
THE EXHIBITIONIST

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THE EXHIBITIONIST is a monthly online magazine dedicated to the cause of creativity.

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COVER PHOTO *Angry Bird* Khadija Ejaz

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FROM THE EDITOR

This is a small story about a man who had taken a 2-day photography class with me in Muscat, Oman. He was stocky, dark, in his mid 30s, a quiet generic kind of person that doesn't speak much and whom people often forget is present. I don't remember his name. I don't even remember his face. He was a nameless South Indian man who worked in a nameless office someplace where dreams go to die. I only remember this quiet, dark, little man hiding at the back of the room for the 30-seconds he took to speak when his turn came to tell everyone why he had chosen to take the class: he had grown up in India and had always had an interest in photography, but it was an expensive hobby, and his father had never had any money. He said this as if he felt ashamed, and he then hunched back into his seat with a smile that was really a humiliated tear. Old humiliation. He looked like he felt stupid, as if he didn't belong there with the rest of us. But he did, because he had shown up despite the humiliation.



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Khadija Ejaz

GUEST EDITORIAL

In books that tell your story, in music
setting your beat, in films that are your
experience.

In pictures your moments, in paintings
defining your essence,
in the life that you sense.



In the touch of rays of the setting sun, in fragrance of the melody of
the wind chime,
in taste of flesh sublime. In how you perceive time.

In how you build a wall to shield you, from paralyzing despair.
In how you take it apart, brick by brick, as you become aware.

In how you prostitute your talents, in society to rise and shine.
But is it your inner voice that you undermine?

In the text or the cloth or the statue or the symbol, to worship who
do you choose?
But in differentiating between beings all embodiments of one god,
isn't humanity that which you lose?

In those you choose to hang-out with, with them most you share.
Wandering their own paths, intersecting once again, the friends for
whom you care.

In devastating doubt that overwhelms, trapped in your body's cage.
In fantasies of butterflies in your stomach, as you take center stage.

In how you play your limitations, in your chosen sport.
Dodging big guns, striking the underdog's lethal retort.

In how you save your neck, each waking hour on a revolving chair as
you try,
to find what binds millions of lines of software code, to the stars in
the night sky.

In pills that you pop, race-courses you sniff, in beauties you sip,
numbness you inject, in the plants that you smoke...
Chill-out darling, it's all just a joke!

In picking what you learn from your parents, bridging the infinite in-
between.
In how you study school, sailing seasons of the your teen.
In how you protect your sister, in how you raise your child, in how
you build your home,
in how you decode the information, in your ancestral genome.

In the beauty of past life you feel, in the ancient ruins' plight.
In how you figure out how souls unite.

In how you decipher what a man means to a woman, and a woman
to a man.

In how you determine the positions in which, side by side, together
they stand.

In what you speak, in words you choose to miss.

In how you kiss.

Stay creative, and you might see,
maybe it's the most fun way to be.

Abhineet Gogne is a filmmaker from Mumbai, India. He has made several short films which have been showcased at various national and international film festivals. He wrote, directed, edited, drew, and animated his first Hindi feature film, 'Love' (starring Prashant Narayanan, Shilpa Shukla, Rajesh Vivek, and Chitrashi Rawat), which will be releasing in theaters in a few months.

XZBTs

Some Salt in Your Punch

Shibani Bedi

Hey there little lady,

Hope this letter finds you well. Not that I don't know what you are going through. You just came back from a debate in Lucknow and, though you didn't win a prize, what ails you has little to do with losing out on that trophy. You fell for a really cute guy who dissed you while you tried to get to know him better, right? And though you harbour hopes of meeting him at some point in life (you won't), because his disposition and demeanour seemed similar to yours, you are sad because you are nursing a broken heart. Please don't fight with dad over it. Talking to mom has never seemed like a good idea (she never seems to get where you are coming from) so at least one of them will be spared your wrath. But try not wallowing. This dismissal is making you feel petty right now but is one of the first jolts that will steer your interest in things beyond gossip, clothes, nail paint, and pining over men. You will see. In case you feel like closure, you can blame your obesity and frumpiness for his rejection (men are quintessentially shallow) but don't dwell in your state of misery for more than three weeks. Okay four. Try joining a gym or something. Or go for long walks. Long, lonely, silent walks to nowhere are therapeutic for someone with a mind like yours. I know you have this desperate urge to get out, to explore the city, to be on your own but

