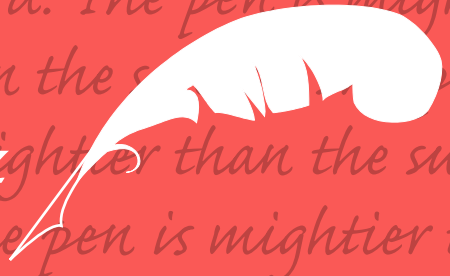


Freelancer

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A Publication of
the Amarillo College
English Department



Amarillo College

Guidelines and Policies

Freelancer is an annual publication of the Amarillo College English Department designed to showcase student, faculty, and staff writing of all kinds. Winning entries from the Amarillo College English Department Writer's Roundup contest are also included. A new issue is published each spring.

Freelancer invites submissions from AC students, faculty, and staff. You may send us original poetry, short stories, essays, reflections, etc. Submissions may be emailed to a staff member, given to a member of the English Department, or delivered to the English Writing Lab in Ordway 101. We **must** receive an electronic copy of each work, either saved on a form of electronic media or emailed as an attachment. Submissions **must** have a name and contact information (student ID number, mailing address, and phone number) on them. To be published in *Freelancer*, submissions **must** be accepted by staff majority vote.

Each submission becomes the property of *Freelancer* until after publication of the issue it appears in, when rights revert to the author. Submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by the author's request and a self-addressed stamped envelope. All submitted works must be original and unpublished.

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Liar

by Jenna Beddell

You fed me fictitious words,

Hid me from the pain.

Poisoned me with claims of love,

Embedded them in my brain.

You asphyxiated your promises,

Took away their breath.

Clenched your hands around my trust,

Strangled it near to death.

So remove the blindfold from my eyes,

And let me see at last.

Erase the illusions I believed,

So I can know the past.

Slay the fairytale of my world,

And set my faith on fire.

Ruin everything you swore you wouldn't,

And destroy my life, you liar.

Fragments

by Robin Henderson

“Domestic violence occurs in 60% of marriages and is the most under-reported crime. Get out now!” the woman on the radio urged as I drove home. An hour earlier, I had been working my second job, happy to be away. Minutes crept by as I mustered the courage to get out of the car to face the perpetual nightmare that was waiting inside my house. Seconds ticked by as I struggled, with full hands, to open the door. In the remaining fragments of this day, I was able to leave the agony behind by discovering my inner strength and overcoming fear.

Dread had infected me like a sickness, but I drew strength as I walked slowly through the door. He stood up from the couch and walked over to see what food I had brought home. I ignorantly expected him to greet me. Instead, he reached in the bag of food, and I could see that he was not happy with my dinner choice. I avoided eye contact, hoping not to set him off. His unhappiness quickly shifted to anger, and his face turned crimson. As routine held true, he told me how dense I was. I lowered my head and stared at the floor as I always did. He smashed a burrito into my hair and scalp. I sighed, loudly, as clumps of beans and cheese fell to my shoulders. “Shut up! If you don’t like it, leave,” he fatefully said. What took him three seconds to say took me one second to decide. For the first time in a long while, I looked closely at him. I could sense the man was insecure, and he needed to control me for his own security. I had been supplying him all that he had needed to continue treating me this way. His lips pursed, his eyes narrowed, and his knuckles whitened. He wanted a fight; he needed it. I was done fighting. I was done enabling him. “Ok, I am leaving,” I asserted. I knew that if I slept on this decision, I would never leave. I did not have a plan; I only knew that I had to act quickly. The seconds slipped by in silence, odd silence.

I could almost hear his thoughts scrambling as I walked into the bedroom and brazenly pulled a suitcase out of the closet. I hesitated for several minutes. Could I do this on my own? Was I strong enough? I rationalized that I could not get any lower than now. I was ready. I changed shirts and wiped the food from my face. I took a long look in the mirror. I made myself a promise, in that minute, to never again allow myself to be treated poorly. He nonchalantly walked into the room to watch me pack. He told me what he would do to me if I left. His threats fueled me on. I packed, hurriedly, like I was about to miss a plane, the plane that would take me away from all this. I ignored him, yet he persisted. His rage mounted, and he drew his hand up to hit me. I stopped what I was doing and looked deeply into his eyes. He saw fearlessness in my eyes that he had never seen before. I was no longer afraid of him. I finally understood that without my fear he was powerless. In a panic, the man tried different ways of trying to manipulate me, and with each new tactic, I grew stronger. I zipped up the suitcase. It had only taken fifteen minutes to pack for a new life.

An hour had passed since I made the decision to flee, and I had been sitting in my car for another hour. Realizing all that had happened, I, then and only then, crumbled to a sobbing mess, releasing all that had been suppressed. I made a new vow that this would be the last time I left that man. Finality set in and I felt the heaviness,

from eight years of suffering, float away. I was proud of myself for standing up to him, but resentment started to seep in. I was the one having to sacrifice everything. He was still in control by having, in his possession, everything that I owned. I relinquished that thought as I drove to a hotel. These things were not necessities, but material items that could be replaced. I reflected the rest of the evening about how brave and strong I had become in just a fragment of a day. He repeatedly called my cell phone over the remaining hours of the night, to no avail. I went to sleep dreaming of the new life that would await me in the morning.

The fragments of that day led me to who I am today, and without those fragments, I am not whole. I never received my belongings from that man, but I did regain a priceless remnant, my self. My plight with that man was far from over, but my fortitude has led me through each challenge. Instead of reliving those seconds, minutes, and hours, I now embrace the unfolding moments in my life with a new-found confidence.

A Long Way Off

by Frank Sobey

"...his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him..." (Luke 15:20)

Just before the
horizon
thins
with light
a pale shape
steps
out of
the silent
house
and stands
waiting
hands tucked
and still
facing a distant
country.
In those brittle
moments
the eyes
close,
the mouth
opens,
the heart
expands—longs
for a resurgence
he can hold
and kiss,
that fills
the sun-
framed
absence in
his life, that
requires blood.

Loving the Bomb

by Jon R. Alexander

The Cold War was a forty-four year long struggle between the communist Soviet Union and its allies and the capitalist United States and its allies. Few shots were fired, yet both sides had thousands of nuclear weapons trained on each other. The constant threat of annihilation brought about some odd behavior on both sides: from building the restrictive Berlin Wall in the East to the xenophobic practice of McCarthyism in the West. Many great motion pictures were made in that time period alluding to or drawing from occurrences during the Cold War, such as *The Manchurian Candidate*, the *James Bond* films, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Apocalypse Now*. However, the film that best captures the madness of the Cold War is the unlikely 1964 dark comedy, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.

Dr. Strangelove's greatness comes in part from its premise: that the events leading to the end of the world could be funny. The film satirizes the Cold War principle of Mutually Assured Destruction, or M.A.D. Considered a deterrent by both sides, the idea was that if one side attacked, the other side would attack too, and both sides would be destroyed. As laughable as that concept might be, that's not the funny part of the movie. The laughter starts when, in this atmosphere, a crazed general (aptly named Jack D. Ripper) comes to believe that his impotence is not a side effect of aging, but the result of a communist plot to corrupt America's water supply. He reaches the conclusion that the enemy is such a threat, he needs to put an end to their existence. Seeking that end, he fabricates a story of a "shooting war" and uses the loopholes in the chain of command designed to ensure M.A.D. to independently order a nuclear strike, resulting in an apocalypse. Adding to the amusement is the fact that he is not alone in his madness. He is assisted or enabled by a variety of larger than life characters, all of whom seem to have forgotten that they are dealing with human lives.

