

BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

ON MY OWN TIME



2019 LITERARY ART

A COLLECTION OF AWARD-WINNING
POETRY AND PROSE BY NORTH TEXAS
BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

ON MY OWN TIME

When IBM asked more than 12,800 C-suite officers from 112 countries and 20 industries worldwide to rank the characteristics most instrumental to employee success, CEO's cited the willingness to experiment. The world's top-ranking businesses were also found to be the ones that most supported skills-building and co-creating in their workforce.

The relational advantages between commerce and culture have never been made more evident than in the current business landscape. Business Council for the Arts applauds the business leaders who have invested in their employees and who strengthen their workforce's creativity and innovation through *On My Own Time* (OMOT). By sparking conversation and engaging team members across departments and through hierarchies, participating OMOT companies have created an office environment of shared collaboration while publicly recognizing their employee's many talents.

On My Own Time, a trademarked program organized and produced by Business Council for the Arts, is a regional art competition that showcases the talent and creativity of North Texas business professionals. Since the program's inception in 1993, OMOT has promoted the work of thousands of creative employees from companies across North Texas. The program includes two components, one for visual artists and another for writers.

This publication is a compilation of award-winning entries from business professionals, created outside their working hours. Expert jurors from the literary community select the winning pieces in the following categories: Corporate Collaboration, 10-Word Story, Fictional Shorty Story, Creative Non-Fiction, and Open Verse Poetry. These authors will read their work aloud at Literary Night on October 10, 2019 from 6:00 – 8:00 PM at the AT&T Performing Arts Center. The public is invited.

To all the artists who participated, thank you for sharing your talents with us. Business Council for the Arts continued to see the competition increase this year, with over 100 entries made between 20 companies. An outstanding congratulations is due to all of the winners.

Recognition and thanks are also owed to each ambassador for his or her dedication to organizing and managing their OMOT program internally within their company. Lastly, we offer deep gratitude to our jurors: Talmage Boston, Michael Clay, and Joshua Folmar; who without their volunteered time the program would not be possible.

Interested in bringing added engagement and creativity to your business through On My Own Time and other BCA programs? Contact Abby Howard, Engagement and Creativity Manager, at abby.howard@ntbca.org



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CONTENTS

OPEN VERSE POETRY

<i>Four-letter Words</i> , Jennifer Wang, UT Southwestern Medical Center	4
<i>Kristen</i> , Holly Meister, JP Morgan Chase	6
<i>COKE TAB</i> , Connie Hardin, JP Morgan Chase	7

10-WORD STORY

<i>The Griot</i> , Reed Smollar, JP Morgan Chase	8
<i>Whew</i> , Heather Svokos, UT Southwestern Medical Center	9
<i>Cactus</i> , Tuan Nguyen, CallisonRTKL	10

FICTIONAL SHORT STORY

<i>The Pink Teacup</i> , Dana Vickerson, Gensler	11
<i>The Jangly Man</i> , Dana Vickerson, Gensler	13
<i>The Negotiator</i> , Michael Morgan, Heritage Auctions	16

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

<i>The Art of the Game: Don Bluth's Groundbreaking Dragon's Lair</i> , Caitlin Guzman, Heritage Auctions	18
<i>Slice of Life</i> , Anne Perry, The Art Institute of Dallas	20
<i>Adopted Child</i> , Arianna Hawkins, Merriman Anderson/Architects, Inc.	23

COPORATE COLLABORATION

<i>Dazed and Dazzled by Dior</i> , Nilaa Kadiresan, Anne Perry & Michael Sims, The Art Institute of Dallas	25
<i>Martian Biome</i> , David Dunsworth, Nilaa Kadiresan & Anne Perry, The Art Institute of Dallas	28
<i>Synesthetic Sonata</i> , Nick Hill, Anne Perry, Michael Sims & Sheena Smith, The Art Institute of Dallas.	30

FOUR-LETTER WORDS

JENNIFER WANG | UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER
1ST PLACE – OPEN VERSE POETRY

When we were kids,
There were certain
Four-letter words
We could not say.
One in particular
Was even banned
From most cable TV,
But as adults, we say it
All the time,
Though rarely meaning it
As an action,
Like you do now.
You don't say it,
That four-letter word,
But your fingers talk.
They get a little too curious
And I try to discourage them,
Like our moms did
When we asked what certain
Four-letter words meant;
But we kept pushing,
And your fingers kept wandering
Lower. You still can't say it
Or even ask if I'm okay
With this so you put your mouth
To other uses.
I tell myself it's okay,
But then you go to places
That make me think of
Another four-letter word.
This isn't taboo
Like the one on your mind—
Network TV uses it,
And we even joked about it
When we were teens—
And yet no one wants to talk
About it or even think
About the consequences.
You surely don't,
As your mind becomes occupied
With more four-letter words:
Want, need, give, take—
No, not the last one; it's too close
To that word you've banished
To the deep caverns
Of your mind,

Like the bad words your mom
Told you to never think about
Much less say.
You don't go there
Because you're not that type
And as long as you don't
Cross the final threshold,
You're okay– I'm okay.
I tell myself the same,
Pushing that four-letter word
Away, except now I remember
Those jokes and the girls
I used to call names
With four or five letters,
And I think that none
Of this is okay.
I should cry, scream, kick, push,
Do something to tell you
How I feel on the inside,
But my body says
Something else,
And you only understand
Moans and shudders,
Wants and needs.
In the end,
There is nothing
But the silence
Of unsaid four-letter words
To convey our emotions:
Lust, love, hate, hurt, fear
For, from, of
You and me.

KRISTEN

HOLLY MEISTER | JP MORGAN CHASE
2ND PLACE – OPEN VERSE POETRY

Slender and tall
deep brown hair as dark as midnight
vibrant eyes of similar hue
You have an exquisitely intelligent mind
to meet any challenge, with humility
and a sharp wit which can light a room
with laughter
You are beautiful

You see none of this in your reflection
for your voice
tells you other stories
lies
and I'll always wonder
what makes you listen

You went away one frigid morning
I felt the void you left --
we hoped, until you were finally seen again
by the side of a Nebraska highway
in the cold winter snow
frozen to death with your voice
and its stories
and your bottle

You died at the hands of that voice
which no one but you could hear
and those stories
which no one but you would believe
and that bottle.

