
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 *Who Goes There.* Khadija Ejaz

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FROM THE EDITOR

I met a girl in a secret town recently. She was tall but not too tall and had short hair the colour of some brands of chocolate milk. Her skin was white, but the baby girl she had brought with her had skin the colour of peach snow. I met them in a small town high up in the green mountains of the American state of Virginia. In another time this town could've been an Indian hill station. India's old British masters used to spend their Indian summers in these high altitude hideaways. This small Virginian town was lush, leafy, and wholesome. It was hidden somewhere between rolls of green Appalachian mountains. It was a town where people knew their friends' dogs and where hotel receptionists called people 'my love'.



The girl with the chocolate hair and the snow daughter was telling me how she felt about my XZBT editorials. A friend had forwarded the link to the magazine to her. The chocolate-haired girl particularly liked the editorial where I talked about writing to the pace of my exercise routine and the one where I talked about how running my own magazine felt like being an interviewer. I invited her to send me some of her work (she had a degree in English), and she blushed and felt flustered – she said that she wasn't sure if her work would be good enough, but she promised to send me something.

I wonder if I will ever hear back from that girl in that secret mountain town. I wonder how many people like her are there in hidden towns all over the world, in shanties by the sea and small houses in the desert. People with chocolate hair and charcoal curls and mustard waves and salsa ringlets. I wonder what their names are.

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

Khadija Ejaz

GUEST EDITORIAL

A decade ago, I reached a creative crossroads. I had written novels for years, four published as young adult e-books. Yet something was missing - joy in writing.



I prayed for a sign to the right path. That message arrived with a tragedy - the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster and the death of seven astronauts. I couldn't free my mind from images of contrails scarring the sky.

One morning I free associated before starting a novel chapter. The astronauts' deaths crowded my thoughts. I paused and wrote my first poem, "*Contrails.*" The editor of an e-zine published the poem and wanted more.

Blood & Thunder, the literary journal of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, published another poem, "*Visiting the Alzheimer's Patient,*" written from my experience as a hospice volunteer.

God had guided me in a new direction. I have been published in ten literary journals, given poetry readings and workshops and selected as a nominee for Poet Laureate of Oklahoma.

Along the way, I learned three writing techniques essential in both fiction and poetry:

Write from the Heart

Choose subject matter that stirs your passions. Fictional characters will come alive, and readers will care about them. In poetry, metaphors and similes will have emotional impact.

Revise, Revise, Revise

In writing, less is more. When you've finished final edits, take another crucial step. Read every word aloud, including novel chapters. Your voice will trip over extra words and awkward construction. Cut them. Use active verbs. Read aloud again until your voice rolls like a ball bearing over silk.

Know Your Target

Read books and journals by the targeted publishers. Shape your writing to their needs.

Robert Ferrier is the author of four published novels available at SynergEbooks.com, Amazon.com and other E-Book publishers. His poetry has appeared in *Oklahoma Today*, *Möbius*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Broomweed Journal*, *Crosstimbers*, *Westview* and *Metro Library Magazine*. His books, *Rhythms* and *Ambient Light*, each won the Oklahoma Writer's Federation Inc. award for Best Published Book of Poetry. He was a 2007 nominee for Poet Laureate of Oklahoma in the US.

XZBTs

The Party Dress

Travis Arnold

“That dress looks amazing, Sarah!”

“Does it? I got it for something else, but I never wore it. I think the party would be a good place to debut it, don’t you?”

“I may steal it.”

“Don’t you dare!”

The dress wasn’t so perfect anymore. A rough pull from the absolute dreamiest guy named Trey had torn it – funnily enough, he wasn’t so dreamy when he was angry. Sarah couldn’t understand why. She couldn’t understand much of anything, really. It was like her brain had been removed and replaced with thousands of puffy cottonballs. That thought made her giggle.

“Are those the shoes you’re going to wear with it?”

“Yeah, why?”

“You shouldn’t wear heels. They’re too hard to dance in, and you might lose them if you take them off.”

Joyce was right. Sarah kicked her heels off and brought out the nice boat shoes she got on sale last week.

“What about these?”

“I like the leather, and they’ll be comfortable, but I don’t know if they go with the dress. Do you have anything in blue?”

“Yeah! I’ve got some nice loafers that my sister gave me. They’ll be perfect.”