Breathing life into a cast of eccentric characters, *Dr. Strangelove* features performances from some lesser-known acting greats at the top of their game. Sterling Hayden, an actor known for almost always portraying a "tough guy," plays the loosened General Ripper with comical paranoia. Hayden's deadpan delivery of his rant exposing his concern for our "precious bodily fluids" has the corners of my mouth twitching every time I see it. Ripper's gun-shy aide, Group Captain Lionel Mandrake, is one of the few voices of reason in the film. Played by Peter Sellers, his dovish fear of conflict and Gen. Ripper combine to show that even sane people can be funny. Featuring an earnest Slim Pickens as their southern-fried captain, the crew on the fighter plane heading for Russia on Ripper's orders comes across as a group of well-informed yet foolhardy men ready to follow any order, even if that order leads to the deaths of everybody on the planet. Giving a fearless performance as one of the generals trying to help the President stop the attack, George C. Scott creates a funny monster in General Buck Turgidson: a man more devoted to military glory and one-upmanship than the preservation of human life. Sellers' second role in the film is the powerless President Merkin Muffley, whose stymied attempts to prevent a war include letting the Soviet ambassador into the top secret "War Room" to discuss how to avert disaster,

conducting a side-splitting phone call with a drunken Soviet Premier explaining that the imminent attack is one big mistake, collaborating with the Russians to shoot down his own fighter plane, and even sending troops to his own military base to get Ripper to give him the code that would stop the bombing. When Gen. Turgidson starts fighting with the Soviet ambassador in the “War Room,” the President delivers one of the most memorable lines of the film when he says, “You can’t fight here! This is the War Room!” In his third and final role in the film, Sellers stars as the delightfully deranged title character, Dr. Strangelove. A mad ex-Nazi scientist advising the President, Strangelove delights in chaos and destruction, all while possessing a hand with a mind of its own that alternately gives the Nazi salute and tries to strangle him. The joy in his voice as he confirms the existence of a Soviet “Doomsday Machine,” a device that will remotely respond to any U.S. attack with total nuclear war, brings about in me both laughter and chills. Together, these comedic performances take an incredible story and deliver it with crazy credibility.

None of this would have been possible without the genius of Stanley Kubrick. His precise direction gave *Dr. Strangelove* a cohesiveness most movies lack. Kubrick was known to be a perfectionist with a keen eye for detail. The insides of the plane looked so realistic that men from the real Air Force questioned where the movie had gotten its designs. He made the nonexistent “War Room” so easily believable that when President Reagan first entered the White House, he asked where it was. Kubrick also deserves credit for letting his actors improvise when they had good ideas. When George C. Scott accidentally fell over during a scene, he got right back up and finished the speech he was giving. Other directors would have re-shot the scene, but Kubrick left it in, knowing it only increased the perception of Turgidson’s madness. Kubrick was also the originator of the idea that the harrowing story should be told jokingly. Adapting the book *Red Alert*, he realized that the plot, while possible, was too outrageous to be filmed as a serious motion picture. And what a motion picture it was. Kubrick closes the movie with one of the most memorable scenes put on film. After all attempts to stop the fighter plane have failed, Slim Pickens ends up accidentally sitting on the bomb as it deploys. He joyfully rides the bomb rodeo-style to its target and, with it, the end of the world. The film ends with shots of atomic bombs detonating one after the other, accompanied ironically by the bittersweet World War II-era song, “We’ll Meet Again.”

Perhaps it takes a cynical mind to fully appreciate what *Dr. Strangelove* brings to the table. Relishing the insanity rampant in the movie, my cynical mind meets its match and more. Still, though I have enjoyed the story, actors, dialogue, and hard work that made the movie great, when hit with that one-two punch that closes the film, I almost feel like sobbing. Indeed, tears would not be unreasonable for many who see the film and realize that a single madman could have brought about a nuclear holocaust with nobody in power being able to stop him. The better response comes from people who see the film, recognize the craziness, and reply with laughter as they learn to “Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.”

In Her Eyes

by Julie Rains

Every day she stands in
the same place staring
in the mirror with a disgusted face.
The body she sees repulses
her mind. It's not at all
what she's trying to find.
They say she's absurd,
she's perfectly thin, yet she counts
her flaws again and again.
She's appalled by the skin
beneath her arm. The jiggle of
her thighs causes her alarm.
Her waist is small, but a
bulge is there. She has too
much skin below thinning hair.
In her mind she is
fat, unfairly so. She never
eats, but has nothing to show.
Her body is weak, a small price
to pay. Perfection will come,
she is certain one day.

Polysyllabicus

by Karen L. Speelman Taylor

I sit and watch a thick blob ooze from the nib of my pen. Ink that should flow hangs from the sharp tip in a dark blue globe like ripe fruit that dares to be plucked. Words mined from my brain sleep in the shaft of my pen. One by one, I coax the words to the light full of hope, but each one falls to the page with a dead wet thud. Ink, pen, words, page, all are a part of a whole that yields not to my will.

My head aches. My eyes burn and grow dim.

All of a sudden, the dead words on the page are no longer separate but appear articulated like a serpent's spine as the written lines begin to undulate in time with some otherworldly mellisonant humming, the result of a pair of beating iridescent diaphanous wings rhythmically agitating the once lifeless verbiage. Momentarily hypnotized by the fluidity of my language transitioning on the pressed-pulp landscape, I am oblivious to the wearer of the wings.

As mere dilettante with capabilities equating quotidian artistry, I am captivated by the magnificent locomotion of my newly found creativity. Sleeping words once locked inside the shaft of my pen burst from the effulgent nib like sparkling meteors showering down from the heavens onto the awaiting page, and immediately the multitude of glimmering stars deliquesce and flow into the others in the continuous symphonious dance. Their meanings singularly or wholly become indiscernible. Sagacity bolsters my belief that textually my words must be artfully wondrous, although I cannot read them.

As my frustration grows at my inability to comprehend my own work, I realize I am still an ingénue awaiting liberation from my artlessness. It is then I become cognizant of the presence of the owner of the wings. This unearthly being manifests in a pileous ebony mantle with dipterous pellucid wings temporarily flattened on its back, and upon its bulbous head rides what must be a coronet consisting of two feathery protuberances rising up symbolic of quills in an inkwell. In its multifaceted optical orbs, I see an infinite number of my own reflection, and I envisage the release of my fecundity is linked to this serendipitous meeting

Polysyllabicus's unexpected arrival is reminiscent of another dipteran interloper eternally captured by a Netherlandish artiste's hand in his rendition of a contemplative Carthusian. Unfortunately, only those with judiciousness know his appearance is imperative to the contemplation of creativity as others, such as Myiagros at the altar of Zeus, simply want to crush him.

Something is changing in the euphonious humming, and I sense my time with Polysyllabicus is running out. Maddeningly, I still cannot decipher what I have written on the page, and I beg this ethereal creature for the cipher; however, my pleas go unanswered. Not wanting to be doomed to a lifetime of producing insipid drivel, I am on the verge of entering into a Faustian agreement with him, but I believe he cannot hear

me over the melodic humming as I refuse to consider he may simply be ignoring my request.

Suddenly, some monstrously cacophonous buzzing shatters the languorous mellifluous droning. Before the resounding dissonance completely pollutes my quixotic perception, I detect a mandibular movement and hear Polysyllabicus articulate in a barely audible whisper, "*memento mori*." (Remember that you are mortal.)

I wake up and flick a fly off my hand.

Title Goes Here

by Michelle Vongkaysone

I'm not a poet
I don't really write that sort of stuff
I'm not much for reading it, either
Most importantly, I don't fool myself
Or others about it

I've never called myself a poet
Or anything else I'm not either

Even though I may indulge in the thought
Of being something else I'd like to be
I am what I am
I don't refer to myself otherwise
I don't delude myself

Why are titles so important?
Yes, names can have meaning
All words have meaning
But, then time can distort this definition

Other connotations don't require passage of time
To distort them
People can easily warp their titles
Themselves
Through those that are expected
And those that are not
Their titles insinuate what
They "should" and "should not"
Be doing

Why is this so?
Is the desire for an idealized portrayal
Of people based on what they "are"
So strong that people feel
Compelled to delude them
Otherwise?

Titles are relative
They are shallow
They limit what others are willing to see
In regards to their peers

Basing what is already subjective
On further illusion

Crafted by those who intentionally
See what they most want of themselves
For whatever reasons
(Status, depression, etc.)
Is ineffectual

I'm not a poet
I don't call myself a poet
This isn't poetry
It's all words
Just words
That may or may not have
Meaning
Depending on your perspective.

The Arrival of Despair

by Jessica Jackson

A young girl, around the age of eight, steps out the front door of a red brick house. She pauses on the porch for a moment as her eyes adjust to the bright summer day. The waiflike child descends the stairs to the sidewalk. She has a white sundress adorned with small pink flowers. Stringy brown hair hangs down past her shoulders. As she begins down the stairs, she notices the green vines with purple flowers that line the sidewalk. Walking out into the sun, she feels the warm concrete under her bare feet. She stops at the end of the sidewalk. Next to her is a dark evergreen bush. The late morning sky is devoid of clouds; a beautiful light blue stretches across the horizon. A soft breeze ruffles the dress about her ankles. Over the tops of houses she can see trees from the park at the bottom of the hill. It seems a veritable ocean of emerald green, contrasting against the sky. The air is sweet with no hint of manure from the nearby feedlots. Such beauty surrounds her; she is engulfed by the warm summer air—though what she sees through her green eyes cannot overcome what she is feeling behind them. A new powerful emotion has consumed her thoughts. Not quite sure of what this experience involves, she stands longer looking out upon the beauty of the day. The emotion is relentless. No amount of physical beauty is able to overcome the despair building inside the small girl. Not realizing it at the time, she sees not what vicious strength the emotion will evoke as years pass; she only knows that at this moment she will never be the same. With a quiet sigh, the girl turns. Head down, she walks back into the dark home.