COKE TAB

CONNIE HARDIN | JP MORGAN CHASE
3RD PLACE – OPEN VERSE POETRY

A COKE TAB IS A WISH COME TRUE
I WISH I WISH I WISH I KNEW
WOULD I COULD I SHOULD I DARE
WISH FOR SOMETHING THAT WASN'T THERE

SHOULD I WISH FOR SOMETHING BIG
SHOULD I WISH FOR SOMETHING SMALL
SHOULD I WISH FOR SOMETHING SHORT
SHOULD I WISH FOR SOMETHING TALL

A COKE TAB IS A WISH COME TRUE
ONE GOOD PULL IS ALL YOU DO
IT'S NOT HARD IT TAKES NO TOOLS
WOULD THIS COULD THIS ALL BE TRUE
I WISH I WISH I WISH I KNEW

NOW GRAB A CAN AND HOLD IT TIGHT
PULL THE TAB WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT
AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED ALL OF THIS
CLOSE YOUR EYES AND MAKE A WISH

COULD YOU SHOULD YOU WOULD YOU DARE
WISH FOR SOMETHING THAT WASN'T THERE
WOULD THIS COULD THIS ALL BE TRUE
I WISH I WISH I WISH I KNEW

THE GRIOT

REED SMOLLAR | JP MORGAN CHASE
1ST PLACE – 10-WORD STORY

With nobody to listen, the storyteller burned books for warmth.

WHEW

HEATHER SVOKOS | UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER
2ND PLACE – 10-WORD STORY

It was just once. Thank God the gun wasn't loaded.

CACTUS

TUAN NGUYEN | CALLISONRTKL
3RD PLACE – 10-WORD STORY

Love story: I once watered a cactus,
to its death.

THE PINK TEACUP

DANA VICKERSON | GENSLER
1ST PLACE – FICTIONAL SHORT STORY

The scream of the tea kettle made both children jump. Jackie reached out a slender arm and pulled it off the back burner, resting it gently on the lace potholder their mother had bought at Suzie's General Store four years ago. On the stained, white tile counter were two pink tea cups, and inside those were a tea bag each. Jackie poured the boiling hot water carefully into each cup and turned back to look at his sister.

Their red, puffy eyes met for an instant, and then Lillibet looked down. Her small fingers were knotted in her lap.

"It's gonna be ok, now, Lilli," Jackie managed. He was older, braver, stronger, or so he told himself.

Instinctively, the two children looked up. The cracked plaster ceiling of the old farmhouse was bathed in morning light. Their mother's yellow lemon wallpaper, which had peeled and faded in the years since her death, now seemed brighter, almost happy again.

Jackie brought the tea cups over to the small, wooden table and set one in front of his baby sister. She took it and began to blow steam off the top, and Jackie could see her hands were shaking. She didn't look up, but he could make out the bruise on her cheek, a deep purple ocean turning green along the edges. She'd have that mark another week at least. That might make the next few days a little harder, but there was no good worrying about that now.

"Drink up, it's almost time."

"Papa said we was all gonna go into town today," Lillibet managed, almost at a whisper. "He and Bob McGuil had a card game. We was gonna stay and watch the truck so ain't nobody mess with it."

Then we'd be there, ready to take his anger when he lost the last bit of our summer crop money, thought Jackie. Well, that wasn't gonna happen anymore. "Mr. McGuil won't miss him. Ain't nobody gonna miss him for awhile."

The tea cup in Lillibet's hands rattled as she set it down. She lifted her blue eyes to stare directly at her brother. The fear and exhaustion of the night before left her face, and only resolve rested there now. Jackie thought she looked ten years older in that instant. "Ain't nobody gonna miss him, ever."

He smiled at that, and he realized he felt relief for the first time in years. They were free.

He stood up and pushed his chair back then walked over to his sister. He took her by her frail hand and led her out of the kitchen. The two pink cups remained on the table, the last meal they'd ever share in the farmhouse of their childhood. To them, though, their childhood had died with their mother, and these last few years had been something else. Something horrible.

Jackie and Lilibet made their way down the dark hallway and past the old wooden staircase leading to the bedrooms upstairs. They paused and again looked up, both of them secretly fearing they'd hear the creak of their father's feet hitting the floor boards as he rose out of bed. They were being silly though, just children. Deep down they knew he was never getting up. They'd been careful. They'd been sure.

Jackie pulled open the front door and breathed in the fresh air. The morning sun shone brightly to the east, casting a warm, orange light over the barn and fields, now plowed and empty. He gripped his sister's hand more firmly, and they descended the wooden porch stairs together. Both children seemed to step a little lighter, and as they reached the end of their farm and turned on to the dirt road that led out of town, and to the rest of their lives, they began to skip.

THE JANGLY MAN

DANA VICKERSON | GENSLER
2ND PLACE – FICTIONAL SHORT STORY

It seemed to Crystal Meyers that she'd only been asleep for a few minutes when she heard the crackly wail come through on the baby monitor. She rolled over to nudge her husband (he usually took the first wake up of the night), but the spot was empty.

Right, she thought. Business trip. Damn.

She pulled herself out of the warm nest of blankets and padded across the cool tile floor of the hallway between her bedroom and Sarah's. She opened the old wooden door and looked in on her three year old.

The room was dim but not dark. Sarah had taken to sleeping with a night light lately, the nightmares becoming more frequent. Her daughter was sitting up in her bed crying, eyes shut tight, little hands gripping the stuffed gorilla she'd favored since she was an infant.

Crystal crossed the room in two steps and scooped up her daughter. For a few moments, Sarah was inconsolable, but eventually she began to come out of her sleep and realize she was being held by her mother.

Crystal took the child over to the daybed on the far side of the room and sat down. She smoothed the sweat drenched strands of honey colored hair away from the toddler's face and rocked her daughter back and forth.

