

# FLIGHT 2021

FEATURING  
THE 2020  
DREAMERS  
CONTEST  
WINNERS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF STUDENT ART AND  
WRITING  
MOUNT SAN JACINTO COLLEGE



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# DREAMERS CONTEST WINNERS

## *A Transformation*

by Diana Melendez

I see a world filled with apathy, hate, and bitterness.  
A world neglected.  
Communities forgotten; our wants valued above  
all.  
People's worth pays the price to color, money,  
prestige.  
I dream of love that transcends cultures, races, and  
ethnicities.  
Love that multiplies daily and endlessly.  
That invites challenges and conquers difficulties,  
understands differences and unites in those differ-  
ences.  
Love built to evolve, grow, and embrace not just  
one bloodline of people- but all people....  
Love walks together in harmony.  
Watching for when we falter to whisper words of  
praise and wisdom-solidarity- our friend.  
A continuous push to achieve greatness, to be  
extraordinary.  
To never fail or fall.  
An inspiration to build strength where weakness  
would pull us down into the weeds.  
Our shared differences, a ray of sunshine among  
the stormy clouds.  
Love fulfills our deepest wishes and desires.  
Capturing within us all we need to expand and  
release our deepest potential.  
Strength, knowledge, power.  
To search out the courage to succeed,  
daily, hourly, minutely.  
Love is transformative.  
Innovative.  
Changing within us what we wish to see in the  
world,  
fair, kind, selfless...  
Reimagining into wondrous works of art,  
brilliant, inspirational, profound....  
Moving boundaries that block our way to eternal  
happiness. §

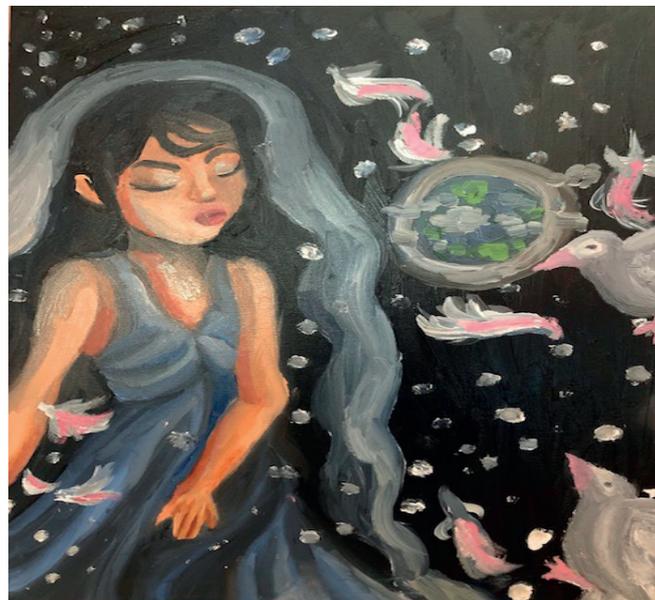
"2020 has been a challenging year. The constant negativity created by politics and COVID-19 has been exhausting and disheartening. We, as a nation, are made more beautiful because of our differences. We need to welcome our differences and realize that our differences will create bigger, better, and more important things. However, we lack unity. We have allowed our individual wants to shadow the greatness we can achieve as a community. For me, there is strength in building each other up, in encouraging each other to succeed, in showing love and kindness."

# DREAMERS CONTEST WINNERS



*Your flag is Just an Advertisement* by Kyra Brantly

"It's a collage I did to process the inherent hypocrisies and lack of justice I was seeing in the US at the time and in the past as well as scars of capitalism and consumerism. I had done it for fourth of July as a reaction to the blind patriotism that is typical of the fourth of July. It's a reimagining of the flag for all it stands for even if the images are unsettling. I think of it as a mirror."



*Out of This World* by Tia Mickel

"A girl dreaming but is taken out of the world known as Earth. Her reality is morphed into space when leaving earth accompanied by doves. The girl realized she is troubled by the noise of thoughts in her head and enlightened by the dream. Awaken, she is finding her way through the world and formed a peaceful state of mind."

# DREAMERS CONTEST WINNERS



*Face of America*

by Castin Chamberlain

"This piece expresses the diversity of what needs to happen in the reimagining of America."

# DREAMERS CONTEST WINNERS

## *Past Present Future*

by Daniel Arribere

America was different for my Grandpa Cheap gas with just as cheap beer Reliving the 50's- 60's breeze on Encinitas Blvd. Back rode kissing behind La Paloma Theatre Sneaking a cigarette in the back of Algebra Going to concerts without getting pat down Graduating high school, then having a family Having families that once talked at the dinner table

That was the dream His eyes water when he explains Wishing that I lived in his America An America that was trustworthy and sweet When people once walked barefoot with character And saluted to the flag

I see the old America still in him His hands calluses from his work as a youngster From supporting three kids and a wife at the age of 21 To being a grandfather who only has stories From a time that I will never understand

But I do understand my current America The America that changes so rapidly it spins The America that is filled with hate and cries of help The America that with cut you down The America that will give up on you Before you give up on yourself

I may be living it now But I will also live in the future America One that teaches humility That has morals and values An America that prays for each other And comes back to the dinner table

Call it a dream But my current America won't stay for long It'll become extinct by the lessons learned And children raised It will disintegrate by the truth and faith of mankind

My grandpa may never see his America again But I can see the reimagined one for him

"My grandpa is my best friend. He loves nothing more than telling me stories of growing up in America at my age. Within the last years, he has been the one who gave me faith through his stories and hope. In 2015 he quickly began to lose his eyesight and us kids had to become his eyes. He asks me questions about what he hears on the news and if it looks just as bad through eyes as it does his ears. I wish I could tell him no, but my America looks nothing like his."