The Marriage

by Frank Sobey

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone..." (Gen. 2:18)

I.

After God himself
brought all creatures to be named
in the lush heat of Eden,
Adam must have sensed something
in creation that gave him
pause, while God, still clouded with dust,
waited to see what he would call them.
Yet he could not bring himself
to brand the shy herd
that stood before him—as the cold
reality of what was in his heart grew.

After the parting, when
the clustered family slept beside the bones
of their kills, he considered what he had
come to call the glacier,
how it came to be formed in the fissure
of his heart
and by whom, only to remember
what he had asked
one morning
in the shadows of the flourishing
trees: "Why am I alone
though you, God, take my hand
in the garden?" But God, marveling
at what he had made,
looked on, unperturbed.

Half suspecting him, Adam
later began to believe
a thin pane of space
must have been between
them at his making,
frosted with their breathing—
else he might be, even now,
in the light of leaves made to fall
around the one bare tree God
would not let him name.
So he watched the glacier thicken,

widen, and splinter again and again
in all of creation, himself,
and his children.

From time to time,
as one dreaming, he prayed,
not for solace or understanding
but to return. After
nine centuries of grinding darkness
though, he could not recall the face
of God—only the name
he carried, crushed to the gravel
of his breath, buried
in the blood. But,
in those long years of the sun,
the old questions he had formed
and pushed crumbled on the tongue's
fast slopes, the answers
receding.

Staggering under the weight of
what had worn away,
Adam, at the end, tossed
the furred skins from his back
to the ground and knelt
in the wet thaw and softened
stone. He looked up,
sighed, then smiled,
a familiar graceful warmth
in his hand and at his side.
Thus led, he started to climb
the ice-hewn pass that through
the sun-blazed arms of God is rising.

II.

*I am not afraid, love,
for hearts as close as ours
cannot be plucked apart
then hurled to rot
in the dim lands
without falling as one*

*breath, the same that God
burned in your lungs.*

*He made you
rest for a moment
so I might become
a mystery
upon your tongue.*

*We will
see those lifted
arms again, love,
and the blood of its bark
will seal our wounds
and wed our lips.*

*I am here.
I have not left you.
Oh, my love, let me be with you now.*

*We are alone together, all of me
in you, you in me, all one.
Do you see? Heart among heart,
we who you thought
were made to fall are shining.*

The Fall

by Jezebel Voule'

I stood on the cliff
looking miles down at the waves that hit
She said I wouldn't jump
I am a watcher
and action was not in my blood
I watched my toes
cling to the edge
hoping I'd slip
and fall into that pit
They say no one has ever survived the landing
though they've seen people try
I imagine it's the jumping
that's the exhilarating part of the ride
not the waves crashing below
the impact of water
that lets you go
She taunts me
knowing I have not what it takes
I'm not strong enough
to survive the wicked waves
I toss a stone from the cliff
I imagine my soul in it

flying through the salty wind
then my face goes long
as my tiny pebble of a soul
gets knocked into the solid rock
I dream of a ripple effect
my soul hitting the wall
and taking me down with it
She tells me it's over
that we should move along
Daylight's almost fading
and there's more to life
than dreaming of the fall
especially if you're not willing
to take any steps at all
She outstretches her hand
It's a safe place
in this rocky land
She says there's always another day
to take the reins
of who I think I am
I reach out my hand and hear stones
taking the plunge to that promised land
How could they be so daring
how long have they been planning
on taking the dive

or do they feel they were pushed
by an unseen hand
I can almost touch her fingertips
to my sanctuary
When will I be ready to live
am I awaiting the push
or will I jump of my own consent
I turn away from her
making a run for it
I know she's smiling
as my feet fall from the earth's embrace
I fall, but on my own terms
and it's exhilarating
even though I know what is bound to come
Time stops for a little bit
and I know what it's like
to be free from my own binds
The salty air embraces me
explores me
but I'm something it can not stop
It cannot change my path
unless I permit
Then the moment of truth
bangs on my door
I face my mortality

but will be entranced by it nevermore
The grim reaper seems to be smiling
and I grin right back
tell him he can have me
if he thinks he's caught me yet
I hit the waves
confused
and I feel only pain
I can taste blood
in the salty wet
I sink below
and I swear the sea is caving me in
The grim reaper stands before me
in what seems to be
my watery grave
and all I can say is what a shame
that it took me so long
just to live for a little bit
The reaper is smiling
as he stretches out a hand
and I say if you think you've caught me
you can have me then
and with my broken body flailing
I break the current's drift
I hit the open air

and know that my life is about to begin

She's standing on the sandy banks

My stability

even though everything has changed

my angel's devil despair

to bring life to me

Never once did she try to push me

though she knew it needed to be done

She's the reflection of the woman

I am ready to become

I fell but I needed to fall on my own terms

so I could appreciate the life I've

tried to hurt

Enigma

by Daniel Kennedy

In the depths of your brain,
I stay hidden out of sight.
Fully capable of pain,
I'm darker than a stormy night.

You keep me locked away,
Hoping to maintain your sanity.
When I'm allowed to stray,
I break your emotional vanity.

Rarely, every once in a while,
A silver streak breaks through.
But the distance is a fictitious mile,
And the good ones number very few.

The best of me can make you smile.
The worst of me can make you cringe.
Some of me seems quite vile,
while others are reason to grin.

A wide variety of emotion
can obviously stem from me.
As vast as the many oceans,
I am your every memory.

War Stories

by Calvin Wilkinson

War is horror. War is a frightening, dirty, immoral monster that chews human beings up and spits them out, if they survive. Stories and poems have been written about every war, many authored by the veterans themselves, all communicating the same thing: war is horror. Authors such as Tim O'Brien, Ernest Hemingway, and Wilfred Owen have all written extensively on the subject. In Tim O'Brien's short story "How to Tell a True War Story," set during the Vietnam War, his narrator takes the stand that there is no such thing as a true war story that is also instructive (94). While there are most certainly many war stories that neither "instruct, nor encourage virtue" (94), and that are full of profanity and horror, there is still much that can be learned from the stories that have come out of war. War and conflict is a natural state for the human race, but the desire for peace and the need for love are the higher things that satisfy mankind. War brings out the best, just as it brings out the worst, in human character. Every war has stories of not just great heroes doing brave deeds, nor of atrocities and brutality, but of regular men and women who rise above the horror in service to their country and comrades-in-arms.

A common theme among war stories, especially those written during the last century, is that the authors are constantly attempting to debunk the myths that surround war. The most heavily attacked is the notion that fighting and dying in a war is a romantic endeavor. Wilfred Owen, author of the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est," after describing a First World War gas attack, has this to say: "My friend, you would not tell with such high zest/ To children ardent for some desperate glory,/The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est,/ Pro patria mori" [It is sweet and fitting . . . to die for one's country] (25-28). Many soldiers, who survived the horrors of trench warfare so common during World War One, would quite likely agree with Wilfred Owen. At the same time, it is important to remember that this poem was written by a British soldier who had seen over three years of active duty in the trenches. What if the poem was written by an American, fresh to the war and with little stake in the outcome, with the mindset of strangers fighting for strangers? A French soldier would hold the viewpoint of fighting for one's homeland against an invader unlike the American forces, or even the British. A war story from the same situation can be different but truthful with varying degrees of virtue and instruction conveying different insights, depending on the perspective.