"Bad dream again, munchkin?"

"The Jangly Man was here. I don't like that man. He's bad."

"What kind of man?" She wasn't sure what exactly her child was saying, because she was still crying and trying to catch her breath. "It was just a dream, baby."

The toddler shook her head violently. "No, mama. He's *bad*. He was on the ceiling. He's loud. I don't like loud noises. I don't like *him*."

"Shhh... darling. It was just a dream. Let's get back in b---"

"Nooooooooo," Sarah wailed, clutching Crystal tightly around the waist.

Crystal sighed. She looked at the time on her FitBit, which read, "2:10." At this rate, it was looking like she was going to need a huge coffee in the morning. She needed to get Sarah back to sleep as soon as possible.

Sarah's grip held strong, so Crystal began to sing. "Five little ducks---"

"No mommy," Sarah whined, "not that one."

"This old man, he played---"

"NO!" Sarah began to cry.

Crystal took a deep breath. She was so tired.

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star---"

"Yeah! That one!"

"Ok, baby." Crystal smoothed Sarah's hair again and hugged her. Then, she began to sing. She managed to get through the song three times before she heard her daughter snoring softly in her arms.

She let her mind drift a bit, but something was nagging at her. Where did she pick up the word *jangle*? She didn't think she'd ever heard Sarah say it before, but she had learned all sorts of new words from her daycare buddies.

The memory rolled to the front of her mind, and she realized where she had recently heard it. Her husband, Alex, had taught it to her. The estate sale, she thought.

Alex, Crystal, and Sarah had taken their golden retriever, Monster -- Sarah's naming, of course - - on their normal Saturday morning walk. That had to have been three months back, she thought. A few streets over from their house, they came upon a line of people waiting outside one of their neighbor's homes. Interested, they stopped to see what was going on.

A middle aged woman in a bright pink pant suit and matching wrist bangles brought out a large sign that read, "Estate Sale."

"Want to take a peek inside?" Alex had whispered to Crystal. "Might be some good stuff in there."

"I will never understand your fascination with other people's junk. No thanks."

"Aw, come on!" her husband had whined, which got the attention of their daughter, and soon both of them were anxious to get inside and take a look.

"Ok, fine," Crystal had relented. "I'll wait out here with Monster while you two go paw through Mrs. Henderson's ancient belongings."

Alex had swept Sarah into his arms and bounded up the sidewalk. Crystal made small talk with a few passing neighbors while she waited for her family to finish their treasure hunt. Just as Monster was starting to get restless, Alex and Sarah had emerged from the old lady's house making a ton of racket.

"Momma! Look! Momma, look at my pretty bracelet. It's sooooo pretty!"

Looped through Sarah's small hand was a leather cord with three rusted bells fastened on top. She rattled them with glee.

The bells agitated Monster, and he pulled at his leash. "Great," Crystal muttered.

"Aw, come on, it's fun," Alex said, brushing her off. "Bells jangle, right baby?"

"I'm not a baby, daddy. I'm a *big* girl! Look at my jangle!"

Alex laughed and took the leash from Crystal. "She'll tire of it in a few hours."

She didn't, though. She rang those bells constantly for three days before Crystal got fed up and "lost them" in the back of the closet. Sarah had cried for her "jangles" for an hour before forgetting about them.

She hugged her sleeping toddler, smelled her hair -- vanilla with a hint of sweat -- and picked her up. She gently set her daughter back down in her bed then waited a few seconds to make sure she was really asleep before creeping out of the room.

As she walked back down the hall, she had that sinking feeling that she wasn't alone, the kind of feeling that when you were a kid made you bolt to your bed and jump under the covers. She knew she was being silly, though, and put it out of her mind. She never saw the monstrous black shape peel itself off the ceiling behind her as she entered her bedroom, but just as she was slipping back in between her sheets, she heard the erratic jangling.

THE NEGOTIATOR

MICHAEL MORGAN | HERITAGE AUCTIONS
3RD PLACE – FICTIONAL SHORT STORY

“Whoa! Whoa! Where do you think you’re going?!”

The old man in the Western cut black suit calmly finished tucking his wallet into the breast pocket of his jacket, “Take it easy, son. I’m not lookin’ fer trouble.”

“Then get back over with the others!” The gunman gestured with his pistol toward the line of terrified people sitting on the floor in front of the teller’s desk.

“Now why would I do that?” The old man’s huge white walrus moustache fluffed as he talked. “You’re here for the bank’s money. That’s no concern o’ mine. Take all you can carry, but be quick.” He pointed at the dark bubble on the wall, “The fella on the other end of that camera has already called the police.”

The robber glanced at the camera and back to the old man. Over the gunman’s shoulder, the old man watched through the drive-thru teller’s window as two police cars stopped head-to-head. Almost before the cars stopped moving, the officers bailed out and took cover behind their engine blocks, shotgun barrels leaning across the hoods of the cars.

“You get back over there!” The pistol’s cold eyed stared the old man down.

The old man gestured toward the window, “You’re too late. They’re already here.”

A glance out the window, and the gunman whirled back to face the old man, “Then I guess plans have to change.”

“Oh, I agree,” the old man settled his dove gray Stetson on his head. “You have some decisions to make.”

“Shut up!” The gunman craned his neck to look out the front glass doors, and hurried closer to the hostages.

“That’s an option,” the old man nodded. “If you take a hostage, take a pretty one. They might not shoot her when they kill you. An ugly one, and they might shoot through her to get to you and just call it a mercy.”

“For God’s sake don’t help him!” screamed a suit that suddenly surged to his feet. The heavy pistol in the robber’s hand clubbed him to the floor. He glared silently at the old man as he pushed himself up spitting blood and a couple of teeth on the floor.

The old man fixed the suit with a glare, “I wouldn’t rile him if I were you.” He looked back to the nervously pacing gunman. “Way I see it, if they come through that door, most of the folks in here are going to die, you’re guaranteed to die from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, and all those deaths are going to be blamed on you, even if you don’t fire a shot.”

