be my primary confidant, even outranking my mother, I couldn’t stand to see her this way. I felt like I’d lost a trusted friend.

“Where’s Joe?” she asked innocently, oblivious to my downcast expression.

I cringed, stiffening at his name. Now, I longed to be sitting in that church pew again, blessed with silent solitude.

“We don’t see each other anymore,” came my automated reply. In fact, we hadn’t seen each other in three very long, very painful years. I couldn’t blame Nana, but it didn’t help me that she kept asking for him every time I saw her.

Just as I was thinking that my Nana was completely lost to me, she said exactly what I needed to hear, reminding me how deeply we were still connected.

“Well then, Patty, you’ve gotta get back out there in those leather pants and meet another nice boy. You can do better than Joe,” she beamed as she hugged me tightly. My eyes brimmed with tears. “Now, what are we standing out here for?”

A Stage Fright

By Abigail Walters

By ~~Indigo~~ ~~Waters~~

Cranberry leather pants, a fitted gray turtle neck, and my hair tucked tightly into a crisp red braid. I was at the podium and the auditorium seemed so insurmountably huge at that moment. Auditioning for the school Christmas play was a huge deal. It didn't matter that the only parts left were intended for boys.

Surely, I could be one of the three wisemen. I had frankincense-scented candles at home. Didn't that count for something? The line for tryouts had been endless. I'd waited an hour in dreadful anticipation and now here I was, standing before all the world with an air of importance as though I was Lincoln reciting the Gettysburg Address. Don't stutter, don't breathe in too deeply and for God sake, don't open your mouth too wide...

My appointment at the orthodontist the previous week had been nothing short of a nightmare. Aside from my begging and pleading, he'd put red elastics around my braces... 'To be festive...' he'd said with a dangerous leer. Didn't he get the meaning of being in junior high? Now, facing fellow classmates, teachers, and upperclassmen, my mouth ached like hell and I knew that as soon as I started speaking, the obnoxious spotlight would hit upon the braces, casting a fiery light from my teeth as though I were a dragon.

But time was up. They were ready for me now. I started my little rehearsed speech. My tone was strong, posture straight, the words came across clearly, but I was acquiring strange stares with every utterance. 'Ok, ok,' I thought, 'I have creepy red braces... get over it...'

Yet to my utter disgrace, it was something else. Something I could feel now as my tongue moved in speech. A lovely chunk of one of the petit fours my grandmother had slipped in my lunch bag was protruding rudely like a bird thrust forth at the calling of the hour in a coo-coo clock. I might as well have been standing there with Madagascan Vanilla beans hanging from my

have been standing there with Madagascar vanilla beans hanging from my nose.

Well, it was all over, due to an unmashed square of radiant turquoise. I didn't get the part, but far worse, I got cast in the Easter parade.

Only the Best

By Lori Closter

The make-up artist gave Clint's cheekbones one more swish with the brush and set it aside. "I think that does it," she said. "You've got a great jawbone there, right up there with the best of them – you ever been to an orthodontist?"

"No."

"Well, you could've. Good luck."

He gave a brief smile and turned away, knowing he had only two minutes until he was supposed to be on the set of the commercial. He tugged on the bandanna, which had been tied too tightly around his neck, and stretched his legs out to either side. The jeans were brand-new; you'd think they'd have saved some money by letting him wear his own, but no-oo-oo-oo. Oh well, he'd thought. Fancy budget, fancy pants. At least they weren't making him wear....

His thoughts trailed off as he watched the approach of the costume girl, Darlene. Horrified, he recognized the item slung over her left forearm: a pair of those fancy leather pants cowboys wore, only they were half-pants –

no seat, no backs of legs. Worthless. He started to meet her. "I am not, repeat not, wearing those," he told her.

She jerked her thumb briefly behind her, dropped to one knee, and started tying the pants onto him. "Three wisemen says you is," she muttered. "So, you is."

Clint looked around, startled. Who were the three wisemen?

The makeup girl—Annie -- came over. "Producer, director, writer," she recited. "Done deal. So, you know your lines?"

"I don't have any," said Clint. "Pretty much I just mumble awhile, making it look like I'm chatting up this blonde who looks like she stepped out of a hatbox at Bonwit's, not gotten off a wagon train."

"Bonwit's," murmured Darlene dreamily. "I haven't heard that name in so long." She eyed him sharply. "So, what're you going to mumble?"

He was startled. "Can't be just anything?"

"Hell, no – gotta be something you've memorized, that you don't have to think about."

She was cute, greenish eyes and blonde hair.

"Only thing I ever memorized was the Gettysburg Address," he drawled.

"Shit. That's too short. Maybe you can offer her some petit-fours, and then she'll just be talking and eating."

SHE IS JUST BE TALKING AND EATING.

“Ah reckon ah wouldn’t have any petit-fours on me,” said Clint, still practicing his drawl. “But I might have a couple of Madagascar vanilla beans. I uses ‘em to make kahlua, you know, from vodka. Takes two weeks.”

Darlene frowned. “You won’t have two weeks. You won’t even have two days. What you got is two minutes. And a script written by some brainy guy whose novel oughta win a Pulitzer, but won’t cuz the publishing industry’s tanked. You know, the economy and all. So the best and brightest are here. Your simple little play for the gal in the corset will probably include a barely detectible subtext about killing a dragon and maybe getting shoved in a tomb right before Easter..” She smiled wickedly, yanked the last leather tie, and stood. “Ready, John Wayne? I mean, Charlton? I mean, JC?”

Clint stepped away from her, picked up the spanking-new ten-gallon hat off a nearby chair, and held it to his chest, almost for protection. Now he looked worried. “The casting director asked if I’d ever used a sword,” he mused. “But no one said anything about a tomb. Do you think they’d really do that? Because I’m –“ he hesitated.

The two women exchanged a glance. “You’re what?” they asked, almost in unison.

He hated to admit it. But he had to find out what he’d gotten into.

“Claustrophobic.”

Darlene slapped her bluejeaned knee in glee. “Honey – don’t you worry. If you’re recitin’ the Gettysburg Address and wooing some gal with petit-fours and fighting a dragon and trying to keep these chaps from falling off all at the same time – the knot here’s a little loose, I did the best I could – 30 seconds in a tomb ain’t going to finish you off. You’re golden!”

seconds in a tomb and going to finish you off. You're golden:

"Thanks," he told her. "You're a big help."

She shrugged. "No problem."

They were distracted by the producer bearing down on them, a Blackberry in one hand and wireless mic in the other. "You set? Great. Here, this way. Hey, I forgot to ask – you okay being in a small space for a bit? I forgot to tell you, there's this little subplot about Easter –"

"Sure," said Clint. "As long as it's just those few seconds."

The producer threw back his head and laughed. "Good one. A few seconds on the screen, right – but probably not more than an hour or two to shoot. Depending on how many retakes we need." He grabbed at Clint's arm. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, I – forgot something. Be right back." He dodged away and caught up with Darlene as she headed back to the wardrobe department.

"Hey- have you read the script?"

She eyed him innocently. "Why?"

"Well, it's just – how'd you know about the bit about the dragon and Easter? They didn't even tell me 'til just now!"

Now she gave a broad grin. "Like I said, honey. The best and the brightest. Now skedaddle to that set and give it your all."

Clint did. And when the commercial wrapped, half a day earlier than expected because he kept mouse-quiet inside the tomb, he sent Darlene a box of petit-fours. She returned them, with a note: “Don’t care for petit-fours, thanks just the same. But if you’d like to try again, with the fruit of some Madagascar vanilla beans – why, go right ahead. Remember – only the best around here!”

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