Even with the decline of trench warfare in ensuing wars, soldiers continued to write about each war's own particular brand of terror. For Tim O'Brien, his story's characters must contend with the booby traps and guerilla tactics seen during the Vietnam War. Two of his stories, "The Things They Carried" and "How to Tell a True War Story," follow one narrator and his platoon through the jungles and mountains of Vietnam. In both stories, soldiers are forced to watch as their friends and comrades-in-arms are violently killed. Both stories dwell on the horror of war, the loss, the destruction. At the same time, both stories also show the love each man has for his fellow soldiers, as when Bob "Rat" Kiley loses his friend Curt Lemon to a booby trap: "he loved the guy. He . . . was his best friend in the world. They were like soul mates . . . like twins or something, they had a whole lot in common" (94). In "The Things They Carried," much of the narrator's focus is on the platoon's commanding officer, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, and his conflicted love for both a girl named Martha back

home and his brotherly love for the men he is supposed to be leading. Lieutenant Cross's love for Martha is conflicted, in that though he wants to love and be loved by her, "she belonged to another world, which was not quite real... a poet and a virgin and uninvolved, and because he realized she did not love him and never would" (87). Ultimately, Lt. Cross realizes he must make a choice between continuing to live in a fantasy world where he and Martha loved each other and attending to the real world of Vietnam and the dangers that confronted him and his men. This conflict is brought into sharp relief with the death of one of his soldiers, Ted Lavender, a death that he feels that he should have been able to prevent: "He pictured Martha's smooth, young face, thinking he loved her...more than his men, and now Ted Lavender was dead because...he couldn't stop thinking about her" (81). His guilt is misplaced, since he had no real control over whether Ted Lavender was killed or not. His lack of attention to his platoon's situation does, however, leave room for doubt in his own mind. Could he have prevented Lavender's death? This is the question that haunts him. His emotions for his men make this a war story that not only speaks of unimaginable suffering and horror, but also love and sacrifice. Because of his love for his men and for Martha, his guilt over Ted Lavender's death, and "a silent awe for the power of the things they carried" (82), he finds himself unable to put down the burden he carries, his emotion, his all-encompassing desire to love.

Is O'Brien's narrator correct in saying that there are no true war stories? Yet, even O'Brien contradicts himself in the course of "How to Tell a True War Story," as there are descriptions of beauty alongside stories of brutality. O'Brien talks about a "wide river turning pinkish red, and the mountains beyond, . . .you find yourself studying the fine colors on the river, you feel wonder and awe at the setting of the sun" (102). Throughout O'Brien's writing, we see themes of love, duty, sacrifice, and beauty. As O'Brien's narrator observes at the end of the story, "a true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and...do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow" (104).

Alan Seeger's poem "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" continues the paradox that there is both beauty and destruction in war. The poem is a mass of contradictory terms and images, as it attempts to capture the mental state of a soldier about to join a battle just as spring is beginning:

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air-
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair. (1-6)

In this section, the beauty and renewal of life that is associated with spring is contrasted against the destruction and death that comes from war. So many times, it takes a great tragedy or disastrous event to make people appreciate the beauty of life. Think about the soldier who is about to follow orders to attack an enemy position, knowing he likely will not survive the assault. As he looks about himself, he can't help but notice that spring has arrived, as he sees that "the first meadow-flowers [have] appear[ed]" (14). With death all around him, he is struck by the renewed life he sees in the natural world.

In order for a war story to be true, it must first be truthful. It is inevitable that the sequences of events, the people involved in them, or even if they happened the way they are remembered, can be distorted by the passage of time or influenced by the stress of the situation. It is the willful distortion of the truth, or perhaps an unwillingness to hear the truth, that may determine the course of the story; an example of this can be found in Ernest Hemingway's short story "Soldier's Home". This story tells of Krebs, a young soldier just returned from duty during World War One. When he returns home, he finds that no one is interested in hearing stories of his experiences. He has returned from war a year after most of his fellow soldiers have returned home, and in order for his audience to be interested in his stories, he finds himself having to sensationalize what he had experienced. After Krebs tells these stories with little half-truths and small lies in them, he feels the consequence of the distortion: "[he] acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration" (68). Hemingway's soldier finds that he is eventually unable to talk about what he went through at all, first due to the lack of interest he finds in his listeners, and second because of the consequences from the lies he was telling to gain attention.

Ultimately, what makes a war story true or untrue lies within the character of the author. A man's character is called to account when faced with the awesome horror that war is and it is once again his character which sees him through the stress and in the end it is his character that is able to tell a true war story complete with the horrific alongside the beauty.

War is human nature. It is the horrific of mankind, mixed with the beauty of what a man is. It is the twisting of the horrific and the beauty that is a man's soul. Conflict is what the human race is on every level. The importance of war stories, far above the immorality that comes from warfare, is to communicate the value of life and the indestructible values of love and beauty.

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Global Warming

by Tad Little

“Give a hoot, don’t pollute” for years was the motto of Woodsy the Owl from the United States Forest Service. Just a few years later, people morphed this friendly reminder into a more pointed statement: “Just say no to Hummers.” We are no longer being reminded to pick up our trash. We are being told that the vehicles we are driving, the homes we are building, and even our mere existence is having a catastrophic effect on the Earth. Global warming alarmists love to predict a future based on fear rather than science. They tell of a world with one continent destroyed by flooding and a horrendous drought on another, the devastation of crops, and once thriving areas now unlivable due to harsher weather. While there are many people who choose to believe this theory, many scientists have proven that global warming is not a man made phenomenon.

The global warming alarmists like to point out that the average temperature of the earth has increased 1.5° F over the past 150 years. They like to blame this temperature increase on an increase of CO₂ (carbon dioxide) generated from man. The fact is, as researchers have pointed out, over the last 10,700 years there have been seven major warming and cooling trends. These trends have lasted as long as 3,000 years or as short as 650. The temperature variation in many of these periods averaged as much as 1.8° F, .3° F more than the temperature increase of the last 150 years. It has also been documented of the six major temperature variations prior to the current era, three produced temperatures warmer than the present average and three have produced cooler temperatures (Carlisle).

The major argument of those who believe in the phenomenon of global warming is the rise of CO₂ levels in the atmosphere. Levels of CO₂ can be measured in ppm (parts per million). Once again they are quick to blame this rise on modern conveniences. More cars on the road equal more emissions. Larger homes require more natural resources to be used, such as more coal being burned for electricity and therefore greater CO₂ emissions. What they do not consider once again are the historical trends. Using techniques, such as examining air pockets trapped in fossilized amber, scientists can tell the levels of CO₂ during the Prehistoric Eras. These levels 100 million years ago were 3,000 to 5,000 ppm, not 350 ppm like today’s levels! (Ray). Even if they choose to ignore historical trends, they should consider modern day fact. It is estimated that humans produce seven billion tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere every year. Nature, on the other hand, produces in the same period about 200 billion tons (Ray). They choose to forget the past, ignore the present, and worry about the future.

It is one thing to look over the past and record the events; it is an entirely different matter to predict events that have not happened yet. It takes very complex computer models just to predict the weather for tomorrow. Those models are even more complex and made of assumptions for the weather seven days from tomorrow. However, people expect scientists to have an accurate prediction of what the climate will be like 100 years from now. Astrophysicist Sallie Baliunas of the Harvard-

Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics has the same point of view. In an interview from May of 2001 she stated, "Predicting the weather is done on a very small scale. We have to try to do that globally, but we can't do that because the computer power isn't available. We also don't have the knowledge of what changes the climate. So we have to make some assumptions and guesses. There are something like five million parameters that have to go into a good climate model, and it has to compute for a time longer than the age of the universe if we wanted to know something" (Baliunas and Glassman). Therefore, based upon this information, even if it was possible to gather, organize and input all the available data for the computers to generate their best model predictions, they would no longer be telling us the future, rather what should have happened in the past.

It is a fact that global warming has been one of the most highly debated topics in modern time. What does not seem to be a fact is the information the global warming alarmists are choosing to base their arguments on. They are choosing to ignore the scientific records of the past. They are oblivious to the lack of scientific methods for accurately predicting the future. They would rather manipulate current data to try and support a false logic because scientists have proven that global warming is not a man made phenomenon.

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Good Initiative, Bad Judgment: A Closer Look at No Child Left Behind

by Jason Henderson

The No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, is a United States Act of Congress that was proposed by President George W. Bush shortly after taking office in January of 2000. The bill, which received overwhelming bipartisan support, is based on the principle of standards-based education reform. This reform style simply states that setting high standards for education and developing measurable goals will increase the overall quality of the education each U.S. student receives. The legislation was primarily targeted at closing the achievement gaps often seen in low-income students and helping these students maintain proficiency levels. The NCLB act focused on three areas of educational development: reading, arithmetic, and science and set a goal of 100 percent proficiency in these subjects by the year 2014. In order for states to be eligible for any federal educational funding, the states agreed to establish educational baselines for all state-run schools, proctor federally approved testing to students, and report to the federal government any educational gains and losses made in their respective state. But, since the NCLB Act was officially signed into law on January 8, 2002, there have been very few, if any, measurable gains made. States have been forced to live up to the unrealistic goals of the NCLB, administer more controversial standardized testing, and shrink their curriculum to focus only on the three main areas of concern under the NCLB; all reasons the federal government should rescind the No Child Left behind Act and return all educational decision making to the states.