"I ain't killed nobody," the gunman stopped pacing, and began trying to look in every direction at once.

"That don't matter a bit," the old man pulled out a chair and sat. "Police Chiefs don't care about the citizens, but they do care about writing reports that blame the criminal for any casualties. If a cop that kills someone, they used excessive force, then there's a lawsuit. Just a mess. If the criminal is the one responsible, it all goes away as soon as the bad guy hits the floor." He crossed his legs and brushed some imaginary dust from his knee. "On top of that, right before I came in here, the radio was talkin' about how the President got stabbed today. Seems the First Lady walked in on her during some intense negotiations with the Peruvian Ambassador." The old man waved his hand around the room, "All this drama won't even make the news. You and all these folks'll die for nothing." He interlocked his fingers and rested them across his belly, "That how you want to go out?"

The robber's gunhand dropped to his side, and he looked at the old man like a lost child, "No. I, don't want to die. I didn't wanna hurt anyone. Just needed the money."

"Then you have a choice to make," a hand rose to smooth the walrus in thought. "You can put that gun on the counter and lay down on the floor. You'll do a few years, but you'll keep breathin'. Or, you can go out in a blaze of glory. What'll it be?"

"I only did it for my kids..." the gun rattled on the counter top as the robber struggled to get his cramped fingers to obey. "They deserve...better."

The old man's bristly eyebrows arched in approval, "You made the right decision."

The robber's expression of surrender changed to puzzlement, "I don't remember seeing you in here when I came in. Where were you?" Sudden movement at the doors stopped his words as his eyes widened in terror.

"Son, I walked in right behind you."

THE ART OF THE GAME: DON BLUTH'S GROUNDBREAKING DRAGON'S LAIR

CAITLIN GUZMAN | HERITAGE AUCTIONS
1ST PLACE – CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Are video games art? This question has been cause for much conversation and debate in video gaming circles for decades. And today, many have come to a common answer: yes, of course. With video game exhibits popping up in museums worldwide, including the MoMA and the Smithsonian, and rare vintage game cartridges selling for record-breaking prices at auction, it is safe to say that video games are now a recognized form of art. But until quite recently, video games were regarded as simple entertainment, just as television and film were in their early years. In 1983, however, one game was heralded as the champion for the industry, one that would elevate gaming to a higher form. That game was *Dragon's Lair*.

To understand what made *Dragon's Lair* special, one need not look farther than its main designer, Don Bluth. A former Disney artist, Don Bluth is a great innovator of animation. By 1983, Bluth's critically acclaimed directorial-debut film *The Secret of NIMH* had already made him a star in the animation world. He would later go on to direct such beautiful and breathtaking films as *An American Tail*, *The Land Before Time*, and *Anastasia*. His recognizable style is iconic for its adorable and expressive character design, gorgeously lush backgrounds, and fantastical elements. *Dragon's Lair* was a bold experiment for a then-rookie Bluth and his team, but no one could have pulled it off better.

Dragon's Lair is a unique hybrid of animation and video game. It is fully animated with a wide variety of characters, creatures, and settings. The game's hero is Dirk the Daring, who is on a quest to rescue his beloved Princess Daphne from the evil dragon Singe. The titular dragon's lair is chock full of monsters and death traps. Dirk will die. A lot. You will lose a lot of quarters. But it's worthwhile to see the creative and often hilarious animations that follow each wrong turn. The animation in the game is what made it spectacular in 1983 and remains an impressive feat.

Don Bluth may not have been very established at the time, but *Dragon's Lair* bears his stamp very strongly. Dirk is the classic Don Bluth hero with his blocky features, big nose, and strong silhouette. He is certainly a courageous knight, but he also has a funny side and is a bit of a doofus. One of the most delightful sequences in the game happened if the player loses: Dirk crosses his arms and glares at you, the player, as his body disintegrates, as if to say, "You really stink at this!" He is a refreshing aversion to the standard fantasy hero with no flaws or personality. When it came to designing the heroine, Bluth and his team allegedly used *Playboy*

magazine models as a reference for Princess Daphne, which is reflected in her busty figure and revealing outfit. Sexy damsels in distress are standard fare for the fantasy genre, but Daphne's design is so over-the-top that it is almost parody. It is easy to see the influence that she would have on the design of Bluth's later heroines, like Thumbelina and Anastasia, who are similarly lithe and feminine but far less sexualized.

Only three games are currently included in the permanent collection at the Smithsonian. *Dragon's Lair* is one of those three. *Dragon's Lair* may not have immediately answer the question, "Are video games art?" but when we look back, it is clear that we couldn't have come to that answer, "Yes, of course," without this iconic work. With this in mind, it's no surprise that Don Bluth's most recent project is a movie adaptation of *Dragon's Lair*, which is currently under production after a successful Indiegogo campaign. Additionally, the original game has been ported to a wide variety of systems, from computers to smartphones to the Nintendo Switch. Everyone can continue to enjoy this classic game. So what are you waiting for? Go play *Dragon's Lair*!

SLICE OF LIFE

ANNE PERRY | THE ART INSTITUTE OF DALLAS
2ND PLACE – CREATIVE NON-FICTION

My fingers dance on the keyboard as I birth a short story. The phone rings; I am jolted out of my fictional world hearing my neighbor's voice.

"It's Karina," she sobs. "Joe cut off his finger—hospital. . . ."

"I'm coming."

I run out, leaving the door unlocked, grateful I am dressed. My heartbeat accelerates. Their Trailblazer awaits. "Come!" Karina gestures wildly, blood on her face and hands.

I stumble to get into the back and one of my sandals falls off. I let the other one drop. Karina steps on the gas. Joe moans, his hand wrapped in a towel.

"Hold on, Baby," says Karina.

Where is the finger? I decide not to ask such a left-brained question.

"What are the kids going to think?" Karina cries. "There is blood everywhere." I picture Jocelyn and Joseph coming home and how I will arrive at the hospital with no shoes, no purse, no cell phone.

Joe moans, "It hurts!"

We're here.

I jump out and run through the emergency entrance. "This is an *urgent* emergency," I announce, aware of my redundancy.