The shoes were undamaged, at least. Well, Sarah thought they were. One was somewhere in the party – she had lost while trying to get off the dance floor before she fell over. The other had been one of the first things Trey pulled off when he started to remove her clothes, before he got angry.

“I think I’ll go strapless.”

“Just leave off the bra entirely. You’ve got the boobs to pull it off.”

“No way, everyone will think I’m slutty.”

“No one will care – besides, most of them already think you’re slutty, after Joseph.”

“Oh, I hate you so much.”

“I know” Joyce said, grinning.

Sarah’s first “boyfriend” had spread lies about what he claimed happened between them during the fall of her tenth grade year.

“We didn’t even do anything.” She muttered.

“I know.”

Joyce had bloodied his nose with a solid punch the week after the rumors started spreading. It earned her a citation and three months in a school-suspension program.

Now, Sarah wondered where her friend had gone. In fact, she wondered where the rest of the party had gone – and when, exactly, she went into this dark room.

“Trey, let’s go back to the party...”

She couldn’t seem to talk above a whisper anymore, and it was hard to keep her eyes open. Sarah couldn’t tell if Trey didn’t hear her, or if he ignored her; he just kept pulling off clothes. The banging on the door didn’t even draw his attention.

“You can’t wear those; they’ll have a line around your ass.”

“I wasn’t going to, weirdo. I’ve got some boyshorts that won’t show through.”

“You should wear a thong, they don’t show at all.”

“I don’t even own a thong. You know that.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot you were such a prude.”

Sarah shot her friend a nasty look, and quickly switched her frilly panties for the far more modest shorts. She knew they had just shrunk in the wash, but she still felt self-conscious when she had to shimmy into them.

“Stop, Trey.” Sarah would have cried, but her mind wasn’t clear enough to let her.

“Shut up.”

It was either the banging on the door or Sarah’s weak protestations that angered Trey, but the dress was the one that took the punishment. Once they’d both ceased, Trey seemed to grow calmer, even more focused on his task. The lime-green shorts came off next. They lay next to her dress in a crumpled heap – Sarah’s hands were the only thing that preserved what little modesty she had left.

“What about Jewelry?” Sarah enjoyed wearing a simple silver band on her right hand and a small cross necklace from day to day.

“I don’t know, do you have anything that’s pretty, but you’re not afraid to lose?”

“Why would I lose it?”

“Sarah, this is your first real party. There will be alcohol. If you make it home with that dress, I will be surprised.”

“I’ve been to parties before.”

“Not one like this. I’m telling you, this is a college party – it’s an entirely different league.”

“I do have my butterfly ring. It’s only nickel or something, I got it from a dollar store when I was twelve.”

“Oh, I remember that one, it’s cute. Didn’t your sister take it to Minnesota, though?”

“No, she mailed it back after I yelled at her on the phone. She still has a few of my tops, though.”

“Oh, right.”

Trey pulled off his own pants, now. Even in her altered state, Sarah knew what was happening. She just hoped it would be over fast. Her hands were forced above her head in a not-so gentle way as Trey pressed his useless junk against her. He wasn’t even hard.

“Shit.”

Trey’s hands came off her wrists, and he leaned back on the bed. Sarah couldn’t see it, but she could tell what he was doing. It wouldn’t be long before he tried again, and this time it would probably work. The banging had returned. It was more urgent now, and harder.

“Fuck off!”

The banging didn’t go away. Trey once again lowered himself onto Sarah and kissed her neck. She nearly vomited.

“Montao County Sherriff, open up!”

This time, Trey paid attention. Pants around his ankles, he tried to flee through the window. The door splintered under the Sherriff’s kick, and a thin red beam focused on Trey’s back. The tazers hit home. Two men in uniforms dragged him away as Joyce tried to cover Sarah with a blanket.

Her outfit finally complete, Sarah eyed herself in the mirror. The dress was a little short, but she loved the way she looked in it.

“You’re going too, right?”

Joyce smiled. “Of course. Someone has to watch your ass.”

Travis is a Computer Information Systems major at Ranger College, in Ranger, Texas, in the United States. When he's not doing homework, working or relaxing with some video games, he enjoys hiking with his dog and taking in the natural scenery of rural Texas.



Interloper

Lance Hawvermale

The cat sits next to me as the poem struggles
onto the page like whatever simile would move you
if I were deft enough with one on a Wednesday.

She doesn't know the hugeness of writing
and saying things in hopes of ending heroin use
or war or the way politicians snipe each other on TV.