When the No Child Left Behind Act was officially signed into law, many politicians and Americans believed we had taken a step in the right direction to ensure our children receive the best education possible. The unfortunate reality is this legislation placed unobtainable goals on many of our schools across the nation. According to an article in the *New York Times*, the law requires “All students in the United States, including English language learners and students with special needs, to perform at grade level by 2014” (Hussey). This requirement unfairly punishes schools with a high number of English as a Second Language, or ESL, children, and schools with higher enrollment numbers of children that require special needs. These schools are forced to expend vast amounts of time and money trying to bring these children up to the appropriate grade level, and in doing so, many of the other students are not appropriately challenged. School districts are forced to spend money that would have been directed at Gifted and Talented or other programs on special teachers and tutors in order to make the required improvements. Some states have even lowered their own academic goals and reporting systems just to meet the federally required minimums in order to show the incremental improvements necessary to keep federal funding.

Another key part of the NCLB Act is the requirement for states to administer already highly debated and criticized standardized tests. These tests make their mark on a child’s future by labeling him or her as academically “acceptable” or academically “underachieving” when in reality the tests, in many circumstances, only prove that one

is capable of testing well. Life skills and critical thinking techniques cannot be assessed on standardized tests which are almost always in a multiple choice question and answer format. In the book, *Standardized Minds*, the author notes that “Current research shows that standardized testing has thwarted rather than helped educational reform and that they continue to be remarkably biased and inaccurate assessments of the abilities of many Americans” (Sacks 7). So much emphasis is often placed on these standardized tests that teachers are often encouraged to spend as much classroom time discussing successful test taking techniques as they are teaching the actual subject matter covered on the tests.

The fields of art and music are an important part of a well-rounded academic curriculum and are essential to the success of students as a whole. Unfortunately, another result of NCLB legislation has been felt in the realm of arts and music. Since schools cannot be penalized, or more importantly, rewarded for having successful art and music programs, they are most often the target of budget cuts in order to increase spending in other areas to improve test scores. Schools often refer to this activity as “narrowing the curriculum” and view it as a necessity in order to meet educational goals. As part of an ongoing study of the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted a survey in 2007 and found that while approximately 62 percent of school districts increased the amount of time spent in elementary schools on English language arts, and or math, 44 percent of districts cut time on science, social studies, art and music, physical education, lunch, or recess (McMurrer 7). This reduction in the art and music curriculum directly impacted a young 13-year-old prodigy in Longview, Texas. The focus of a 2007 *Time* magazine article titled, “Are We Failing Our Geniuses,” Annalise Brasil was saddened to learn that her school’s music program was going to be scaled back shortly after she had won a regional singing competition (Cloud). The school district cited a need to increase slumping test scores. After much debate with the school’s administration, and no funds for financing a private education, the Brasil family made the tough decision to sell their house and enroll Annalisee in another school district; a school district that included an art and music curriculum in addition to a strong gifted and talented program.

While the No Child Left Behind Act is based on good intentions, it falls way short of providing the anticipated gains that were advertised by lawmakers. Failure in education is not an option for the United States. It is time for the federal government to realize its shortcomings and allow the states themselves to again play a vital role in educating the future of our great nation. Throughout its history, our nation has rewarded those who have strived for educational greatness, not educational mediocrity.

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Innocence Exploited: The Plight of Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

by Jessica Wan

Frailty, if thy name is woman, then Cruelty, thy name is man! The men who rule the life of poor Ophelia in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* certainly do not let their overwhelming sympathy for her straits prevent them from manipulating her to accomplish their own ends. Laertes, perhaps the only character in the play with Ophelia's interests at heart, is absent for almost three acts, leaving her alone to handle her botched love affair and the murder of her father. Claudius thinks nothing of using her relationship with Hamlet as bait to draw out the prince's madness. Polonius acts the concerned, doting father while instructing her to lay bare the intimate details of her love life for his perusal; he feels no qualms about "loos[ing]" (2.2.162) his young daughter before a madman. However, Hamlet bewilders Ophelia the most, calling her "the celestial and my soul's idol" (2.2.109) just before accusing her of transforming from an honest girl to a "bawd" (3.1.110). The obedience and innocence which allows other characters to guide Ophelia in her deception of Hamlet also make her a ready scapegoat upon which he releases his many frustrations.

Ophelia's tractable nature presents itself early in the play as she dutifully complies with the wishes of her father and brother. Many a heroine embraces the passion of forbidden love; Ophelia, on the other hand, relinquishes her relationship with Hamlet despite the affection she clearly feels for him, which she displays as she bemoans his crazed state: "Oh, what a noble mind is here o'er thrown!" (3.1.148). Ophelia chooses obedience over love as she agrees to repel her lover's advances and she docilely surrenders his love letters; however, only when she takes part in her father's scheme of espionage do her actions elicit any reaction from Hamlet—a retort far more rude than her betrayal merits, as Harold Bloom would agree: ". . . the prince's astonishingly brutal verbal assault upon Ophelia. . . far surpasses his need to persuade the concealed Claudius of his nephew's supposed madness" (39).

Hamlet has plainly expressed in writing his fondness for Ophelia, using powerful words such as "Doubt truth to be a liar/ But never doubt that I love" (2.2.118). Why, then, does he treat her so crudely? Unfortunately for Ophelia, she unwittingly presents the perfect target for his tempestuous temper. From Hamlet's very first soliloquy, he has kept private his anger towards his mother: ". . . break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). Although Ophelia's disloyalty is but a shadow of Gertrude's faithlessness, in his mind her actions further typify the villainy of woman, causing him to unleash his anger towards his mother at this naïve and defenseless substitute. A. C. Bradley states it thus: "[Hamlet] can never see Ophelia in the same light again: she is a woman, and his mother is a woman: if she mentions the word 'brief' to him, the answer drops from his lips like venom, 'as woman's love'" (187-88). Any love that his heart may have held for Ophelia has been shoved aside by his disgust for his mother and, in turn, for all women.

By allowing herself to be led into provoking her suitor's wrath, Ophelia ironically draws herself closer to her own end, for with his rough treatment Hamlet is, in effect, "murdering Ophelia, and starting her on the path to suicide" (Bloom 41). The modest scale of her life had been supported thus far by three bastions—Laertes, Polonius, and Hamlet. Now all three of her supports have crumbled, for her brother is absent, her father is using her, and her apparently demented lover despises her. With his rejection, she begins a downward spiral into insanity which is further catalyzed by her father's murder. Ophelia describes her own sorry state as Hamlet abandons her: "Oh, woe is me,/T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" (3.1.158-59). When Laertes arrives at the end of act 4, his sister is transformed into the puppet that others have used her as—purposeless, lifeless without someone to hold her up and jerk her strings. When the snapping of a branch sends her onto the threshold of death, she does not have the will to pull herself away, and so the water claims her, tainting her death with the dishonor of suicide. Nevertheless, Shakespeare has actually accorded her the most peaceful end in the play—free of the stain of blood and the taint of poison, the guileless Ophelia dies as beautifully as she lived, blithely singing her own requiem.

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“A Hymn to God the Father” and “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” : Faith in Forgiveness

by Alexandria “AJ” McCormick

In John Donne’s “A Hymn to God the Father,” readers are taught that they must have faith in forgiveness to truly be forgiven. In Katherine Anne Porter’s “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” readers are shown the effect on an individual’s soul if one does not grant forgiveness before death. These two works, combined, show readers the negative and positive effects of forgiveness.

Donne was a poet, author, student of law, and without a doubt an intellectual man. He led a life full of tragedy. In the first eight years of his life, he lost his father, his mother, and two of his sisters. Born into a Roman Catholic family and taught by Jesuits, he was a religious man. He attended multiple universities where he focused on law and diplomacy. After school he was admitted to two Inns of Court where he was able to expand his diplomatic presence, and his future was looking bright. Then tragedy struck again as his brother died while in prison. Catholicism was illegal at this time, and his brother had been arrested for harboring a Catholic priest. This tragedy forced Donne to start questioning his Catholic faith. After years of traveling, he returned to England and began his diplomatic career. He was quickly advancing, but ended up sabotaging his career by secretly marrying Anne More, the daughter of the Lieutenant of the Tower, and the two were forced to hide out at her cousin’s home. After many depressing years, Donne was finally forgiven and able to return to practicing law. Donne went on to publish works to please James I, King of England, even though he was hesitant to do so as they meant he officially renounced his Catholic faith. The King rewarded Donne for his devotion, and Donne began to excel in the English Church. After losing his wife, Donne continued to work for the church and would have even had the chance of advancing to bishop, had his health permitted. Donne died on March 31, 1631, and even in his final days was a devout Anglican (Jokinen).