I tell Karina I will park the car.

"No, go see the children. They'll be home from school."

I drive their Trailblazer barefoot and without a license. When I pull into the Fernandez' driveway, the front door is open, the kids already home. Jocelyn's face is grave; Joseph's unreadable.

"Where are mom and dad? Why are you driving our car?"

"At the hospital. Your father cut his finger."

"I told myself it was only paint," said Jocelyn.

"I'll get my purse and shoes, then we'll go to the hospital." My voice is even, calm.

"Your shoes are in the road," remarked Joseph.

Karina calls. "I need you to do something hard. Go into the back yard and find the finger. Put it into a plastic bag; keep it dry. Put it on top of another plastic bag with ice. Don't let it get wet."

Search for the finger? My heart convulses. At some point, the kids had let their dogs into the backyard, and I wonder about the timing. I search.

Karina calls again.

"I can't find it."

"What is *it*?" asks Jocelyn.

I know I have to tell her. "His finger."

Karina's sister, Mireiya, arrives with her four children—five-year-old twin girls and two older boys.

All six children come out to help, the twins crying.

Mireiya climbs a ladder to check the roof. "That finger could have been flung anywhere."

My mind is a whirl. I call the vet and ask if the dogs could be x-rayed and, if a finger was found, would it still be—

Yes, the x-ray would show the finger; no, it would not be useful anymore.

I tell Mireiya I will go back to the hospital to be with Karina. Driving their Trailblazer, this time with shoes and cell phone, I get another call from Karina: Joe is in surgery; it is too late for the finger; no need to come.

Dazed, I find myself at Kroger's. What do kids like? Pizza. Popsicles. Bean dip. I buy all this and frozen enchiladas.

When I get back, I pass out popsicles. *I want red, I want purple*, I hear.

A spatter of blood crosses the kitchen floor, trailing through the dining room and garage. I start to clean the kitchen, avoiding the blood.

Mireiya returns. "I'll take the kids home with me." They pack. A car pulls up. It's Stephanie, the teenager who helps me with housework. I ask if she will help me clean up blood.

"Sure." She is nonchalant. "Coke works."

I marvel at how this teen is so casual as she cleans up blood with coca cola. I cook enchiladas. The phone rings multiple times. I tell Karina's mother about the accident, but she is confused about whether it happened to the son or the father. Other relatives call; some only speak Spanish. I know they wonder what a *gringa* is doing there.

My husband goes to the hospital during the surgery. Several hours later he tells me how badly the hand was damaged, how Joe was awake, talking during the operation.

We go back to their house to gather bloody paper towels. Joe and Karina return, with two relatives. Joe smiles, waving his bandaged hand above his head, ever the host. "Come on in."

Every finger on Joe's right hand has been damaged. Joe has no memory of what happened, but before going out to see they had found out his ex-wife had just moved to Dallas.

Blood seeps through Joe's bandages. "Get some rest," I say.

"The enchiladas were good," he responds.

Next morning I wake up thinking about Joe's hand—his *right* hand—held high over his head. As soon as I get home from teaching, I go next door. There are lots of cars in the driveway and unfamiliar children in the front yard.

Joe is surrounded by a circle of sympathizers. "Come on in, Anne. We're meeting to decide who will give me a finger. So far, no one has offered."

"I'll give you a toe, Baby, but I need my fingers for the kids," says Karina.

I look at the serious faces. Karina tells them who I am in Spanish. She shares the story of the trip to the hospital. "Tell them about my shoes," I say. She does; they all laugh.

I tell Joe that friends are praying for him.

"I'm keeping my fingers crossed myself," he says. We laugh.

He holds up his left hand. "Most of you count like this—one, two, three, four, five." He points to each finger on the right hand as he counts. "But I'm gonna be counting one, one-and-a-half, two. . . ." Again, we laugh.

Karina told me that recently Joe's relatives were questioning why they had moved to Texas—away from people who would be there in case anything happened.

"But look at today," she marveled. "Just look at today."

ADOPTED CHILD

ARIANNA HAWKINS | MERRIMAN ANDERSON/ARCHITECTS, INC.
3RD PLACE – CREATIVE NON-FICTION

I remember her eyes. Darts of amber gold shoot from center out of iris, dark green (hazel perhaps?) encircling the details. Some days more yellow than hazel, I would say. Perhaps just the way my eyes caught her reflection in light? Yes, perhaps. Those eyes were definitely yellow.

We had known each other long enough; enough to be called sisters, legally, and in my mind of only eleven that seemed enough evidence. I don't remember a struggle.

Bang!

"Come on Dasha, I need to shower before school!" This similar line would play out of my mouth daily. The white panel door opening to a rolling cloud of all the house's hot water, steam reminding my skin I wouldn't receive that modern joy this morning. Today was different though, I felt it. The rolling cloud of steam carried whiffs of grey, black smoke; a burning of flesh scent fresh with the heat rose to my nose. Dasha looked up at me, my hair curler still hot on her wrist.

"Guess you won't be fixing your hair anymore." Her yellow eyes (maybe just a youthful memory?) didn't have any tears.

"Aren't you in pain?" I thought.

Almost carefully, she pulled away the hot iron, a Christmas gift for my upcoming teenage angst and watched as parts of her black wrist were so seared there wasn't blood. Not a drop just the (seemingly?) painful pulling of flesh's edge. She dropped the iron to the floor and pushed past my frozen eleven-year-old human body. I don't remember a struggle, yet somehow the brown, laminate floor and my face came into contact. The laminate was cold, the smoke was sticky, and the steam created water beads all over my goose pimples.

Dasha pulled upon my hair, gently almost, gently... "We will always be sisters." Hazel, darting eyes for a moment to meet mine. She retreated to our bedroom.

Unplugging the iron I contemplated keeping it. If I washed it once the iron was cool, the pieces might come off. I left it on the bathroom vanity, a decision to make after school.