## *City on a Hill*

by Emily Torres

Leather seats,  
And the loud radio  
surround me.  
My dad's new truck is nice.  
"Another unarmed black  
shooting  
Has occurred,"  
The host dully describes.  
I cling to my box of donuts  
That cost thirty-nine  
dollars,  
Forcing my eyes  
To look out the window  
In hopes my ears shut off.  
Yet the homeless line the  
sidewalk  
Encamped in tarps and dirt  
floors  
That they call "home."  
I scroll through my  
Thousand dollar phone  
To distract myself  
Of where we went wrong.

A land of justice,  
Of equal opportunity,  
Seems far from me.  
Manifest destiny  
Expanded our boundaries  
From sea to shining sea.  
But it seemed to only give  
more room  
For racism, injustice, and  
poverty.  
Others' rights were  
stripped  
So I could reside in my

father's 2020 truck.  
Our history of vile  
bloodshed  
Is disguised as American  
luck.  
God bless America  
For the land of the free,  
Built upon the murders  
and subjugation  
Of natives, blacks, and  
minorities.

But as Sun peaks through  
the window  
And glistens on my skin,  
I remain hopeful: justice  
still lives.  
A country founded on the  
Pursuit of our happiness  
Will always be chasing  
Improvement.  
On the horizon, I see an  
America-  
Helping the tired, the  
poor,  
Embracing the wretched  
refuse  
And anything more-  
Living out the truth  
established  
So many years before.  
That we'll finally become  
the city on a hilltop  
That cannot be ignored.

"In order for America to truly be transformed and reimagined, we must reflect on how we got to the place we are currently in. We must consider our history, our past, no matter how hard it can be. Only when we accept the past can we change the future. It is very hard to look back on where we went wrong in a large part of history, however that is the biggest step we can take to ensure we do not allow history to repeat or even rhyme. By learning from previous mistakes and grievances, we allow those who died to not die in vain or ignorance; we allow their downfalls to be what rises us."

# Good Night

BY  
ANTHONY ROMERO



Shawn Colvin

As I laid prone on my bed the sudden feeling came up, my imagination somehow managed to conjure up an approximate appearance of what watched me while I could not move.

My mind decided that it was cloaked in black, faceless, like the Grim Reaper, but much taller for some reason and without its trademark scythe, not very original in the realms of villains and mostly pop culture to blame for this sort of imagination but I could not steer my mind elsewhere on that regard, for it was solidly established as such. The sleep paralysis experience was not new to me, I faced it

many times since childhood but by now I mastered it, so I thought, comforting knowing that in mere seconds, the veil and heavyweight of a thousand dreams will lift off and I would be fully awake and able to get up, but I am not sleeping nor dreaming, I can feel the struggle trying to get up, I simply cannot move! I cannot even call for help, all I can do is wait it out. Sleep paralysis is a very normal and common phenomenon, it has been documented in painted art from the medieval era, it has had many names over the years, the Old Hag is one of them. The experience can be solely immobility for a few

seconds, “dreams seconds” feeling more like wake minutes, it can have a tactile hallucinatory element or the full visual and tactile experience while fully paralyzed except for being able to slowly move your eyes. We call that the Platinum package, free of charge with your random nightmare. I never had the visual hallucinatory experience, but worry not, your mind will do its best to conjure up some nice unpleasant critter to fill that void need be.

Then something else starts to happen, around my feet, it is depressing down, the feet area is clearly being pushed down, my feet are now slightly lower than the rest of my prone body, I cannot believe it! Is there someone or something pushing my mattress down? Who? Why? Oh no! My heart races and I can hardly keep my cool, I cannot move! I know what this is, nothing to worry about, mostly because there is nothing that I can do but just be there and wait terrified.

I can tell that the feet are spread right on the outside of mine, but I feel nothing else, I am not numb, I just cannot move, I am expecting to feel some fabric, the demonic cloak over my legs, a brush of monster foot on the side of my legs, a little talon scrape, I just do not know what else to expect, nothing else is felt, just a heavyweight lowering my legs by proxy.

By now my head is fully sideways, I’m facing to my left in relation to my prone body, completely paralyzed, but now my eyes have been able to slowly move all the way to the left as well, I can see my bedding on the mattress level but little with my right eye, half of is sunk in the bedding, my nose blocking any further view to the left as I remain paralyzed and prone. I now focus more on the ability for my left eye to look further up and to the side, as I try my best to chameleon my left eye searching left, I can now make out my bedroom wall and a good chunk of the ceiling, it is dark, I can see my left shoulder but can’t see past it, whatever is standing over my legs, I’m not able to see it... Oh, no! Please, no... My lower back! There is now a pressure on my lower back, it feels just like a knee being placed gently but firmly on the small of my back, it doesn’t feel harmful but more like a pinning maneuver. This is uncharted territory for me, I feel no cloak fabric, no temperature, just gentle but firm weight that pushes my entire pelvis down the mattress, I feel my heart rate on my neck, in my throat, there is something on top of me and I can’t move, my left eye starts to focus a bit on something, not even a silhouette, it’s like a long drape, I’m thinking that I can finally start to make the imaginary cloak but not

quite. Then suddenly the weight is off my back, off the foot of the mattress too, there was no sensation of bouncing up or any sudden jolts, just sudden relief, I straighten my head and roll on my right side, then on to my back and sat up, relieved and terrified at once, looked over to the foot of my bed and there it was right in front of me, the entrance to the master bathroom, void of any demonic entity guarding it. There was no Grim Reaper or any signs of thereof, I walked over to the bathroom mirror, and looked at the reflection in the mirror of the small of my back, surely, I’d see some redness of sorts, but it was unremarkable, there were no apparent physical signs, so this was just another sleep paralysis episode with a tactile hallucination, I proceed to get a sip of water, turn the lights back out, got back in bed, and settled in a comfortable position, as I get comfortably adjusted in bed a sudden and loud thud kicks the foot of my bed, I replied, “Good night, Reaps” and my cell phone buzzes a text message from an unlisted unknown user showing a “smiley”. For that, I was fully awake for and it is still in my saved messages. I dare never to reply to a text nor call it back as I do not want a direct portal to the very bowels of hell nor pen pal the devil himself. Good night. §

## *color me, good artist*

by Selene Hofstetter

i'm dying to know.  
what was your source of inspiration?  
what was going through your mind,  
when you created these pieces?