you don't know how as all the great places to hang in Delhi are miles away from where you stay. And given that you are only 16 years old sans a spare car, driver, money, friends, or the confidence to travel alone, you will spend many a night wanting to kill someone. Just relax. Give yourself one more year and things will improve. And once you start college, you will crave time at home. No, you won't move to another city. Not till you are 21.

I suggest you start taking Chemistry seriously else it will sabotage your board exam result. I am aware that those sporadic anxiety attacks and breakdowns have been more than regular lately. And I am aware that you have been failing most subjects every semester. I know you hate being in class (you can't imagine your day without bunking two lectures) and you dislike all your classmates. Even the ones you call friends. Don't fret over it. Sometimes life doesn't leave you much choice, and your life especially will put you through a lot of awkward situations amid strange people expecting you to make polite conversation. But trust me, that is where the fun lies. You will come to appreciate it in some time. The more uncomfortable one feels in the company of outrageously unfamiliar people and situations, the clearer one's idea about life and existence becomes. Both in a good and a bad way. And boy, will you have questions! Having the patience to talk, listen, and learn from everyone and everything will make you wholesome. And I say this out of experience. Plus, I am not in the habit of sugar-coating. Not anymore.

You'd expect your 26-year-old self to dish out details about the future, but I am sorry, I won't do that. I am loath to say this but I

want you to make some of those mistakes that you will be making because were you to not, you wouldn't turn out half as strong, consistent, or clear about a few things in life as you will be in the future. The only assurance I will give you at this point is that the future is better. Yes, you will spend nights crying yourself to sleep — defeated, disillusioned, lost, and guilty if not broken-hearted. No, there won't be immediate anodynes. You will be right but you will go wrong or be wronged. And no, life will not be fair to you, especially when it comes to relationships and shoes (not till you are 26 at least). You will lose some weight but you will have to work hard for it. You will forgive your mother. Dad will disappoint you but you will figure that he isn't super human and is allowed vulnerability. You will be grateful for having a brother like Polly (surprise, surprise!!). You hate daylight and human contact at this point but that will change. Happiness will be fugacious but you will learn to make the most of it. You will, occasionally, warm up to optimism (unbelievable, right!). Your aggression will recede (thank god). You will shout less, hate less, hide less, cry less, self-destruct less, and on good days you will laugh unabashedly. Memories will always haunt you, and you will resent your sensitivity and sentimentalism, but you will learn how to deal with it.

I hope I haven't got you spooked or anything. The point of this mail (as creepy as it may look, coming from the future and all) is not to get you all frantic, or worse, disappointed. Things will be way more interesting than you can imagine. And fun. But honestly, that is hardly the point of this exercise. I wanted to use this surreal opportunity to give you a few pointers that will be of some assistance

to you whenever you are in the pits so that your future (in a parallel universe, of course) is better.

1. Don't run away from difficulty. Deal with it. Sometimes, opportunities come laced with hardships. Don't fear change.
2. Don't give up on your dreams no matter how homesick or back-beaten you feel. Focus on the big picture always. Don't wait for second chances. Don't put your aspirations on hold to pursue when you are in the right 'frame of mind', for that, dear child, is hogwash.
3. Words will always fail you. You are not as articulate or outgoing as you think. You put up a good façade of being an extrovert but that is mostly a red herring for all the things that you are not equipped to share or discuss with others. In short, you are an introvert who is great at playing an extrovert. You have and will always have issues communicating ideas, thoughts and feelings. Work on that else you will end up losing some great people, friends, and opportunities.
4. Don't fear making yourself heard or, seen and don't fear having an opinion, even if it isn't the most prolific or interesting.
5. Don't get into the habit of being modest.
6. Don't get intimidated by the erudite. You are not stupid. You let people speak more than they hear you, making you feel inferior. In case it dawns on you that you are less informed, accept it and work on it. Don't hide or get all defensive.
7. Stop wasting time falling in and out of love at first glance, for Pete's sake! Most of this one-sided love business is futile anyway. Invest the time you spend wallowing in a good book or a movie. Please!