An eruption of chatter began downstairs, parents clambering over Dasha's wrist. What happened? Who did it? Why? Was she hurt? She can't go to school like this? Why was Dasha such a problem child? Because she's from Russia, because she's adopted, because her drugged up mother left her locked in basements as a child, because that made her crazy.

The yelling became more apparent. The angle rising to the 2nd floor where now I hid on the floor next to our vanity. Contemplating if the iron was cool enough to the touch. To clean off to keep it useful.

My name appears out of the chatter! Or was it just another word I wished into my own name? My hand clutched the iron's wire playing with the cord while pulling on my eyebrows. The black-light filaments wafting away to the floor, evidence I was here.

“Ari! Jacob! Time for school!” I rushed down the stairs, pretending I heard nothing. We left in the Honda minivan, blue, although grayer due to kaleche dust. Dasha came with us. Wrist wrapped, face red. The rest of the day was normal. I went to class, failed spelling and promised to understand phonics noises tomorrow. At lunch, Dasha ate a rainbow ice pop one of my favorites, and I wondered how she acquired the extra lunch money. At pick up, Dasha and her amber eyes were gone. She wasn’t my sister anymore.

At least legally.

DAZED AND DAZZLED BY DIOR

NILAA KADIRESAN, ANNE PERRY, & MICHAEL SIMS | THE ART INSTITUTE OF DALLAS
1ST PLACE – CORPORATE COLLABORATION

Dazed and dazzled by the Dior collection of haute couture at the DMA, Dorian experienced a liminal moment of decided, delirious spiritual bliss. In this state, he could hardly remember his own name or why he had come again (his sixteenth visit to the exhibit in 19 days—oh, why, why were they closed on Mondays?) Bumping into a young woman who stood with a sketchbook in front of a dazzling gingko-leaf printed draped masterpiece, his drawing diary disengaged from his arms, and a dozen sheaves of watercolor paper descended, bedecked with his latest inspirations. She gasped and bent to help him collect them, and their eyes and beings met. He had never connected this way with anyone; few had understood his drive to decipher and create art.

"What, what is your name?" he stammered, drawn to the decorous outline of gingko shapes on her sketchbook.

She looked at him through the longest (false) eyelashes he could remember seeing. She didn't look down at him disdainfully or up at him as a demigod, but directly at him as an equal.

"Dolores."

In his mind he finished her name with "del Rio," his favorite actress from the Golden Age of film.

"My name is . . ." he stammered, distraught.

"Dorian," she finished for him as she studied the signature on one of his sketches. "These are deft, daring, dramatic, and dynamic!"

"Dare I see yours," Dorian asked, "over dessert?"

"Indeed."

While their eyes surveyed the exhibition, they clutched hands instinctively and devoutly as they came upon a supremely delectable dress, then drifted to the café as if floating on clouds.

During dessert, they confessed their desire to spread to the world their love of fashion and Dior.

They dreamt up ways to demonstrate this goal:

"We could rent a dirigible and fly over Dallas, dropping Dior exhibition guides to the masses hungering for beauty."

"Yes! Much like the Italian Decadent poet Gabriele D'Annunzio—the lover of the Italian star Eleonora Duse—as he dropped pro-Italian leaflets over Vienna from an airplane."

What would the future hold for these two nascent stars of the dress, stars who might one day shine diamond-like in the firmament as Dior did now?

While Dolores sketched designs in her notebook, Dorian diligently contributed details to them, adding embellishments with markers and colored pens.

“A decisively productive rendezvous,” she murmured, batting her lashes demurely.

Returning to the exhibit, they swooned over the Dior gowns as if in the cathedral of Notre-Dame, taking in every detail before its spire, ablaze, collapsed and the dismayed public was asked to leave. Dorian remembered his first inclination to observe, design, and make women's fashions, at the age of 4. He had been eating lunch with Donelle, his best friend at kindergarten. Donelle took as little interest in her lunch as he had. Instead they took a few bites of their sandwiches and then began folding and tearing their paper napkins and brown paper bags, not trying for the intricacies of origami but rather fashioning their paper products into miniature garments of great sophistication.

Making clothes from real fabric would be next. At Donelle's house, the two went into her mother's closet, where a dizzying array of velvets, silks, chiffons, and other fabrics beckoned.

With scissors, they cut out only diminutive sections of the most alluring garments to design new clothes for her Barbie, a petite Fashionista model with brown skin, one of the new more anatomically natural permutations of Barbie. He himself was not allowed to have dolls, and his dire disdain at his growing collection of trucks, cars, guns, and action figures was defeating. Why was he not allowed a doll to dress?

When Donelle's mom discovered her debauched, defective clothes, she shrieked, cursed, moaned, and demanded he leave their home, failing to appreciate the dexterous, delicate new outfits they had designed. O, the Dantesque plight of being an artist! And that was not the only relationship that had deteriorated at the merest hint of aesthetic discomfort and discord. Would this duet too, end in disaster and destruction?

At 5 pm a dour but diplomatic guard dutifully informed them that the DMA was closing. How Dorian despised this inevitability, wishing that they could hide and sleep among the manikins.

“You'll come tomorrow?” he beseeched Dolores.

“Of course. I visit daily.”

He gazed at her intently. Was she his Muse? A long-lost twin? Design partner? Someone with whom he should declare love? An imaginary deity conjured by his deranged state?

Disrupted from his ruminations, Dorian was distressed to note that the last of the stragglers at the exhibit had departed. The restless art guards were circling ever closer. Dispirited, Dorian said good-bye to Dolores, promising to see her in the morning.

At home, Dolores nibbled on dried fruit, musing over her sketch book. As she flipped through her sketches that Dorian had augmented with technical details and phenomenal flourishes, she could vividly sense the production capabilities of a collection taking shape. Would Dorian entertain the idea of a collaborative design collection? She assembled their sketches and design specs into a folder, her heart racing with discernible, Dionysian delight.

In the morning, Dorian arrived dependably before the DMA opened, waiting by the fountain at the museum entrance. Fountains had always attracted and mesmerized him—watching the perpetual descent and ascent of contending water droplets reacquainted him with the hope embodied in starting over. Dolores approached with an elegant yet determined trot.