It can be argued that the speaker in “A Hymn to God the Father” is Donne himself as well as any Christian sensing the end of his or her days. The personification of the word “done” (2, 5, 11, 17), which is how Donne is pronounced, expresses how Donne himself relates to the poem. With the line, “When thou hast done, thou has not done, / For I have more” (5, 6, 11, 12), it seems as if Donne himself is telling God, “When you have forgiven me, you have still not finished forgiving me, for I have more sins.” The poem itself mirrors Donne’s struggle with faith. Early in his life he was skeptical of his Catholicism, perhaps evident in the poem as being skeptical of being truly forgiven before death. Then, in his dying days, he regained faith, and this is shown in “And, having done that, thou hast done; / I fear no more” (17-18). However, the sins in the poem are sins that every Christian will make at some point in his or her life, whether minor or major. The hymn could, therefore, be voiced by any Christian and not just Donne alone.

Being a scholarly and religious man, allusions are strongly used in the poem from the very beginning. The first two lines, "Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun, / Which was my sin, though it were done before?" alludes to original sin. The next allusion is "I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun / My last thread," (13-14). That line represents the Moirae, or The Fates, in Greek Mythology where the thread of life is the three major parts in life: birth, shown by the thread being spun; life, shown by the thread being woven; and finally death shown by the cutting of the thread ("Moirae").

With this work being written to be sung, it was fitting that Donne wrote it in closed form. The fact that the poem is actually a hymn, a praise to God, shows how strongly religious it is. The flow of the hymn takes readers through a story as well. In the first two stanzas the speaker realizes his sins and begins the story. In these two stanzas he denies these were his sins and then accepts that they are indeed his own. The beginning of the last stanza reaches the story's climax with the speaker in extreme fear of not being accepted into Heaven, as shown with "I have a sin of fear...I shall perish on the shore" (13-14). Then the final stanza ends the story with an epiphany, a conclusion, as the speaker realizes he must have faith in order to receive forgiveness.

Like Donne, Porter also suffered a tragic life and struggled with her faith. She lost her mother at the age of two and was raised by her grandmother, Catherine Ann Porter, until she was eleven and her grandmother died. Born Callie Russel Porter, she later changed her name in honor of her grandmother. After her grandmother's death, she and her remaining siblings lived with various relatives for the next five years. She then married John Henry Koontz who converted her to the Roman Catholic religion. He was an abusive husband, and their marriage lasted only three years. Porter suffered from what was thought to be tuberculosis but was later discovered to be bronchitis. Then, a year later, she was one of those infected during the 1918 flu pandemic. She was physically weakened by the events but mentally stronger. Porter moved to Mexico during the revolution, and the events she witnessed led to her crisis of faith. Porter remarried three more times, and it is rumored that her last marriage proved that she was unable to have children. After her fourth divorce, Porter never remarried. In the final years of her life, Porter regained her faith in the Roman Catholic Church. Neglected by her father, divorced four times, and all she experienced in life, led Porter's writings to be dark and heavy in betrayal ("Katherine Anne Porter: About Katherine Anne Porter," "Biography of Katherine Anne Porter").

In "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," the reader is taken inside the mind of an elderly woman lying on her deathbed. Not only does Porter do a good job of making the readers empathize with Granny with lines like, "Doctor Harry spread a warm paw like a cushion on her forehead" (para. 2), but she efficiently uses imagery so that the readers feel like they are standing in the room. Her stream-of-consciousness style of writing in this story causes the reader to be confused at times about what is really being said or seen, and this is used to make readers feel as if they are fading in and out of consciousness with Granny. Porter's dark style of writing is greatly shown in "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," and the story seems to portray the anger Porter held towards the men that had hurt her.

Being Roman Catholic herself, Porter uses many biblical allusions in her story. A continued allusion throughout is the use of the words "light" and "dark." These are

symbols for Heaven and Hell. Granny dies in sin and in the very last line “she stretches herself with a deep breath and blows out the light” (para 36). Another allusion is the reference to the biblical bridegroom. The scripture this relates to is Matthew 25:1-13, where Christians are told that if they keep their faith and are true to it, the Lord will reward them by letting them into Heaven. Porter uses the line, “Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house” (para. 36) to show that Granny has been jilted once more. Even though Granny kept up the appearance that she had faith, the faith was never pure and therefore she was jilted from Heaven by her own lack of forgiveness.

This work is highly ironic. Throughout the story Granny speaks of things she can wait and do tomorrow: “Yes, that would be tomorrow’s business” (para. 13), she says to herself when thinking of hiding her love letters to and from John and George. Granny feels she has been a good Catholic and that the saints will reward her, and all of her sins have already been forgiven. However, Granny has never truly forgiven George, the man who jilted her, and therefore, dies in sin with her last thought being, “I’ll never forgive it” (para. 36). The irony is that if she forgives the Lord for all her pain, she herself will be forgiven.

These two works strongly mirror both authors’ faith in forgiveness and fear of dying in sin. John Donne spent many of his days grieving, but realized later in his life that he must have faith and share that faith with others. Katherine Anne Porter was never jilted, but experienced similar suffering as Granny does in the story. Both led challenging lives and both had a crisis of faith. However, it seems that at the end of their lives, rather than hold a grudge for all their suffering, both writers were at peace with God. This peace would then allow them to be able to live out their final days knowing that God would forgive them.

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Spring 2010

Writers' Roundup Winners

Each year the Amarillo College English Department holds a Writers' Roundup contest to encourage beginning as well as advanced writers to demonstrate their creative flair. Students are given a prompt and have two hours in which to write. The type of writing is up to the student.

For more information on how to enter this friendly competition, please call (806) 371-5170 or email Angie Peoples, English Department Administrative Assistant II, at ampeoples@actx.edu.

Frozen Time

Grand Prize Winner

by Charlie Clark

Snow clotted the window as Margaret fetched the cherry wood chest beneath the old woman's bed. She estimated about eight inches of white blanketed the western grounds with six more due to arrive from the North, freezing the roads and turning their little estate into a ice-locked penitentiary by noon.

"My pearls," the old woman said. "I believe the occasion deserves some class, don't you think?"

"Yes'um," Margaret answered as she always did. Reflexively. Dutifully.

Margaret fished out a small key from the pouch of her apron and opened the chest. The pearls hung off a small hook inside the lid, and Margaret knew them well. Leaning over the bed, she clasped them around the old woman's neck where they mingled limply with sagging skin and dark veins.

The woman had been beautiful once. A vixen on screen. Her features rendered magnificently in forty-eight shades of gray down at the local one-screen cinemas where down-on-their luck farmers paid five cents a pop to watch her slap cheeky, young yanks for taking liberties as a stout, southern gentleman bided his time in the background, waiting for that long embrace that always came at the end when the close-up camera faded to black. There was no touch of that haughty innocence, now, or that iridescent stare which, in the proper lighting, could make those dirt-claimed millworkers forget the breadlines of tomorrow.

The woman checked her profile in the small handheld mirror Margaret had presented her with that morning. Today, it was the perm that bothered her, so she picked at her bangs with the same boney fingers that once held hands with an older Clark Gable. "I wonder what they'll be wearing, my callers. You did say formal, didn't you, dear?"

"Yes'um," Margaret said, fluffing the old woman's pillow before setting it behind her shrunken back.

The woman practiced her smile. Nodded once, then practiced again. "The pearls do catch the light well, don't they?"

"Yes'um."

"You don't think them too showy?"

“They’re lovely, ma’am.”

She considered this as her eyes found that retrospective look to them that usually appeared about this time. “I do wish I had checked those invitations before you sent them. It being just such an *important* occasion, you understand.”

“Yes’um,” Margaret said as she retrieved the mink shawl from the closet and set it on the hook outside the door. Though purchased ten years ago at a downtown boutique, it remained well-aged and unworn today.

“Tell me, do you think he’ll come tonight? He’s so shy, you understand. But, I know he must think of me.”