8. Quit looking for scapegoats. And stop seeking answers. Gospels will find you but you'd have to walk the distance.
9. Don't waste time holding on to things which have no meaning for you. You will know what I mean when you get there.
10. Never stop singing. And don't give up on your guitar. In case you pick up smoking at some point in college, try getting rid of the habit at the earliest. You don't want to lose your voice to it. Trust me, it is worse than losing one's vocal adrenaline to heartbreak.
11. Do not give up on theatre. Like, never. Let the patrons of safe choices stick their heads in their butts, but you please don't fall for safe advice. You don't want to go through life with that kind of suffering.
12. Read more. Talk to people who are in the habit or the profession of reading to help you choose what to read.
13. Spend more time with your family and friends from college. They will always have your back, no matter what you do or where you are.
14. It is okay to experiment. College is the best time to indulge but don't get carried away. You wouldn't want to wake up with a hangover and a lump of guilt riding your back.
15. Take it easy. Nothing is sacrosanct, and nothing is sacrilegious. Do what works best for you.
16. Just be. No one is perfect. Not even those who look or sound like they have it all figured out.
17. Don't sit on your plans. Chances are that you will sit on them forever. Don't be lazy.
18. Try not hating yourself so much, and stop waiting for good things to happen.

19. Have as much fun as you can. Chasing thrill at the cost of security is not a crime. The stakes, of course, are high when you cross
26. So make the most of your time now, and don't get dissuaded by failure.
20. Being lonely is terrifying, but don't stop working on yourself and rediscovering life just because you don't have someone to share it with. Company is overrated.
21. Stop looking for saviours.
22. Lastly, when in doubt (like, whenever) go over this letter again.

I love you, now more than ever.

Shibani

Shibani Bedi is a Delhi-based daydreamer and borderline cynic who, having dabbled in journalism since the last four years, has discovered she has a knack for assimilating, hoarding, and sharing wisdom and information in the form of talking, listening, reading, and recommending books, music, movies, and life experiences. A closet rebel and wannabe wayfarer, Shibani credits her instinctive restlessness as her sole motivator which pushes her to try new things and chase creative stimulus, even if it leaves her panting for air.



Man, Woman, and Child

Fiona Poojara





Fiona Poojara is a television producer at Times Now in Mumbai, India, where she also does voice-overs for shows and promos. She trained in broadcast journalism at New Delhi Television and also has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics. She enjoys photography, music, traveling, good food, and meeting new people.



Musing

Lance Hawvermale

Elegance as a word means missing you
only as much as umbrellas mean rain.
I cannot invite you in nor sprinkle
the clouds to make you please divest yourself
from the sky; I can only brace myself
for your appearance, unwisely trusting
your myth and turning your apocrypha
into law, as Mayans did with the moon.

Lance published his first two novels under the pseudonym of Erin O'Rourke. He released his third novel, a murder mystery titled *The Tongue Merchant*, under his own name - and he hasn't looked back since. His writing has won over 20 awards. His novel *Fugitive Shoes* was named to the University of Oklahoma's "Books That Inspire" exhibit. Currently an Assistant Professor of English at Ranger College in Texas, Lance teaches film, poetry, and creative writing courses.

Visit his website at <http://www.lancehawvermale.com>.



Ahmedabad Rears Its Head Again

Sonal Mehta

I am contemplating a trip in a few days to Ahmedabad, home of my alma mater, to get my clearance from the office, and to hopefully bid a final goodbye to the place that has been home to me for all these years. Hence I caught myself reminiscing on the first couple of years I spent there, and to my surprise I had quite a fair share of fond memories to go with the ones of utter despair.

12 summers ago, I packed up bag and baggage and left for a completely foreign land. I had just got admission into a prestigious med school in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (I didn't think it was prestigious when I left - I was still depressed at not having gotten into a Delhi med school, but it was drummed into me over the subsequent 6 years. I still have trouble accepting the fact).