“Fifteen minutes before opening. Darn,” declared Dorian.

Dolores, flushed with determination, responded, “I organized our designs; Interested in seeing them?”

“Decidedly!” exclaimed Dorian. They sat on the exterior wall of the fountain. As Dolores displayed and described her concepts one by one, Dorian added a direct suggestion for each. Dolores discriminately captured notes in the margins of each design. Distracted, they were not aware that the museum had opened. Though dazed and dazzled by Dior, they now had something divine to devote themselves to: Their own dynamic design duo.

MARTIAN BIOME

DAVID DUNSWORTH, NILAA KADIRESAN, & ANNE PERRY
THE ART INSTITUTE OF DALLAS
2ND PLACE – CORPORATE COLLABORATION

“Could this really be what I think it is?” Adrian’s mind raced as he adjusted his glasses and scrutinized the recent images from the Mars Rover once more.

He had earnestly searched up and downloaded all publicly available date-stamped images of the orange outcrop and surroundings that had first seized his attention several hours earlier. His heart pounded as he clicked through the images, comparing the pictures over time. To the untrained eye, all of them would likely appear similar, but upon close examination, Adrian’s assessment was that the images revealed subtle changes in the terrain.

Adrian arranged the key images side-by-side in chronological order. The rock-like formation that resembled a population of sea sponges seemed to have subtly evolved over three years—maybe more. With meticulous haste, Adrian attempted to examine the extent of the changes and potential causes. Were the changes effected by forces of rock erosion by Martian dust storms and micro meteorites? Perhaps the cause was tectonic—dare he think organic?

He resolved to research all available information on the geography of the Martian terrain and its composition, beyond what he had already studied. It was already established that Martian soil does contain chemicals that we would call nutrients, and there was evidence of water under the surface. If Adrian could establish sufficient basis, or at least raise enough compelling questions about the changes he was observing, that would no doubt provide the impetus for further investigation, funding, and exploration. Perhaps an earthly colony on Mars was not too far away.

The trip to Mars hadn’t been nearly as hard as he had imagined. Still, he already missed some things about his life on earth, such as his wife and six-month old daughter. Their computer “visits” weren’t the same as being at home. And he would be in his new habitat for at least another year.

“Biomes are distinct biological communities that have formed in response to a shared physical climate,” he reminded himself. But what if the environment was constantly shifting, like the sudden striking evidence of climate change on the earth that made converts out of the scientifically skeptical, er, skeptics of science. Mind games, he reminded himself, with no one to talk to. Was he losing his ability to formulate precise phrases?

Adrian decided to launch a drone over the landscape to get a broader view of the area that seemed to be changing. Over the next several days what he recorded changed his total perception of not only the landscape, but of the planet itself. Yes, the terrain was moving, as though a sensual being were just below the surface seeking prey, or partner. He had long heard the fantasy stories of worms, or other beings on the planet, but this new view presented something entirely different, more emotive and humanistic in style and movement.

Was it his imagination, or was the movement he was witnessing seemingly more ancient than even the foundations of Mars itself? There was no audible presence, no atmosphere to carry a sound, but the movement simulated a great massing of features as if entities at war were about to rise up and destroy the planet, if not the entire universe.

Adrian reeled at the possibility of the entire planet erupting in uncontrolled violence against itself, or some unknown energy source from outside the universe using the planet as a weapon against Earth, or this galaxy to bring about complete destruction of everything, including time itself. Now there was a gravitational shaking, like an unknown geological force moving beneath the landing module, engulfing him and all the landing equipment, and carrying them in a downward spiral that sucked all matter and time into itself. And yet he still remained conscious, as if floating in a dream, unable to bring himself awake, or move, or breath. Was this Mars, the god of War suddenly revolting at the whole human race, space, and time, or just his imagination from drug and sleep deprivation presenting him this vision, or was the vision real, and he the simulation?

Where was Venus when he needed her? Suddenly he felt a longing for the comforts of home, for the feminine energy of his family, for art and earth and other humans. The Martian Biome seemed to animate in him an acute sense of affinity with all life on his home planet. He closed his eyes for a moment and had a vision of Venus tenderly holding their daughter in her arms, gazing up, smiling at him. He felt his grandfather's serene presence—the man who had been a constant source of inspiration in his youth and beyond. His grandfather was the epitome of foresight and encouragement, inspiring everyone he touched to go above and beyond.

As he sat bewildered by the surreal visions of the Martian Biome, he fought his natural human instincts and dutifully transmitted to Earth his prolific observations and recordings of the alien world. He could well imagine the reactions his colleagues back home would have. Would they believe all that he had to share with them?

Adrian remembered the old saying that his grandfather often used to quote, "Where there is no vision the people perish." He felt that he had been fortunate to get a glimpse, a vision of what was to come. It was vital to pass on this vision to his species before it was too late. He was determined to remain in full control of his faculties until he was safely back on Earth. He looked forward to the challenge of helping unleash the collective human genius to deal with this potential Martian menace.

He initiated the sequence to fire his ascent engines. Home was only seven months away.

SYNESTHETIC SONATA

NICK HILL, ANNE PERRY, MICHAEL SIMS & SHEENA SMITH
THE ART INSTITUTE OF DALLAS
3RD PLACE – CORPORATE COLLABORATION

Where had the time fled? As Natalya looked at her young grandson playing so peacefully in the sandbox, she remembered the day she fled from the old country during a time with limited woman's rights and violence within her home and the homes of everyone she knew, with no money, no clothes, no plans for the future, except to find a happy life in America at a time of change. Full of optimism, hope, creativity, beauty, and big dreams, she had begun her new life in Dallas, Texas, so long ago.

Natalya had a special gift; when she heard music she saw colors, and as the colors flowed in her mind, they would guide her into beautiful dances. Not quite sure of how to use this gift, she began to seek guidance without success. Over time Natalya began to give up on her gifts and decided to take focus on her new life in America.