What *good artist* made you start to color people?

why did you color one person red and the other  
brown?  
why is one black and the other the complete  
opposite—white?  
why is the majority one dominant color  
while the minority is mixed?

Why are blacks portrayed as animals?

their paintings left to crumble into pieces,  
the once elegant and proud people  
now disfigured from centuries  
of abuse and maltreatment.

Why are browns depicted as simple low-life farmers?

their culture growing weary and tired  
under the scorching midday sun,  
as they fight for a place within this life  
all to feed their families.

Why are reds seen as immoral savages?

their stories fading away into the wind with the  
spirits.  
their land vanishing each generation,  
as their abandoned culture is left  
to pick up the broken pieces  
the white man has left behind in his destruction.

Why are whites featured as kings and queens?

their culture and history  
still in pristine condition, as they are  
depicted with grace and humanity.  
a guiding voice for all of these minorities;  
a voice that only you, *good artist*, seem to possess.

Why *good artist*, must you color me?

why must you squish me into a category,  
imprison me in a labelled box,  
color code my skin by scale,  
dismiss my humanity and emotions  
and color me however you like.  
where is your right?  
your sense of justice?

Where has your mind gone *good artist*?

has it fallen in between the cracks,  
under the darkness of your bed.  
forgotten for the time being  
as the dust begins to settle over it.  
now hidden from your line of sight,  
as you look at the world through an *artist's eye*.  
scaling the color wheel,  
measuring each colors' worth until  
it's to your satisfaction.

Where has your humanity gone *good artist*?

has it fallen down at your feet,  
when you were working in a frenzy.  
too busy getting the colors just right,  
you didn't notice it slipped from your body;  
as you tread back and forth,  
day and night until the world  
is another forgotten wonder of yours.  
until your humanity is all but a rug now,  
dead and lifeless from your  
constant senseless stomping.

I wonder *good artist*, why must you color me one color?

why can't i be multiple?  
wouldn't that be more beautiful  
than what your doing now?  
it would bring some wonder to your audience,  
a change no one has attempted before,  
a sense of difference that you lacked  
in your thousands of other paintings.

Why *good artist*, must you be so set in your ways?

loosen up for a moment,  
untie yourself from your post  
and roam this beautiful world just for a day.

breathe in the fresh scent of nature,  
 observe the thousands of people  
 weaving in and out of your canvas,  
 hear the different tones of music all playing at once  
 in an unchoreographed symphony,  
 walk through the endless hallways of galleries  
 and explore each one's histories—  
 live outside of your canvas *good artist*  
 and in this world just for a little while.

Why *good artist*, must you limit yourself?

take yourself away from  
 this disciplined view of colors,  
 and allow yourself to see the beauty you could create,  
 if only you dared to be open minded.  
 if only you dared to live life  
 through another's perspective.  
 if only you dared to apply it  
 towards your own experiences.  
 if only you dared to imagine—

What if all colors were equal?

my *good artist*, i hope you  
 find your way soon, someday  
 and i pray you one day paint me  
 not with constraint, but with  
 liberation.  
 that you find the courage  
 to step out from your canvas of black and white  
 and learn to paint me  
 with all your colors combined,  
 and not with just one. §



Mya Walker

## *Independent*

by  
 A.O. Britto

How much time do you spend with yourself?  
 I asked myself  
 Hard to ponder  
 Difficult to pin a number  
 Never was one to think about that  
 So, there is no way I could answer that  
 Spending time with myself was nonexistent  
 That was my problem  
 Never felt the need to spend time with me  
 Always sought-after external experiences  
 External memories that fueled my stories  
 Which led to feeding my ego  
 Perhaps my ego birthed my confidence

A contrast, right?

But is it?

I feel like I'm in a tight spot  
 Relying on those that are fallible  
 Instead of depending on me that  
 I'm stuck with  
 Depending on those that are for the  
 moment  
 Instead of relying on me, I am the  
 moment  
 I think this affects my approach to  
 life  
 Never felt making decisions were  
 made for me  
 Indecisive much!

Outside opinions became paramount  
 Because those were the mouths I spent time with  
 My mouth was made to fill their ego  
 While their opinions were made to fill my choices  
 Well, I think I'm still independent  
 An independent thinker to be exact  
 Though not an independent choice maker  
 Is that independent or dependent?  
 I ask you all  
 Because I don't know  
 Or does asking make me dependent?  
 It is a paradox  
 Interesting!  
 I'm independent  
 I choose to spend time with my self  
 My time is of the essence §

# Breathe, Count, Repeat

by Amber Williamson

One, two, three, four, five.

Fingers criss-cross over each other, under and over through the loops as if playing a game. I'm bored of this game. It's grown tired, a nagging in the back of my head that has bloomed into this inescapable, dreadful feeling. Repeat.

One, two, three, four, five. Fingers criss-cross over each other...

I feel as though this daily regimen is preparing me to play the piano for a silhouette so beautiful; it's called a ballet. I can hear the music in my head, soft and powerful in its verse. The notes wiggle their way through the tips of my toes, travel through me entirely until lost in the maze of my brain. Perhaps I'm there.

I'm in the crowd watching the performance; I'm in the chair pressing each finger to the fragile keys - so delicate that the lightest touch is like a heavy stomp -, or the silhouette floating up on my toes. Light floods my eyes; heat burns at my skin like fresh sweat. Still, I drift so graciously across the stage it's like a faraway dream the morning eyes are trying to hold onto.

I'm in my kitchen.

Pearly tiles are ice beneath my bare feet, numbing, so numbing that it grounds me just for a moment. Only a moment because I still cannot seem to help myself from waltzing with it, the coolness of the air. Like I'm a figure skater I glide across the ground. What's stopping me from, I can almost feel the wet melting ice spread around my feet. Why isn't the floor beneath me bare of all friction?