Nothing could have prepared me for the culture shock that lay ahead. For the first 6 months or so, I was in a perpetual daze. The place, the people, the place, the people, the people, oh, the people...everything drove me nuts (or in my rare lucid moments made me believe that everyone else was nuts).

The first month or two were spent getting myself ragged like anything, although in retrospect I seem to have enjoyed it. There were some really weird seniors in hostel with strange ideas of what constitutes fun. One guy woke me up at 3am and interrogated me till 5am about Delhi and its surrounding areas. "How many districts

come under NCR?"', and shit like this. When I forgot to mention the place he was from (Faridabad), he went ballistic and reportedly gave me hell. I was too sleepy to notice, but some of my friends told me the next day.

And it wasn't just the people who were already there. There were so many freaks in my batch too. I began to suspect there was a conspiracy to pick out all the weirdos and send them to that college, but the theory instantly collapsed 'cos it was based on the assumption that I was a freak as well. (A large majority of people have been known to be strongly in favor of this hypothesis, but I refuse to accept it.)

One of my classmates used to love pretending that he was some sort of politician-cum-freedom fighter. He used to give us long speeches on how we should stand up for our rights and not let ourselves be ragged, and how he could arrange a *tamancha* (pistol) for the 'cause'. Another one spent roughly 80% of the time at home, and how he managed to get through with attendance like that is a mystery to all (It has been alleged that he went and told a professor that he had cancer and wanted to spend as many of his last days as possible with his family. How a prof at a med school would fall for that is totally beyond me. It has also been alleged that he is married and has a daughter and that's the reason for his frequent and long visits to his hometown). Then there was the chap who virtually lived for porn. (He is reported to have watched 7 back-to-back porno movies in a single night to celebrate new years' - need I say more?)

The faculty of the college seemed to have its share of quirks too. One day the Head of Anatomy called me as I was leaving for lunch and asked me to lock him in his room and to unlock him at the end of the break. That was the longest lunch break I ever had, and I had to keep reminding myself every minute, 'cos if I had forgotten to unlock him, I'd have to wait for him to retire before I could pass Anatomy.

The language and food were things it took me years to come to terms with. The food sucked quite badly. I can never forget the time I went to the mess after playing an hour of soccer, dreaming of a lavish spread, and our cook (a lady affectionately called *mausi* by everyone else - there was no fondness from my side, our relations were at best strained) presented me with a platter of *lauki ki sabzi*. I could feel the bile rise in my stomach. I controlled my reverse peristalsis and asked her what there was for dessert, and I was offered a bowl full of some green gunk that I thought I'd seen on the soccer pitch few minutes back - *lauki ka halwa*. I pretty much ran what I believe is known as the 'gamut of emotions' at that moment. I felt disgust when I saw that thing, awe and amazement at the lengths that life went to in order to piss me off, joy when I realised I was right all along - the world *was* crazy, and dismay when I realised that there was no way on earth that I could possibly eat whatever that was, and would have to go out and hunt for food.

The first few months in any new place are trying, I'm sure, but I was tested to the hilt in Ahmedabad. The things that got me through those dark evenings when I was staring at the prospect of having *tinda* or *lauki ke kofte* were some good music, some good reading, my

friends who to some extent agreed with me (those evenings were sometimes like war, when we would just sit together for 15 minutes before going to the mess and brace ourselves for the ordeal), and the promise to myself of an ice cream after the “meal”.

I had my share of fun in college, although much different from the way I had pictured college before joining (someone should sue Bollywood for their depictions of these temples of learning), but I am not looking forward to going back to the scene of the crime(s). Least of all in the heat of June. And I can already feel my gastric mucosa jumping around and looking for a place to hide at the very prospect.

Sonal Mehta is originally from Delhi and has also lived in Ahmedabad for five years where he went to medical college. He came to the US for residency training and since then has lived in multiple cities. He tries to write about life, the universe and everything, when he gets some free time from his day (very often day *and* night) job as a vascular neurologist.





XZBT