The fact that the Dodgers are thirteen games back
has no meaning for her, and if the ozone dissolves
she will be unaware, like the death of an unmet aunt.

But I see the painful fracture of a bad line break
with the same eyes that see capital punishment
and schoolyard carousels in ripe need of repair.

You cannot have one without the other, I tell her
though by now her eyes are closed, her tail placed
beneath her chin far too perfectly for me to ignore.

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, USA, Lance teaches film, poetry, and creative writing courses. Visit his website at <http://www.lancehawvermale.com>.



Myna and Me

Madhavan Nayar

He was waiting for her on the other side of the road, but she suddenly turned her head and shot me a quizzing look. *What are you up to?*

I said nothing and pressed the ignition, and the engine purred to life. That seemed to alarm her even more, and she made a loud squeak. But she did not budge an inch from her perch on the edge of the pavement. By now the car was aligned with the road and ready to move forward. Something whispered in my ears to stop and let her pass; after all, she was the first at the road and had the right to move.

She then gingerly stepped onto the road and gave me a stare. *You do remember, don't you? You scoundrel.*

My mind wandered back to the early 1990s. I had dropped my daughter at the dance center on a hot August afternoon. The mercury hovered above the 50C mark. I had returned from work and was tired, but my daughter had been patiently waiting for me to take her to the dance class. It was only a ten-minute drive, and I was about to return home after dropping her off. The little bird stepped onto the road just as the car hit the tarmac. Instead of flying, the bird did the most amazing thing - she started walking to the other side of the road.



For a moment, I could not believe my eyes. Fatigue had slowed my reflexes, and by the time I hit the brakes, she had disappeared from my vision. After a split second, I could feel the faint but distinct sensation of the wheel going over a convulsing body. I stopped the car by the side and jumped out. There she was, her little body now reduced to a pulp, the color crimson forming a small puddle by her side. One wing moved a little, raised to the sky, as if pleading for that last touch of comfort. I gently lifted her up; her eyes had lost that bright luster of life. I tried to feel her heartbeat. There was none to be felt. I felt miserable. My brief inattention had ended one of God's beautiful creations. Just a few minutes ago she had been a charming beauty, without a care in the world. Her ash-grey coat was now stained red, her slender legs broken in multiple places. With my head hung in shame and guilt, I opened the car and found a small plastic bag. I gently eased her into the bag, closed the top, and walked to the organic waste bin nearby. At first I thought no one had seen me, but I soon realized that a lady from an apartment above had been curiously watching the entire spectacle. I looked at her, and she closed the windows and disappeared from view, probably in disgust.

I drove back in silence. How could I have let a momentary lapse of concentration take a life away? Here I am, sworn by a sacred oath to protect life, yet showing callous disregard to those very principles. Can we put a value on life? Is one life more precious than another? Is one species more important than another? I reached home, tired and confused. I had to go back to pick my daughter up an hour later. I

drove there through a different road because I did not have the courage to go past the scene of the crime.

Years passed, yet the incident remained vivid in my mind.

The stare of that myna bird on the road brought it all back to me.

Her head was tilted slightly to one side; her one eye was watching me



intently, while the other eye caressed her lover on the other side of the road. Bright yellow lined her eyes and gently curved on to her sharp beak. Her head was covered with shiny, brownish-black shiny hair that glistened with each

movement. Her slender neck and neatly preened wings were touched with white and were in perfect harmony with her slender legs.

“Watch out!” her lover seemed to shout from the other side of the road. She nodded twice and put her left foot forward. I sat in my car, my eyes transfixed on the scene that was unfolding in front of me. Why would she not fly to the other side? Surely that would have been the quickest way to his arms? But she proceeded to move her right foot and then her left and so on and began to walk to the other side of the road, a good twenty feet away. My foot on the accelerator made the engine purr a little more, but this only made her walk slower. I eased off the pedal and decided to wait. I was not going to make the same mistake again. I smiled to myself.

In the next instant, my head was violently whipped back, and I heard the loud mocking laughter of the myna.

I woke up two days later amongst the smell of antiseptics and the sound of rustling white uniforms of another kind of nightingale. There was a heavy collar around my neck. I tried to turn but the sharp pain in my neck cautioned me against being adventurous. Half an hour later, Sophie came to my bed-side. “Doc, why did you stop the car in the middle of the road?” I did not quite grasp what she was referring to. I kept looking at her. “Everyone says it is a miracle that you are alive; your car was a total wreck after that collision from the rear”. My memory started trickling in slowly. “Did I have an accident?” I asked.