Margaret stumbled a bit. This was a new bit in the broken record that had become their routine. She sucked some breath through her front teeth then rubbed at a wrinkle in her apron. “I’m sure he’ll do his best, ma’am.”

The woman smiled, this time genuinely, the blush deep and coy on her cheeks. “I won’t say, yes. Not to the first proposal, you understand. A lady must always keep them on their toes, my dear.”

“Always, ma’am,” she said, patting the old woman’s arm as she watched the drifts outside the spotted window. There was no sun to the sky, only an orange blur, dimmed by fog. Beneath the window, there lay the empty garden, and beyond that, the front gates where a snow-covered path wound as cold and as vacant as the estate, itself.

Standing there, her hands caressing the woman’s worn skin, she thought of broken dreams and broken minds, and still the snow fell.

Snowed In For a Reason

1st Place Sophomore Level

by Sarah Green

“Eew, Thursday. I really need to get out of bed. I need a shower and breakfast, and I need to get in the Word a bit, if I have time. Awh man, I’ve got that test in Ferguson’s class today too, I should have stayed up to study last night. Clytemnestra was the Princess from Troy right...no, that was Orestia, wait no, Orestes. No, I think he’s the one that killed the golden fleece to win Medea’s heart...Or, I could go back to sleep. I think I’m going to fail anyway. No, I’ll get up and study instead of reading my Bible, I’ll do that later. I’m sure God understands. I’ve got to get up now; that was my third snooze alarm.”

“HMMMMPH!”

“Oooh, a text! It’s probably just twitter.” Karah reached out her arm from the warm covers and felt around for her phone. Finally she felt the squish of her fingers on the silicone case, and pulled it back to her.

“Hey Girl, it’s Kelissa. We’re not going to open the shop today. I don’t think we’d have any customers anyway. Have a nice day off!”

“Woohoo, no work today! Oh, I bet we got that big snow storm, I thought it would just pass us by!” Karah sat up in bed and found her glasses and shoved them onto her face, struck her fingers between two wooden blinds and peeked out into the backyard. “Woah”, she breathed excitedly. The ground was solid white. It was snowing such big flakes so hard that she couldn’t even see her dirty silver truck. She was still staring in awe when her phone buzzed in her hand again.

“Good Morning Honey! I don’t know if you’ve looked outside yet, but there is snow EVERYWHERE! AC is closed today, and so is LaughWay, so I get to stay home today!”

“Yaaaay! AC is closed and the shop! I get the whole day off! Now I have time to do my laundry, clean my room, hang out with my family, text and talk to Don, sew a little bit . . . “

And spend some time with me.” Karah heard whispered in her mind, in the voice she had come to recognize as God’s. Her excitement of the snow day melted instantly and was replaced by awe.

“God, forgive me for being so caught up in the world. I put you on the back burner of my schedule. I read my Bible when I had time and I wasn’t too tired. Thank you so much for the snow. Thank you for sending it to slow me down. Thank you for its

beauty. Thank you for the symbolism of snow. The land here is yellow and dry and muddy. After an hour of snow, it is pure white and unblemished, much like we are when you forgive us. Yes, the snow will eventually melt or be plowed and be gross looking with dirt and whatever it is that turns snow so black. But when it's all gone, the ground will be a little greener and a little prettier. Just like how you forgive me. I will mess up again. I'll try not to get all ugly like when the snow is plowed, but I'm human, and I will. You'll still be there to forgive me and wash me white as snow again. Thank you, Lord, for snowing me in. Thank you for slowing me down. Thank you God, for helping me fit my life into You, instead of fitting You into my Life. I love you Lord. Amen." Karah puts her phone away, grabs her NIV bible, flips over to Philippians, and begins to read.

It's so easy to get caught up in the rush of the world. Between school, two jobs, a boyfriend and church, personal time with God is the easiest thing to put down. But it's also the most important one. When you stop getting into the Word every day and finding out what God's plan for your life is, all the other stuff of the world gets harder and harder, and heavier and heavier. God won't give you more than you can handle, but you can *take* more than you can handle. Talk to God and see what His plan for your day is.

Wrong Bones

1st Place Freshman Level

by Juleah Nusz

Cold blood, colder than the blood that flowed through a reptile, ran through those veins. Detective Forsythe tapped the pressure dial mounted in the center of the biotomaton's chest. The needle pointed to zero presently.

"What's wrong with this one?" Forsythe asked, peering into the dull lens covering the right eye of the biotomaton.

Doctor Drake's hands were shaking. Forsythe took careful note of this. Drake looked up and smiled.

"She's new. I have yet to test and see if she works."

The biotomaton was grotesque looking. Its lifeless human frame was mounted with pistons and other various mechanics that were directly controlled by Drake. They made perfect house servants and added a slight, if disturbing, homey touch that standard automatons could not attain. The turn key protruding from its back made it look like a life-size wind-up doll. Forsythe turned his attention away from the half-human, half-mechanical figure and looked out the window. The northern Industrial Parks had harsh conditions and it looked like another storm was about to blow through.

"I'm sorry to take up your time, Doctor Drake," he said as he offered his hand, "Some concerned neighbors down the road called me up and, well, I had to come and check. It's standard procedure, you see."

Drake ignored Forsythe's hand and squinted at him.

"Ah, I see, certainly understandable. At least you surveyed my amazing machines."

Forsythe's mouth twitched into a slight smile as he dropped his hand back down to his side. He glanced back at the biotomaton that hung from the rack like a broken toy.

"Personally, that thing gives me the creeps."

Drake's demeanor stiffened and the air seemed to grow stale.

"She is not a thing. She has a name."

Forsythe stared at Drake with a mixture of suspicion and bewilderment. He shook his head slowly and began buttoning up his jacket.

“Right...” Forsythe murmured as he attempted to locate the exit, “Listen, I got to go. Nice talking with you.”

Drake stepped in his way. Forsythe stopped and loomed over the shorter man.

“Get out of my way.”

“Her name is Flora Jacoby. Perhaps I can give you a demonstration?”

Forsythe could feel his blood starting to boil. There was no time for this. He pushed Drake out of the way and headed for the sealed hatch leading outside. The turn wheel sealing the door squeaked in protest as Forsythe pushed at it. He could hear the wind outside even from behind the insulated layers of the wall. The door was not going to open any time soon. Forsythe looked back at the doctor, who was at the window and looking outside.

“What are you trying to do!?” he yelled.

Drake stroked his waxed moustache and spoke without taking his eyes away from the scene outside.

“A storm is coming through, worst I’ve seen in a while. I can’t even see your automobile anymore. The snow has buried it. Perhaps you will be more apt to see a demonstration of Flora’s abilities now.”

Forsythe shook in anger. He didn’t even want to go investigate the old, loony doctor’s lab in the first place, and now this. He stalked toward Drake and held his finger in the doctor’s face.

“No funny business, you hear? I know trouble before it knows itself and it’s all over the place here.”

Drake smiled.

“A demonstration then.” and he launched into a pre-rehearsed speech about the future that was Flora Jacoby.

Forsythe listened with displeasure and followed unwillingly as the doctor wheeled Flora on her rack to a small empty room. Her limbs swung lifelessly as Drake talked. Forsythe shuddered. He had heard enough, but was mildly interested in the macabre affair.

“So this thing, Flora Jacoby, is still a person? She still has a brain?”

Drake’s eyes lit up.

“Yes, she’s different from all my other creations in that she still has a brain. She has the reasoning skills of a normal human being. I just wind her up with the big key in her back and her organs start working again. Or I could use the master key,” he held up

a small skeleton key that was on a chain around his wrist,” and insert it into the smaller keyhole on the metal plate in her chest and she can wind herself up. But I would only do that if I wanted to set her free.”

Forsythe blinked. This was all over his head, but he could get the gist of it.

“Can she hear anything right now?”

Drake opened his mouth and shook his head.

“No, I’m afraid not.”

“What about her personality? Is she still the same person she was when she died?”

Drake frowned.

“I don’t know yet. I certainly hope not. I wouldn’t let her go out by herself if that were the case.”

Forsythe reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a pad of paper and began writing notes on it with the little stub of graphite that hung from a string off the paper. Drake sucked in a breath.

“What are you doing?”

Forsythe paused in his notes.

“This is all a bit dodgy. I’m going to run this by the office. It might be illegal.”

Drake coughed and inched closer to Flora. Forsythe barely looked up. A clicking sound and then a whirl of machinery caught his attention. Forsythe backed up from the biotomaton that was coming to life. Flora’s eyes fluttered open.

