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# 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 *Throne* Khadija Ejaz

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## FROM THE EDITOR

Sometimes I forget why we need art.

Sometimes I wonder, what's the point? It doesn't pay very much, it's hellish to make a

name for yourself, and it doesn't even seem

like art is necessary. So many of us live

without it, and we seem to fare just fine. Why

bother being artistic, why bother expressing

ourselves? What's the point of plays and music

and stories and photographs? Who cares? The world needs doctors

and engineers and CEOs – nobody could ever miss an artist. If all the

artists in the world disappeared, no one would ever even notice that

they were gone.

Would they?

I had been feeling this way for a while, probably because life got

hectic, and I wasn't able to read or listen to music or discuss my

thoughts with anyone as much as I usually need to. I started feeling

hard and worldly, practical, matter-of-fact. Then I went to see 'Les

Miserables' in the theater, and it was as if somebody had gripped me

by the throat. I wasn't able to take my eyes off of the human stories

that were being recreated in front of me. They were stories that I had

lived in some form or the other, feelings that I had felt and

sometimes not been able to communicate to others enough to make

them understand, just because some feelings are too overwhelming to



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convey. What a terrible thing to experience. Like being in a dream where you're screaming but no sound comes out of your mouth. I think you know that dream.

But at the theater, even though the stories I was watching were someone else's, I understood mine better because of them. It made me feel beautiful in my mortal smallness. It made me feel like I would live on, that it was okay, that the road of life rolls on. Art helps me understand myself and give me closure. In the violent world inside each and every one of us, what a relief closure can be. Thank goodness for the salve of art.

“If all the world were paper,  
And all the seas were ink,  
If all the trees were bread and cheese,  
What would we do for a drink?”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khadija Ejaz', with a horizontal line underneath.

Khadija Ejaz

## GUEST EDITORIAL

Through more than twenty years as an editor, I've often marveled at the writing process. I admire writers who can pull ideas together and relate them appropriately. I don't write very often myself; usually I help others hone their work: to write what they want to write, to say what they want to say, and to cover all the angles they want to cover. Sometimes I even help them get started. Today, faced with a blank page myself, I thought about what helps me write.



Usually, I try to start with relevant information—facts that might appeal to the reader. For example, before writing this, I looked up “famous writers who procrastinate.” I thought I would start with an example of a writer we might all know, and then work my way to myself. You know, Bring the Audience In.

Of course, I knew I was fooling myself into writing more about someone else before I got to the personal parts, which for me are more difficult to write about than pulling facts together. I also knew that by doing “research,” I was procrastinating. Or was I? In the article of distraction, I found this interesting conclusion: Many writers suffer from writer's block and procrastination because they strive for perfection.

I started laughing at myself. After all, if a piece of writing isn't perfect, won't an editor help improve it? I've often said, "Even editors need editors when they write."

Once I started laughing, I started writing.

For me, relaxation is the key to starting a project. I can't be worried about household chores or bills, or how frighteningly revealing the piece might be. And I certainly can't be worried about whether the piece will be perfect. I have to relax by laughing—even if it's at my own expense.

Sue Wilkins began her editing career at Dell/Delacorte Books for Young Readers in 1989, where her coworkers always seemed to have time for a laugh (we miss you, Craig Virden). Since then she has worked in both fiction and nonfiction for readers Pre-K through high school. She is now a publishing consultant who works from her home in Newark, Delaware.

# XZBTs

**Shanti<sup>1</sup>**

*Srijan Narayan*

She knew why it had happened, she knew why she had committed suicide, and she could understand why the post-mortem report had said that there had been an unborn foetus.

But even though everyone at the *tola*<sup>2</sup> was raging, she could not fully understand why. After all, she was only 15.

She had known Mala<sup>3</sup> when they had been children. Mala had been a year or two older than her and had lived next door. They had played together, and she had learnt all her household duties by watching Mala - her mother had never had to worry about that. And Shanti, in her childish pride, was always proud of having learned about menstruation before reaching puberty.

The *tola* knew the two as a company. And now the curious neighbors and her mother wanted to know whom Mala had been sleeping with, and Shanti did not know how to answer. She was scared and grieved and did not know what to say.

She couldn't say a thing. She was numb – with fear, terror, and her loss. What had happened was something she so easily could have narrated, but would they believe her? Would they not condemn her?



How could she speak out, get the burden off of her soul, without being castigated? Without being hurt?

She had just lost Mala, the one she had known as her only friend. They had always known each other's secrets, and they both had been afraid then, but now she was gone. Forever. She was alone. What could she do now, how could she speak out? Whom could she turn to?

She heard her father screaming at her mother outside and knew that anytime soon he would unleash his terror at home, on her mother and on her. God only knew what all he would do...