She finally had peace, not having to look over her shoulders in fear of violence, not having to go hungry when food or money wasn't available and living with the limitations women in her country had. She had amazement for all of the different types of people, the outlets for creativity, the technology, styles of hair and clothes—she even took in all of the different genres of music and how they all made her feel. America in the 70's was the perfect time for Natalya to begin her new life.

When Natalya had fully blocked out her gift and was into a routine of going to work, then home, with occasional moments of fun, she realized that her gifts wouldn't allow her to give up the realm of special sensory perception, and it began to guide her late one night. She awoke from her sleep to a room full of colors and music. The colors were bright, vivid, and swift, with shades of green, orange, yellow, and gold, which set a relaxing tone.

At first it startled her: then, even though she felt as though it was all a dream, she began to dance to the music while following the movement of the colors. As they surrounded her, she felt happy, fulfilled and alive again. The colors began to paint the walls with images of her life and where her gifts would take her as she continued to dance. There was an image of paintings behind her while Natalya danced on a large stage. Another painting showed her in different parts of the world with different colors around her. She also saw an image of a man and children surrounding her. The last image was Natalya watching a child in a sandbox with a newspaper dated 2019—a foreshadowing.

Once Natalya realized this wasn't a dream, she began to feel overwhelmed and wondered what just happened, what did it all mean, what should she do next, and were the images painted in her room images of what her future really held?

As time went on and she tried to make sense of this amazing yet confusing night, her gifts continued to guide her when times were rough. She would see vivid images made out of the colors and music as she danced through her vision to create them. These images would guide her on what she should do next.

One day Natalya began an earnest study of the phenomenon of synesthesia when she discovered through an art history class that Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian inventor of abstract

art and teacher at the Bauhaus school of art, had experienced related sensations when he heard the overture to Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*.

She soon learned that people who experienced this overlapping of senses could do remarkable things. One man, for example, was able to remember over thirty thousand decimal places of the irrational number pi. She had given up after 3.14. Now the irrational number pi—a number that never stopped—would function as a personal badge of limitless potential. Like Kandinsky, she too would pursue a career in the arts, but now she would add to her list of muses the American dancer Loie Fuller, who had been a pioneer in modern dance using flowing costumes that were illuminated with colorful theatrical lighting.

As Natalya walked toward her apartment on a muggy afternoon, her gaze fell upon a small white flower in the thin grass near her wooden door. As she looked at it, more flowers sprang from the ground, grew larger and next, the flowers changed colors so that they looked like a bouquet of multi-colored flowers. Natalya stood transfixed as the colors changed and waved through the small stand flowers.

From the corner of her eye, she then saw a large black car roll up on the street next to her, and slowly squeak to halt. Two large men emerged from either side of the car, smiling unconvincingly and wearing dark suits and mirrored glasses. They stood on the sidewalk in front of the car as a young woman drove up on a motorcycle, with blonde hair pulled back and wearing an ankle length dark dress. She looked intently at Natalya and said, in a stage whisper, with an East European accent, "Colors?"

Natalya stared at the blonde woman in confusion but felt familiarity. The color of her black dress, speedily, changed to a sleek base of ivory as she unmounted herself from the motorcycle. Natalya stepped back nervously as the other woman lifted the seat and reached into it. The blond pulled out . . . a Heineken.

As they drank the sun away, Natalya suddenly understood herself. Since that time, many approached her for assistance, advice, collaboration on multi-media creations, and more. She was interviewed by local, national, and international news agencies.

Her gift, once something that confused and troubled her, had become a means of fulfillment and success in America.

At the sandbox, 2019, her grandson smiled up at her. He, too, had the gift. She would help him nurture it.



Business Council for the Arts (BCA) was established in 1988 by Raymond Nasher and other civic leaders in North Texas. Our purpose is to encourage, connect, and stimulate businesses to support the arts in the workplace, in education, and in the community.

The arts increase our quality of life and economic vibrancy. The arts bring us together and help us to meet 21st century social challenges. With more than 200 individuals moving to North Texas each day, we know that the arts make our quality of life desirable and strengthen our economy. Recently, through a study conducted by BCA in partnership with Americans for the Arts, the economic impact of nonprofit arts and cultural organizations was measured at \$1.5 billion annually, putting us among the top culturally vibrant regions in the nation. Here is how businesses can align with the arts through five key assets that BCA has identified:

Asset 1: We connect you to regional cultural resources that improve employee engagement. Today's business teams deserve a workplace that is invigorating and caters to the whole person. Individuals who have recently relocated may be looking for connectivity in their new homes, both for themselves and their families. Through BCA, businesses can share opportunities across all arts media, ages and demographics. We can even bring the arts to you, connecting hierarchies and departments through vibrant on-site cultural programs.

Asset 2: We bring fresh ideas to diversity and inclusion initiatives. Nationally, Texas ranks second in the diversity of its population. Utilize this opportunity to host artists and arts organizations in your own place of business. You can also showcase the diversity and talent of your own team in BCA's inclusive, trademarked art and literary program, *On My Own Time*, that bridges departments, hierarchies, ethnicity, gender, and age.

Asset 3: We partner with you on innovative solutions to community needs. Arts and culture are integrating closely with wellness, healthcare, education, homelessness, urban design and other 21st century challenges. When considering your business values and corporate social responsibility, contact us for information about arts and cultural organizations that can become your partners in innovation. Contact BCA for invitations to our Arts & Healthcare, Arts & Technology, and other Arts & Industry events.

Asset 4: We train your leaders and match their skills to regional needs. Nonprofit arts and culture organizations have an ongoing need for diverse business professionals who will bring new skills and viewpoints to their boards of directors. Our Leadership Arts Institute has more than 30 years of experience in board training and placement. Retain your best talent by giving them the opportunity to make a difference.

Asset 5: We publicly recognize your good deeds to inspire others. Many businesses in North Texas have made the commitment to support arts and culture for their myriad benefits. If you are among them, join us in advocacy and allow us to tell the stories of your good deeds and their impact. Whether through social media or high-profile recognition at our annual Obelisk Awards event, your recognition can inspire others and bring company pride to your team.

Join Business Council for the Arts and its supporting companies by reaching us at
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