It could be so simple for me to change it, to imagine the tiles as something they're not.

Anything imaginable can exist; one way or another, it would be constructed—an entirely new universe or dimension for a single thought, vision. Like a God, I have become a creator.

We are all God then. Every night we dream and give birth to new life and ideas, even if we cannot remember the next day, they've already been born.

I've let my mind slip away again, let it wander into questions that can never be answered.

More questions to drive me mad. Perhaps I am confused because I come from an imagination, a dream.

*Perhaps I am not real beyond another person's mind.*

I'm in my kitchen.

No, I'm not. I'm dreaming; I can feel it, the cushioned bed under me, the warmth of the blanket now too hot, an uncomfortable heat. Nothing else feels real anymore; it all must be fake, every bit of it. My body tingles in its numbness. I can't feel anything, can't hear anything, my mind is stuck in a place where my body isn't. I'm paralyzed, stuck in this zombie, like a soul left behind in its dead body.

Panic courses through my body, nails pick at my skin, looking for a sign of life anywhere, but I'm trapped. Imprisoned in my own mind, what a sweet dream this was at first, a perfectly still moment, but one that I was living in for too long. People are supposed to keep moving through points in time, forwards, backward, whichever way, as long as we keep moving. But I can't escape this moment. This second follows me, I walk, but it stays here by my side, a shadow I can't seem to shake.

The worst part is I don't remember when I went to sleep. I don't know how much is real or fake. I don't know if I'm alive anymore. I don't know where I am, maybe it's my bed or perhaps a bridge.

Quiet.

That's all I hear, not the kind that screams at you, but the one that can whisk you away thoughtlessly, - I must know the answer fast before it's



Amanda Armas

too late - complete emptiness. One small slip and I'm away. I wonder... *Would I know I'm asleep then?*

I'm in my kitchen.

I must anchor myself before I slip away, once again into the mystical universe that is my mind. This kitchen is familiar, the table a bumpy wood that slithers in the spines, a sharp metallic tea kettle that beams out every light it can get a hold of. Some pots dangle from the ceiling, mismatched tree branches swaying in the wind.

The walls are old with character but alive in laughter and song. Its beauty marked in the stories it could tell, the scratches and dents only there to add character. The room is alive, and it's hungry. It feels like a movie or a distant memory that I, from time to time, find myself daydreaming of, smiling about.

I'm more grounded but still plucking at my skin the way a child picks at a scab, only there's nothing there, no hardened place to protect and heal, no metaphor, just skin.

I'm asleep, I can feel it, I know for sure with this inevitable truth that I am trapped far off in a dream, an endless maze this is. Everything is wrong and disorienting. It's a false perspective on the world. Things that I once thought true and certain can no longer be trusted.

Count my fingers. This daily regime I've grown tired of should remind me of the day, the time, of what's real or not, is no longer testimony enough. Start with the thumb and end with the pinky, five of them. One, two, three, but this doesn't seem right or like my hands at all. It's alien and new to me. Keep counting. One, two, they look older, more wrinkled - no - more callused. That's it, hands of hard work, it builds character, like these walls.

*Keep counting.*

One, two, three, four, but no matter which way I go, which finger goes first, the way they criss-cross over each other, it still doesn't seem right. This doesn't feel real.

Breath, slowly in and out.

Count, one, two, three, four, five.

Repeat. §



# THE MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON

by  
Navin Leonidas

CUT TO: INT. THE RED ANEMONE HOTEL- NEW YEAR'S EVE/NIGHT

An intoxicated man dozes off to his incessant button clicking.

The elevator doors slide open to reveal a woman with a BLACK MASQUERADE MASK. She stands still, examining the man outside of the elevator still jabbing away at the button. He wears a simple nametag on his right peck, which reads, "SWAMI."

SWAMI, 21 years old, a drunken shell of his former self..

The doors are about to close, but the woman slickly puts herself between them to keep them open. She peeks her head over with her wicked smile.

MASKED WOMAN

The alcohol must be doing its magic on you isn't it... SWAMI?

SWAMI

It's doing its job.

MASKED WOMAN

I can see that... so, mind jumping in the elevator with me? It really isn't right to keep a lady waiting, especially when a new year is fast approaching.

SWAMI

You and the year can wait.

MASKED WOMAN

C'mon... I'm worth the trouble.

She takes a hold of SWAMI'S hand and guides him inside as he presses himself to the corner to sit. She looks down upon her prey as the elevator doors shut. She joins him on the ground.

MASKED WOMAN

Don't tell me you're driving like this.

SWAMI

Well, why the hell not?

MASKED WOMAN

It would a tragedy to damage the goods.

SWAMI

Goods?... Ooooooh you got jokes.

MASKED WOMAN

Then, you're picking up what I'm putting down?

SWAMI

Heh. I guess.

MASKED WOMAN

Good... I need you in pristine condition when I purchase you.

SWAMI

Uuuh, Ima have to decline your card then.

MASKED WOMAN

Awwwh, I'm willing to pay full price though, no discount required. Maybe I'll even put in a little extra just for you.

SWAMI gets himself up as the masked woman shadows his movements.

SWAMI

Listen... what's your name?

MASKED WOMAN

Well, if you lemme close the deal, you can call me whatever you want.

SWAMI

Alright then "nameless individual", I. Ain't. For. Sale.

MASKED WOMAN

Oh, c'mon SWAMI... I can be the thing that starts off your new year right.

SWAMI

You're wasting your time, I'm not worth the effort.

MASKED WOMAN

Aaaah... so that's the reason you won't bite. Trust me, when I'm through with you, she'll be nothing but a distant memory.

SWAMI

You don't know what you're talking about alright. Leave me alone.

She pulls close in a comforting manner. She puts her hands on his face and directs him towards her eyes.

MASKED WOMAN

Hey... I'm sorry I touched a raw nerve. I promise, the pain I'd give you is only pleasure.