“The truck driver braked hard, otherwise you would have...”

Sophie stopped mid-sentence. Suddenly, all the events came back to me as if in a movie I had seen before.

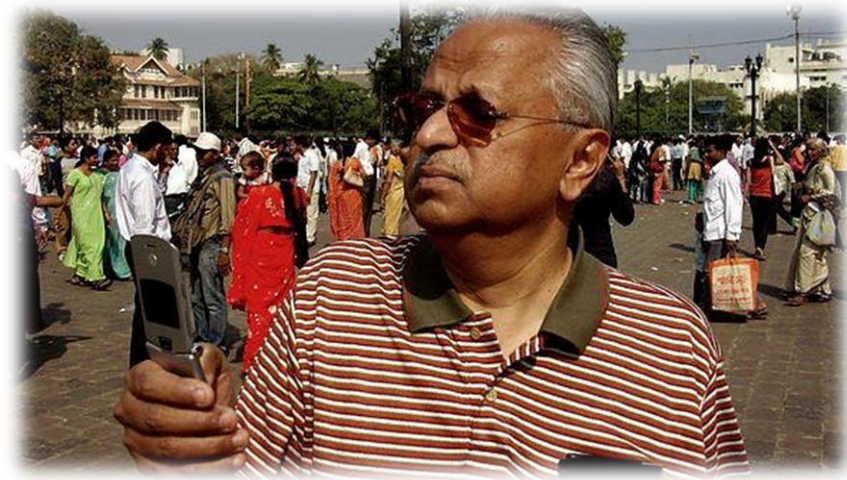


I smiled to myself again. Who was that myna?

[Listen Online](#)

Madhavan Nayar is a pediatric surgeon who has been living in Muscat, Oman, for 27 years after spending 13 training and teaching in the Le Corbusier-designed ‘City Beautiful’ - Chandigarh, India. Madhavan’s day time is spent among the children he treats, and his nights are reserved for reading and for watching and listening to anything on the web or television with music occupying the center of

his attention. Most would call him a liberal but not necessarily a non-conformist.



Orchestral Fanfares

Lydia Ashton



[Listen Online](#)

Classically trained in Sweden and the US, Lydia Ashton is an award-winning composer for television and film. She began her career writing concert music to be performed in the United States and across Europe. Since 2006, she's been scoring films and has worked on projects ranging from trailers to full-length feature movies. Lydia has over 1,500 placements on network and cable television shows. For more information visit her website at <http://www.lydialashton.tv>



Contrails

Robert Ferrier

One contrail signaled launch,
and seven souls slipped
the ties of Earth while still
bound to our hearts.

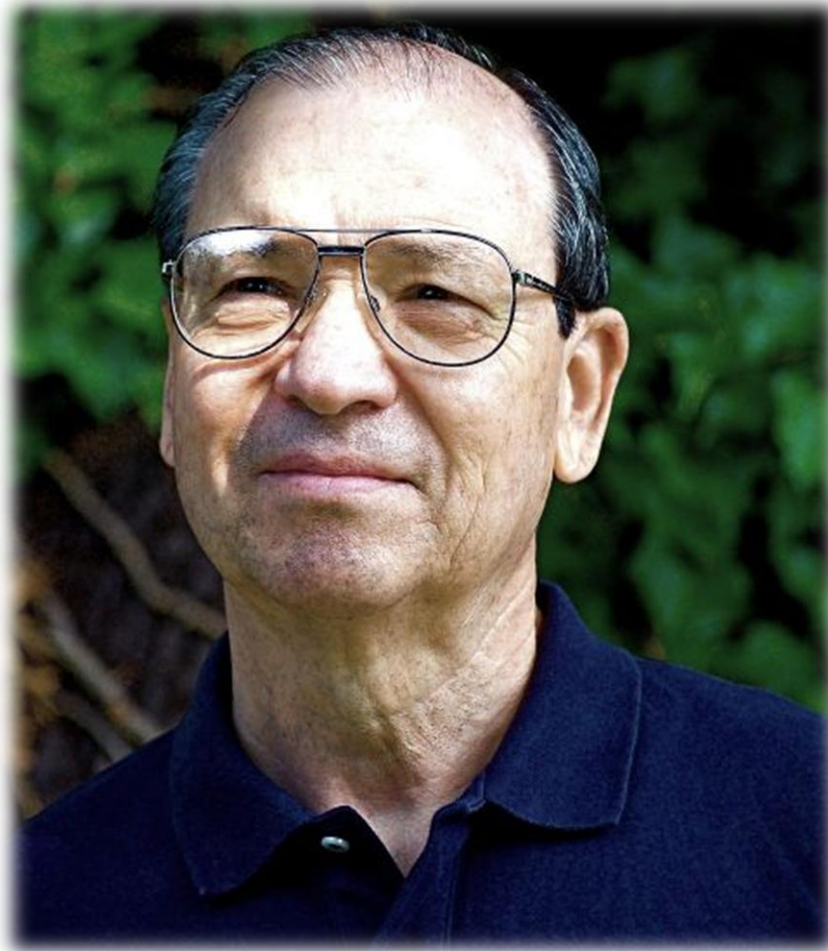
They saw dawn tread continents,
and thunderstorms winking like fireflies
over oceans. They peered down
at conflict shriveled to nothing.