“Drake, you better turn that thing off.”

Drake dropped his hand from the master key that he had just finished winding up.

“I’m afraid not. Flora is much too precious for you and the authorities to scrap. And this opportunity to see what she will do is too much to pass up.”

Forsythe jumped as Flora coughed. A high pitched whining noise erupted from her throat as the noise slowly formed words.

“You’ll never-r-r ca-catch me c-c-copper-r-r.”

Forsythe groaned. Although the voice jumped in places like music from a phonograph, he could guess that Flora had retained her personality.

“Oh, dear,” Drake mumbled, “I suppose I was wrong.” He looked at Forsythe, “I am only permitted to use criminal’s bodies to make biotomatons, as you well know.”

Flora shuddered and then screamed a loud tinny scream. Her hands flew behind her head and fumbled with the latch that held her in the air. It came undone and she landed on the floor with a crash, the pistons and external metal bones adding to her weight. That’s when the ticking noise of her mechanical heart became louder and louder. Drake backed up against the wall, clearly terrified. Flora turned to face him.

“I can hear everything, father, everything. I’ll make myself free.”

She held up her hand and clamped the mechanical fingers together. Drake gulped as they came closer and closer to his neck. A small explosion erupted into Flora’s side. The smoke curled about in the air and Forsythe peered through the white wall of smoke, his pistol still aimed at where Flora was standing. He waited as the ticking continued. A blur burst through the smoke and knocked him on his back. Forsythe kept a hold on his pistol and used his feet to scoot out of the room. He checked his pistol. It only held two charges. One more shot, and Flora still seemed to be up and in the game. Flora slowly stepped out of the room, her eyes locked on Forsythe.

“I just want to be free.”

Forsythe almost felt sympathy for her. He cocked the hammer back on his pistol and glanced outside. Snow had blown into dunes against the window. He shook his head. Snowed in and only one shot left. He’d better make it count. Forsythe swung his gaze back to Flora and aimed the pistol at the lens covering her right eye. Flora frowned and attempted to move away. Forsythe was top of his unit in leading targets. He kept a steady aim and fired the last charge.

The pistol blast rang throughout the empty halls of Doctor Drake’s lab, but one thing above all persisted in the silence that followed, the hollow ticking of a mechanical heart.

A Snowball's Chance in Hell

1st Place Developmental Level

by Joel Ruiz

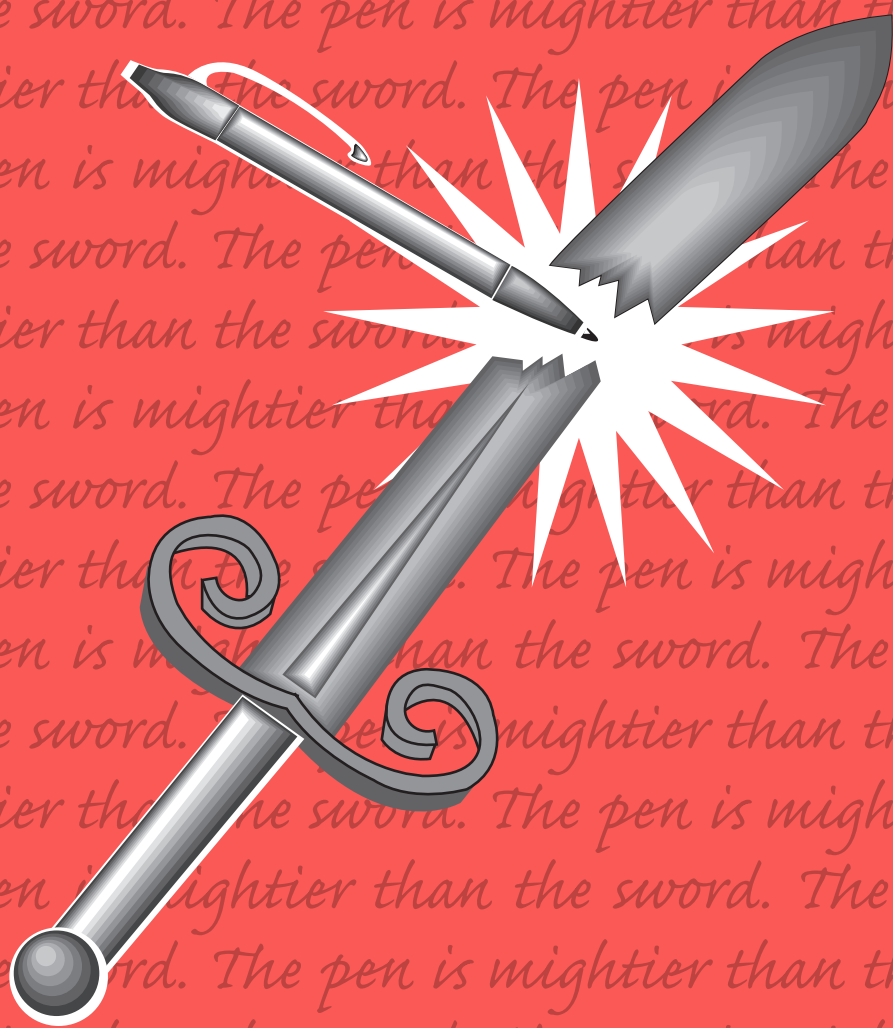
I'm going to tell you about one instance in my life, and a snowball's chance in hell to do the right thing when we could have just given up. In this short story, I will tell you about eleven men and their struggle to do what others have tried but no one has succeeded at.

It was a cold Iraq week and my choke and I were getting ready to go on a very important mission for our battalion, or at least that's what I thought. Orders came down from our battalion commander to go and extract this individual and bring him home alive. Not a big task. It seemed easy and not so difficult so as we got ready and as night fell, a cold but warm chill hit us because out of all nights, there was no moon on this night. A creepy silence fell on the flat open land that we had been protecting since we got there. Our team leader came to us and told us we would be doing a night mission and just simply walked away. This would be our first mission like this. We had never gone stealth before; we all had trained on it, but this would be a new one for us all.

Two a.m. hit, and we got the word from headquarters that it was time to move out. We all got in our positions, turned on our night vision goggles, and started moving. We had a lot of work to do because we had to find one man, and we had five houses we had to check to see if he was there. As we started to walk, it was like a bad TV show; everyone was falling and tripping because we had no idea how to process how far the ground really was, since we had never walked on this land with the night vision goggles. It reminded me of a nursery and a new young and eager child learning to walk. It was a bad sight to see. Finally three hours later and about twenty miles later, we got to house number three. We organized a plan to set up a way to attack the house. We used every man we had to do this, eight on the outside, four looking in, four looking out. Groups of two's set up in the corners of the house. They took their position and waited for the extraction team to go in. As we walked up to the house, that cold, dull silence hit again. We crept up to the back door and got in stack formation, four men way too close to each other for any kind of comfort. I could feel the sweat roll off my face and legs starting to lose their composure. I could hear the heartbeat of the guy in front of me; it was fast and hard. Or was that mine beating over everything else? Slowly the sound of everything went quiet, and all I could hear was the beating of a heart. Was it mine or one of the other four's? Command gave us the green light and we went in. I pulled away from the group and with all my might and fear, I kicked the door with one swift kick. The door came flying off the hinges; pieces of wood, brick, and other debris went everywhere. We piled in, one after another, clearing room to room havoc; and chaos ran rampant as the cries of children and wives pierced over our screams and over the sound of gunshots. The smell of fresh blood triggered us to attack like hungry sharks. I no longer felt like a scared and nervous boy going on a first date. I felt like the soldier I was trained to be with no remorse or worries about if this was what should be done. All I

felt is that we were given a job and it had to be done. After the raid was over and we confirmed the individual target was in the house, we took him home with us. As we walked away, his wife's cries were heard for miles, pleading for us to bring him back to her.

We found out the next day that no one thought we would find this man. Every unit was looking for him and could not capture him. At the debriefing our colonel congratulated us for a job well done, for the position and stealth we showed. At times we could have turned away, but we kept our bearings and never looked back. He told us there was an unmanned aircraft flying over us the whole time and everyone was watching us every step of the way there and back. Finally, he came to tell us the individual we apprehended was a "cash cow." He was supplying the enemy with money to buy bombs and ammunition to kill us and was turning hungry farmers and children on us by giving them money. No one thought we had a snowball's chance in hell in finding him. He was the one man who was making all the trouble in this area.



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