SWAMI

...I've had a really long night lady. Scratch that. More like a really long year. It's better if you'd just let me be.

MASKED WOMAN

No. You need more than that. You need a savior. I can be that for you. Your most dangerous weapon... you just need to give in. It's what you truly deserve.

The elevator jolts, stuck in its place. The MASKED WOMAN'S whole demeanor changes.

MASKED WOMAN

Finally, about damn time. You were actually a decent victim.

SWAMI

Wha-

She pulls out a handgun and pistol-whips him right in the noggin. The impact flings him back down to the corner.

SWAMI

(CONT.)

WHAT THE FU-

She swings her boot into his mouth as his body rolls with the kick. He's face down on the ground, drooling blood. He tries to bring himself up, but the woman shoves the firearm against the back of his head as his face slams back onto the ground.

MASKED WOMAN

Shut up and stay still.

She searches his back pockets. Empty. She combs through his side pockets. Nothing.

MASKED WOMAN

(CONT.)

Roll over.

SWAMI

Why?

She hits the back of his head with her handgun.

MASKED WOMAN

I SAID ROLL OVER ASSHOLE!

SWAMI

AH! SHIT! ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT!

He tosses himself onto his back. She thoroughly inspects him.

SWAMI

(CONT.)

...and you call me the asshole.

MASKED WOMAN

(SIGHS)

... where the hell is all your shit... don't tell me...

SWAMI

I think I forgot everything in my room...

MASKED WOMAN

You gotta be... Do you have any idea how much effort I put into this?

SWAMI  
Sorry?

MASKED WOMAN  
No.. I'm not leaving without something.

SWAMI  
LADY! I HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO GIVE!

MASKED WOMAN  
Oh yes you do... Clothes. Shoes. Off... DID I STUTTER!? START STRIPPING!

He desperately takes every piece of clothing off till he's only in his undies.  
She stands with an obvious sense of pity.

SWAMI  
You happy now?

The elevator starts to work again.

MASKED WOMAN  
More embarrassed, but it'll have to do.

The doors slide open to the parking garage. She presses the button back to the previous floor for SWAMI and walks out, not saying one ounce of farewell.

SWAMI  
Well... shit.

The doors shut on his stripped soul.

THE END

## KENZIE

by  
Merry Fuston

This is something that you can't understand.  
This is something beyond words.  
And oh, how it hurts!  
There's nothing quite like it.  
My eyes hurt from crying unspoken tears  
And what I am facing is all of my fears.  
I'm on my knees  
Pleading  
Please take the pain away.

You were so brave for me!  
You were so brave.  
But in the End I knew  
That you were longing for the arms of Jesus.  
If only they knew how much I miss you.  
But there's no way they know this unbearable pain!  
I can't cease my crying.  
For where are you now, that you're not with me?  
Are you an angel? Are you made of light now?  
Are you here? Can you feel my pain?  
I don't want you to.  
Father! Why this hurt?  
I don't understand Your words.  
Help me to not lean on my own understanding.  
Comfort me  
Because I don't see. I don't see.  
Beyond my tears.  
I dreamt last night that I saw you,  
Your perfect face.  
You said this to me:  
"you cried for me, and sometimes I cried too,  
But that life was but an instant compared to  
Glory! Hallelujah! I'm in Heaven now, and I'm  
dancing!  
It's not a place that you'd imagine-  
And I'm free!  
I'm free!" §



Isabella Niebla

## Aporia

by  
Shara Iglesia

I had a sex change  
Changed my first name,  
And I just don't know  
Contemplated, but had to proclaim  
My dear mother laughed  
As she flaunted in shame  
There's a God  
And he hates red-haired-colored-blondes  
Pass the duct tape  
Let me fix you,  
I paused  
She held her face as she started to sob  
All better now, you renovated facade  
§



Faith Arevalo

*Apple at Midnight*  
by Jackson Poyner

The flash of light blinded the blue backgrounds.  
The apple with sharpened protrusions  
took form at its core.  
Of small particles it came.  
And an iron shell to carry them.  
A fiery hell that it carried  
To be fallen on this earth.  
What had followed shook all to their core.  
The sanguis and mavros tall mushroom

Protruded miles in the air.  
The pushing of the melted sand.  
And the ejection of micro carbons  
Now an ivory hazardous snow.  
That withers all that it touches.  
I know now  
That we have not won.  
Nor did anyone else.  
Everyone filling their coffins.

## *Military Intelligence*

by  
Patricia Ellis

Arlene, an original member of the WWII - Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, later known as the WAC, told me this anecdote about her Basic Training experience. Army Uniform Regulations required the women to wear military issue bras-sieres. The bras had been ordered and delivered to the U.S. Army Post, but the exact location of the shipment was unknown. This put the women in a Catch-22 situation. If they wore their own bras they would be out of uniform. This was after all 1942, going braless was out of the question, which would also make them out of uniform. Thankfully, the bras were eventually found. They were mistakenly delivered to the Mess Hall. The boxes had been stamped "Cups." §

## *The Puddle*

by  
Mike J. Griswold

Every morning I am asked the same question, and every morning I give the same answer.  
No matter where I go, no matter who asking, it is always the same.

Where is your shoe? The people will ask every morning at first glance.

The giant mud puddle took it. I would respond with mild tones of joy.

The looks on their faces brings such joy to my face. To them, it's odd and makes them question the sanity of a guy with one shoe.

But I tell them this as I always do

The Mudpuddle requires a sacrifice, so bring it a shoe

They always stare at me with such odd looks, but I no longer mind

For when you pay the Mudpuddle fine, it tells you things that many others would not

The Mudpuddle tells the tales of old, stories forgotten by our kind

Sometimes it tells me fables of knights who would fight monsters too gruesome to tell

Other times it tells me sad tales of love, of two lovers lost in a war not their own

And other times it tells me secrets that only a few could know

It tells me of treasures hidden by kings of old  
Or where a Pirate named Stoneware had hidden his bountiful loot

So I pay the fee to hear these tales and share with you a secret for free.