We can't blame the stars
for inviting them in,
or beg angels to send them home.
So contrails scarred the sky,

searing our hearts with a script of
unlived dreams. Yet seven new
stars shine, their faces touched by God.

Robert Ferrier is the author of four published novels available at SynergEbooks.com, Amazon.com and other E-Book publishers. His poetry has appeared in *Oklahoma Today*, *Möbius*, *The Mid-America Poetry Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Broomweed Journal*, *Crosstimbers*, *Westview* and *Metro Library Magazine*. His books, *Rhythms* and *Ambient Light*, each won the Oklahoma Writer's Federation Inc.

award for Best Published Book of Poetry. He was a 2007 nominee for Poet Laureate of Oklahoma in the US.



In Fashion

Kelly Ann Jacobson

When Janet Reynolds's maid handed her a slip of paper with the daily messages in her sloppy half-cursive handwriting, Janet saw the name "Miranda" on the first line and jumped as much as her four-inch heels would allow. The message revealed what Janet already knew: Miranda, Janet's best friend and neighbor, had been chosen to be the director of the Rolling Hills Country Club's yearly fashion show. Not only that, but she wanted to discuss modeling the spring lines of designers who belonged to the club when Janet had a spare moment.

Janet's twenty-four year old daughter, Gwen, usually showed little interest in the club – then again, Janet had practically forced Gwen to become a Younger Member after handpicking the girl's sponsors and bribing her by paying the monthly dues with her second husband's credit card. Janet rushed to the phone extension in her walk-in closet so Gwen wouldn't overhear her, closed the French doors, and found Miranda's phone number in her club directory. She knew her daughter would want no part of the fashion show – Gwen often went on tirades about Rolling Hills, especially the cattiness of the older women and the lack of intellectualism present in the younger ones – so Janet figured she would make all of the arrangements and then casually drop the event into a conversation while handing her daughter a nice necklace or new dress. Besides, after the four years of college bills for Gwen's French Literature degree from Brown, her daughter owed her one complaint-free day at the club.

The phone rang once on the other end, and then Miranda answered in an almost yell: “Janet, my darling! I’ve been waiting here all afternoon for your call.”

“I just got your message,” Janet said, “I’ve been running around all day getting my hair done and donating this terrible antique dish set Harold’s mother gave us for our anniversary. You would die if you saw these plates – whoever invented gray Melmac should be shot.”

“If only, but at least they’ll find a more appropriate home. Now, about my request –”

“I can’t tell you how touched we are that you thought of the Reynolds family! Gwen would be more than happy to model the spring lines.”

“My dear, let me stop you right there. I think your maid may have misunderstood my message; I want you to model at the Fashion Show next month!”

“Me? I don’t understand...”

“The last thing the attendees want to see is a twenty-something anorexic girl in size 0 dress that would look terrible on a more... realistic woman. We want to show the members that this line is right for everyone, and the only way to do that is to put the clothes on some of our most attractive ladies. Of course, I thought of you right

away; you're not a pound over your college weight, and you would look marvelous in some of the sundresses and tight Capri pants we want to show off. It would only take a few hours to get ready, and it would mean so much to me if you'd do it!"

"Of course!" Janet said with more enthusiasm than she felt. "That would be marvelous."