"Your daughter has brought this misery home, she is a curse, and you are the culprit. You brought her into this world, you bitch, why did you give birth to this wicked girl? Eh? What do I say now to them, tell me!" he yelled.

Her mother merely said, "Shanti is not telling me anything. She is crying herself, I don't know..."

She then heard a loud noise and a thump...and then her mother's cries. She knew that her mother was being beaten up. She wanted to tell her father, but she didn't have the courage. She didn't have the courage to say a word.

But her father had already entered their only room in which she was crying inconsolably. Her father picked her up from the ground where

she was sitting, picked her up in the air, and dropped her. With a thud she fell to the ground. She did not know how to react. Then her father picked up a kerosene bottle, poured it over her, and said “tell me the truth or I will burn you alive.”

Upon hearing this, her mother came into the room, jumped over the girl, and said to her father, “if she has to die, kill us both, what you are doing! That girl did not die because of you, but by killing us, no one - not the culprit - but you will go to jail. Spare us. We haven't done anything. WE have not brought any disrepute to anyone. Our family's name is intact. Tell him, Shanti, have you brought any disrepute to the family's name? Tell him now, or I will ask your father to burn you alive now!”

To which Shanti simply nodded – no.

She was terrified; she had never felt this frightened before. Her own father was willing to kill her, and her mother supported him. She hadn't even been this afraid when that thing had happened to her.

*<sup>1</sup>Shanti literally means 'peace'. It is also a common Hindu name for girls in India.*

*<sup>2</sup>Tola means a hamlet; here it means a hamlet of the most downtrodden, hitherto untouchable castes. Although long illegal, untouchability is still practiced, and it is uncommon for upper caste Indians (both Hindus and Muslims) to visit these areas.*

*<sup>3</sup>Mala literally means 'garland'. It is also a common Hindu name for girls in India.*

A broadcast journalist with 8 years of experience, Srijan Narayan loves reading, writing, cooking, walking, talking, adventure, films and being lazy, in a random order.



## These Romans Are Crazy

*Sonal Mehta*

The last few days have been a bit of a drag as I don't have a lot to do but study for my next exam (yes, there's a Step 3 as well!). During breaks from the incredibly torrid questions in USMLE world, I generally turn on the TV and always end up realizing that American TV channels are very similar to Indian channels in one respect - there's usually nothing worth watching on them. A few days back, I was going through my usual routine of sipping my coffee and changing channels mindlessly, when I caught sight of choppers with green hills in the background accompanied by very familiar strains of music. It was a rerun of a TV show I used to love as a kid, and it brought back memories of the people at the 4077th MASH. From the C.O. Col Potter to the adorable company clerk 'Radar', 'Hotlips' Hoolahan to the softspoken Father Mulcahy, the unfortunately sane Max Klinger to the almost crazy team of surgeons.

M\*A\*S\*H was one of the few shows that actually at times was so entertaining that it stopped me from going to play soccer (that is possibly the biggest compliment a TV show can get out of me). What I realize now is that it wasn't just entertaining, it was also inspiring. I can't really be sure about this, but I think it played a part in my choosing medicine as a career, not to mention my wanting to join the armed forces as a doctor (most of my friends from school might remember my near brush with the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC)). I remember an episode where they're all sitting around singing a song about their own roles at the MASH, and the doctors

sang, "Doctors in the army, they think they're mighty bright, they work on patients through the day and nurses through the night." (Can you blame me for wanting to join AFMC??)

My idol was and continues to be 'Hawkeye' Pierce. An excellent doctor, a real stand-up guy, a good son, and of course, a complete wise-ass, I realize that that's all I want to be. (He was also somewhat of a ladies' man, but we all know I gave up on that a long time back. It's always good to be realistic!)

Coming back to American TV shows, the first few times that I watched TV here, I was quite concerned to say the least. The fact that the first few shows I caught were Jerry Springer and Maury should explain my concern. Jerry Springer is one crazy show where people bring all their dirty linen, wash it, wring it, and leave it out to dry. They argue, debate, and fight about their personal matters. On national TV. Very dysfunctional, if you ask me. On Maury, there were couples who had children with parental disputes, and the results of their paternity tests were read out. On national TV. Incredibly insane, in my opinion. Then I happened to watch one of those mad-ass "judge" shows. Another opportunity for the average American to do his weekly laundry - on TV - and try to get some compensation for it as well.

By now I've learnt not to wander away from the known and safe territory of sitcoms as these crazy things on TV were skewing my opinion on how dysfunctional American society actually is. (Before this I thought The Simpsons were the yardstick for the same, and I

don't mean Ashlee and Jessica - although I'm sure they wouldn't be too far behind. In the same token, I would certainly not want people to judge Indian society by the mind-bogglingly sappy drivel doled out by Ekkkkta Kapoor and the rest of her K-tribe.)

I feel a lot like Asterix when he taps his head and says, "These Romans are crazy".

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.



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