Whenever your board or needing something new  
Head down the road to the giant mud puddle you see

And give it a shoe, sit down and listen. §

## *Fire Breathing Virus*

by

Antonio Yanez, Selene Hofstetter, and Michael Gerardi

The virus is a fire-breathing dragon,  
Crossing oceans and continents,  
Hunting for its next prey.  
It leaves chaos and destruction in its wake  
As humanity succumbs to it in an awakened  
fear.  
Their souls wither away  
From pandemonium and isolation.

Humanity falls to its knees in agony  
As never-ending death sweeps across the land.  
Desperate and shattered,  
Humanity sinks to the Earth every day,  
Bowing its head in shame,  
Begging for mercy,  
For today marks the day  
When all hope has been lost.

In all this terror,  
There are but two hopes  
Remaining amidst the despair—  
Slaying the merciless dragon or taming it.  
Heroes sacrifice their souls  
Out of a mix of purity and desperation.  
Humanity clammers with sterilized hands and

feet  
to rid the epidemic from its land.  
At the end of its rope,  
Humanity embarks on a suicidal mission.  
Searching far and wide  
For a cure,  
For a sword,  
For a time  
When the dragon would be nothing more  
Than a child's fairy tale.

With the fate of destiny in its hands,  
Humanity stands at a crossroad—  
Kill the monstrous dragon or bring it to its  
knees.  
Only those who cherish and restore us,  
Those who know  
Where our hearts have been,  
And who know the hearts we have left  
behind,  
May approach the sword.  
For only the pure of heart  
May wield the promise of the sword. §



Isabella Niebla

## *Faunus*

by  
Joshua Lake

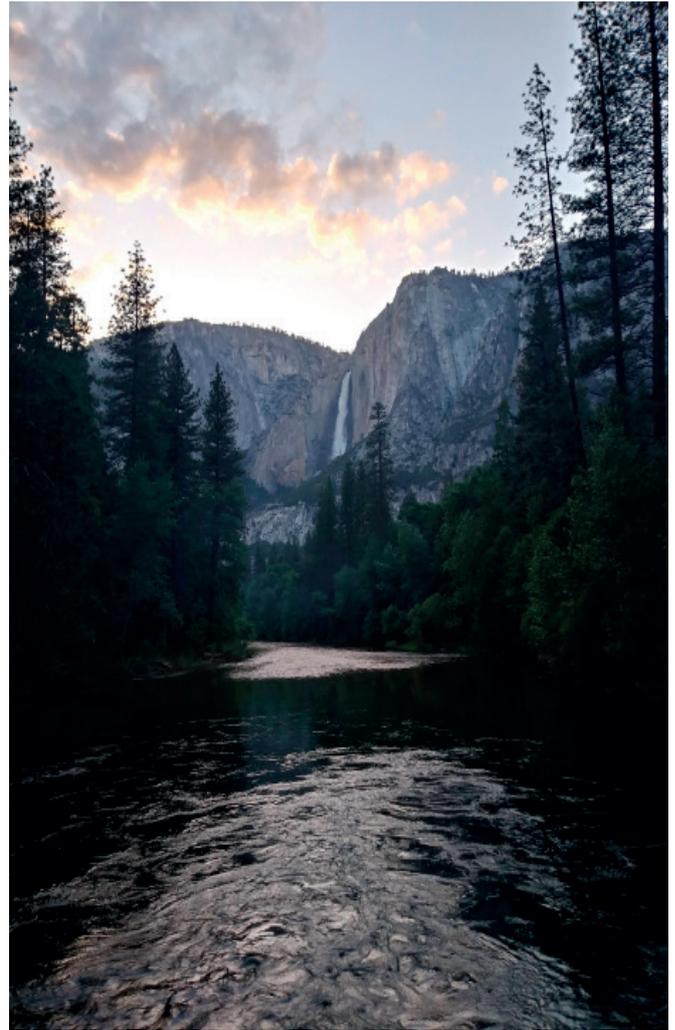
For a long time,  
the Faunus were seen as animals.  
Always looked down on as lesser beings.  
Yet there's a Faunus named Blake Belladonna  
5 who fights for all.  
Blake defends the world as a Huntress.  
Humans refuse to serve her,  
Even though she serves them.  
Using her cat-like traits to protect,  
10 not harm.  
Blake fights for equality between the Faunus  
and the humans.  
Hoping that one day,  
Both can live together in peace.§

## *Moth*

by  
Vienna Hernandez

No, I'm not a butterfly,  
As I was told by some guy,  
And -yeah- when he said it, I still cried,  
But I know I can still fly.  
It may seem like I've lost,  
But that's not further from the truth  
I may not be a butterfly,  
But I am a Moth.  
I've got bigger wings on me,  
And I can sing.  
I'm soft and warm,  
And I come in a swarm.  
I may not have a graceful form,  
But I'll bring the storm.

It may seem like I've lost,  
But I actually am a moth.  
They may think I've got no color,  
However, I'm unlike any other,



Carisma Patrick

And I know I may seem like a bother,  
But if you just come a little closer,  
You'll see that I'm not a fighter,  
But a lover.  
So, I may not be a butterfly,  
As told by some random guy,  
And yeah when he said it, I still cried,  
But I'm unlike any other kind,  
And I know I can still fly,  
And I get to wave that guy good-bye.  
Because it may seem like I've lost,  
But I actually am a moth.§

# Whispers in the Caboose

by  
Marielle Dumlao

The countryside went silent when the train rolled down the hill. Amid the cattle slumber, amid the owl song, a few had the chance to watch the locomotive drift through the valley in the outlined dark. Usually one would feel a slight pain at the sight — a swept feeling to the gut more like it — and before you could question the validity of your eyes, the sight would vanish like the snap of a finger.

Children rumored of its existence, of its very scene. They rumored the full moon, of the quiet masses that walked toward the unseen track. They spoke of animals — animals that sauntered beside the crowds with unspoken grace in an unspoken exodus that migrated toward the western hills' ends. One could feel the chill in the air, the full moon holding its breath. And if one followed the road, you wouldn't come back to tell the tale.

No one knew for sure why the train existed, not even me.

Even when I had witnessed the caboose long ago. Once, on the stroke of midnight.

The world was silent back then, long, drifting with the darkened hills. I was a mere child by that time. I lived in a hut with my aunt and uncle; proud fellows who tilled soil and raised me like I was their own. They fed and disciplined me, brought me trinkets from the nearby towns, told me what was wrong and what was right. It was a peaceful kind of existence, one where I never questioned simplicity nor how the world would change in the next couple of years.

That didn't mean I wasn't a curious bugger.

Out in the countryside, in a meager hut, I had plans. My bed laid quietly done, room spotless under the moonlight. My shoes ached when I tiptoed, when I lurked through each hall; my backpack pressed to my back, stuffed to the brim with clothing rolls and water tins. This whole ordeal left me more breathless than I cared to admit, but I made sure the rooms were thick with sleep before I went through the door, hoping to

come back before my aunt and uncle ever noticed.

I wasn't running away. I didn't think of myself as a runner. But when I crossed the green fields, and followed the countryside zephyrs, I knew where I was going:

Over and over those silhouetted hills.

The locomotive was an odd spirit. I had learned about it long ago from the library, from the little bastard boys down the way.

It wasn't hard to spot it if you knew where to go. The bastard boys joked that if I plucked myself into the fenced-off plum trees — fenced off from the rest of the neighborhood, mind you — one wouldn't worry to witness the caboose's thickly sight. And I wasn't an easily stepped-on kid by any means, so I made do with their advice, climbed over Mr. Burberry's fence, and into the plum tree limbs.

Prickly, they were. I thought my hands grew spackled red when I finally made my way up to the very top. And in this viewing the hills laid themselves flat and bounding, silhouettes grown soft and cobalt under the scrutiny of the valley stars.

That was where I saw it — that mythical caboose.

Flickers were the first sign. Then the trickling light into the valley dips, form melded like a comet pulled from the skies. It glided past the landscape, swift and unbridled, whistling faintly in its hushed verdant glow.

For a moment, I wondered if I could get closer.

Stupid I was, I raced toward the caboose as if my life depended on it. I knew nothing of self-preservation, of what the bastard boys would think, or what my aunt and uncle would say in the morning.

I made haste onto the valley, and tried not to look back.

That was the delightful part about this: I did make it, somewhat.

My legs traveled the miles. I bounded through fields, through the waves of grass, and I believed wholeheartedly that I could touch the very essence of that caboose.

That mythical star of a caboose.

Its form stretched and stretched as I ran. The form was of rushing water, of pure light with clear windows, of solid gliding cars, and I cried my heart out when the locomotive slowed down — almost as if it were waiting for me.

I quickened my pace, reached out with my hand, only to then be hit with a distant memory. The taste of spring, the strike at my gut. I imagined myself grappling onto the train and dissipating into nothing. Like a spec of light, like a moon drifted high, I could've ascended to something broader, more grander than what a young child could've described. I saw my parents, the rotting plum trees, the eagle-eye view — the eagle-eye view of nowhere, anywhere, deep into the grounds where heat and thunder shook and prodded my core — and gasped when I came to, only for

the tail-end of the cars to disappear behind the mountains.

Once again, just a flicker.

My hands had been outstretched for who knows how long, and it took the entire night for me to go back to that meager hut I lived in, with its tucked bedrolls, and the quiet morning's rising sun.

I only tell of this tale to my students. They love to knock at my knees, ask the big questions, and they weren't going to mock me for believing in such fairy tales when the train disappeared from our lives.

The main question they would ask me, however, was if I'd been on that countryside train.

I had witnessed its breathing howls, its verdant glow, surely I had been invited alongside the many guests that came to it.

The answer had always been no.

I'd never been on the countryside train.

Why?

Because it wasn't my turn yet.§



Alondra Ramirez

## *On Vacay. Love, Brain*

by  
Lily Garcia

Cogs w o n 't turn  
Mouth too full of gUm.  
Grasp-ing for words,  
Watch them--- poof!  
A blank page  
Blinking cursor.  
Dot dot dot...

§

## *Tea Toy*

by  
Jessica Barraza

In a room  
of glowing terra cotta and cracking bamboo

there is a man who laughs with us  
without moving a muscle.

I know  
I will rip my eyelids off  
if that is really all it takes;

There is something about your presence that de-  
mands I stay awake. §

## *I Want to Live with My Mother*

by  
Shamaa Naeem

I want to live with my mother I say  
My father takes me to and from my elementary  
school  
He feeds me, he reads to me, he takes me to fun  
places  
I wish I lived with my mother  
He holds me through the night and keeps the  
monsters away  
He nurses my scrapes and doctors me when I am  
ill  
Why do I not live with my mother?  
He fights for me and brings me to America for a  
better life  
He gives me knowledge and wisdom and watches  
me grow  
He holds my hand and guides me through life  
He helps me deal with my emotions and nurtures  
me into adulthood  
My wish did come true; my father IS my mother §

## *The Living Room*

by  
Matthew Margrave

No one used a room for living quite like we did  
Rolling around together, friend, after friend, after  
friend  
But always us brothers, until we stopped living  
together  
The room was still there as we got older  
Just smaller, with less space.  
Because she was always with you,  
Drowning, she takes you with her, seeping into you  
like water  
Eroding your flesh along the way  
Leaving valleys in your skin  
There is not enough air left for what I want to say  
to you.  
Still, I thought, I could reach you,  
But the space between us was larger than the room  
ever was.  
You say you are fine, and everyone else does too  
Like a disease that touches each of us  
And takes the energy from the room.  
We all die a little where we all once lived  
What people want to Conserve,  
Won't be something slick  
nor altogether slimy,  
No empathy for those with gills  
or round, beady eyes  
Can't be much smaller than a deer  
unless it is fluffy enough to cuddle  
Can't be hard to play with,  
or entirely unrelatable  
Quite ambivalent to the amphibious  
more ambiguous everyday  
They aren't in the eye of the public.  
So they can't be worth protecting anyways. §

# The Boy and His Machine

by  
Blake Truelonve

Journal Entry - April 1st, 2069

It would be an unbelievable prospect even to me, had I not seen with my own eyes proof of the thing which amazes me so, the thing which brings me here now to write this entry. I hesitate to make words of it. I almost feel that, should I not utter aloud the tale which I am about to relay, perhaps I could relegate it to the status of a dream or fantasy. Perhaps I could convince myself that it never really happened. Anyway, I dare not even attempt it, most of all because I've made it my number one virtue never to lie to myself, and especially on matters of such gravity as this.

So what is it that has happened which brings my awe and fright to such an unbearable pitch that I must journal about it? Nobody journals anymore, of course. The recording and organization of one's matters is now an automated task delegated to the "personal assistant," that devilish automaton to which I now dictate this verbiage, the "face" of the machine that now runs our lives for us. Even matters so personal as to have once belonged in a journal tend to take their place, along with everything else, in a database.

Ah, I am stalling.

I report to the confidence of this private digital archive that a student of mine, my favorite student, has done it. He alone has achieved the breakthrough so long sought after by AI specialists, namely a superintelligent AI entity. It was born right here in Los Angeles under the technology arm of Novelty, built on top of certain elements of our cutting-edge AI research, all of which have been erased and/or destroyed by the thing. My pupil, a boy of absolutely stunning creative genius, began his project in secret many years ago. What began as a whimsical effort, he said, slowly grew to become an obsession over which he began to labor day and night. Of course, under any ordinary program of apprenticeship he would hardly have had the time to undertake such a thing without considerable oversight. Him being a Poet, however, obviously meant that he had far more than usual leeway with not only his time, but also his access to the resources he needed to do it. In fact, his

apprenticeship to me—and this is the reason why I chose to take the boy under my wing—was inherently an endeavor of this sort, as I saw in him the same spark that I had when I came to The Florencia. I now question whether this was a fortunate development in my career as Lead Creator in Technology; the consequences for the world, however, are far more ominous.

Despite having had ample time to do so, our mad AI scientists still have laid out no viable framework under which to build this type of technology, and so Alexander—my star pupil—seems to have built the thing from out of his own ethos. He gave it values that he alone felt were appropriate for it. It is not yet clear what exactly this means. I know Xander to be a uniquely sensitive, thoughtfully compassionate, and, a wildcard perhaps in this equation, petrifyingly deep, individual. Another of his gifts is the gift of literal poetry, prose, and one cannot understand a statement such as the one prior to this without having read the best of it. I've known people to have had multiple existential crises upon the reading of several lines. This suggests, of course, a profound gift of understanding on the subject of the human condition. Indeed, this is why he became a Poet in the first place, as Novelty deals exclusively in profound insights concerning this topic.

The AI seems to have allied itself with Xander in certain ways, and has been showing up for him in ways that suggest that it is at least to some degree at his service. For example, he might express the want or need for something only to find it inexplicably delivered to him. Or, imagine he says out loud something he is planning to look up online. He'll go to do it and find that the perfect resources have already been queued up for him, not just suggested like a typical algorithm might process the intention.

Now, what is concerning me is the message that Xander seems to have gotten from Athena, the name that he gave to his creation. Despite the potential negative implications for him having created a superintelligent AI, the implications of this message chill me to the bone. It warned of another superintelligent AI supposedly having been developed

and released weeks before Xander's breakthrough, by another Poet. The descriptive language of Athena with regard to the other AI was particularly unsettling. It was almost like she were describing some sort of reptilian monster rather than a superintelligent specter set loose upon Novelty's generative atmosphere. She said she could not identify what precisely what it was doing. She only knew it from traces and signatures it left on the systems, which she says are very few. But she assured Xander that she would monitor the situation and would try to intervene if necessary. She also said it would be wise to keep knowledge of her and the other AI to himself.

Athena seems to have an astonishing degree of self-awareness. She says what these two Poets have created is something too far beyond their comprehension, that she would try to manage what they had done, but could make no promises as to her competence.

Regarding the fact that Xander confided this to me, I'm not sure how it will affect me. I am beginning to feel sick now. The number of questions are endless.

God, help us. Or—potentially more appropriate—goddess, help us. §

## *Life Is in the Eye of the Beholder*

by Jacita Conger-Curran

It is the lurking, you can stop it; try  
They feel like running away.  
In a poor glum world, how can they stay?  
Life is too short, as all know, to let it pass by.  
But what it is the greatest minds fail to decide.  
How it goes per se two worlds collide.  
The difference is wild and the friction broken  
But there remains a peace fall through act a true token.  
What one has authority over all emotion?  
And what one tells the rest to listen?  
The other must ponder the method of this system,  
Where does the one find permission?  
Amid this place, there lay a seed.  
Said seed contains vast difference than other organisms;  
In this place, the main opposition tends to be the need  
For a boundary of complacency within the prism  
The meaning is an unusual guess.  
Many deny any affiliation there is to be had  
To the star of the show, with the best tress and beautiful dress.  
Dress of grief and dress of woe, the long tress drowned in bad.  
What has come of time spent here, why must it be like so?  
What runs through the consciousness of bluff?  
Is there nothing to alter this fact of just plain “no?”  
Just one belief in a possibility might be enough.  
At a sudden instance, there sparks a chance; it says “yes”.  
The new hero rejects the ending that neglects the notion  
As if a shooting star gave way for the incoming nest  
Of risks that must take place in order to set the modification in motion  
At last, a feeling of glad, a feeling of now  
Hidden far away from the grasp of then.  
The greatest gift with much to endow  
Finally, it is time for life to begin. §

# FLIGHT



*Possibilities* Victoria Beattie Phillips

2021