After she hung up, Janet walked out of her closet in a daze. In front of her was the floor-length cast iron peacock mirror her mother had given her on her twentieth birthday, and she walked towards it as slowly as the crawl of a department store sale line. Despite the blond hair dye and the fashionable bob, the white Gucci silk-crepe dress and matching D&G sandals, and a pound of concealer, there was no question that her age was showing more and more every day. She could still see the ghost of her former self on days when the light shone just right through the colonial grille, but the rest of the time she saw more she recognized in Gwen than herself. And even worse, her daughter had to waste all of that beauty on ripped jeans and tank tops.

"Mom!" Gwen yelled from outside the bedroom door, wrenching Janet from her trance. "Are you on the phone?"

"No, dear, come on in."

Gwen entered the room in her typical atrocious attire: a green peasant top and blue jeans with green vines on the back pockets. Before Janet could say a word, Gwen launched into a tirade.

“I saw the note on the kitchen counter, don’t you even think of telling Miranda that I’d be *delighted to participate in such an important event.*”

“Gwen—”

“There is no way I’m wearing some ridiculous outfit designed by a misogynist whose whole purpose is to keep woman in their place through a combination of sexualization and physical agony.”

“Gwen—”

“No, I absolutely won’t do it, and there’s nothing you can do to convince me.”

Sometimes Janet thought that sending her ultra-liberal daughter to college was the worst mistake she had ever made.

“They didn’t call for you, Sweetie.” She waited for Gwen to cringe at her least favorite nickname, then continued: “They were calling for me. I’m the one who is going to model, along with a few of the other ladies, so that there will be realistic women of all shapes and sizes represented.”

Though just minutes before Janet had been planning ways to get out of the show, the satisfaction of watching her daughter deflate like a pair of Botox lips was worth every minute.

On the day of the fashion show, Janet arrived at Rolling Hills a few hours early to have her hair and makeup done. The first floor of the club was empty, but she could hear laughter coming from the second floor dressing room where the models waited.

The ladies had practiced on the rented catwalk a week before; they walked up and down the stairs in their heels, got measured by the representatives from the stores, and learned a few spins and poses from one of the girls who had been a real model over twenty years ago. Watching the middle-aged women well past their prime strut their stuff on the risers made Gwen feel both proud of her friends for their confidence and dismayed at how much had changed since they joined the club, but she did her best to feign confidence for the sake of the group's morale.

When she entered the dressing room, the comforting smell of perfume and new clothes calmed her nerves. Most of her friends were already dressed, and it was amazing how much a little hair dye, a pair of slimming stockings, and professional makeup could do for a lady. One of the makeup artists led her to a chair and began to wipe the makeup off her face, while another placed a strand of pearls around her neck.

“Careful with the jewelry, girls!” Miranda teased from the other side of the room. “We wouldn’t want you to have to sell your homes to pay for it.”

After the makeup artists moved on to another model and a matronly woman in jeans dressed her in a spring suit, Janet sat in the swivel chair to await her cue and stared at her reflection as she had weeks before. This time she saw someone she recognized – her girlish pink cheeks, the sunny blond hair she got from her father, the breasts not yet affected by years of gravity – and she wished she could preserve the reflected image like a glossy magazine cutout. She would never look this good again.

“Janet, you’re up!” Miranda hissed from the hall.

Janet scurried out of the chair, around the corner, up the stairs, and then began her confident walk down the aisle. The music was loud and Miranda was saying something about the designer, but Janet tuned her friend out and relaxed into the rhythm of her step.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a familiar face at the head table next to the club president and activities chair. It was Gwen, and yet it wasn’t – the girl at the table wore a cream-colored suit and had a delicate hat perched on her head, and her normally nested hair was curled around her face. Her daughter waved, too quickly for anyone else to notice but her mother, and smiled. Janet fought tears as she posed with one leg bent and a hand on her slim hip, triumphant, at the center of it all.

Kelly Ann Jacobson is currently pursuing her MA in Fiction at Johns Hopkins University, and she is the Poetry Editor for Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine. Kelly has had or will have poems published in Wooden Teeth magazine, Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine, Coldnoon, and Poetry Pacific; short stories in The Exhibitionist Magazine and The Writing Disorder; and nonfiction on 20somethingmagazine.com and life2pointoh.com. Her work can be found at www.kellyannjacobson.com.



The letters 'XZBT' are rendered in a white, serif font with a double-line outline. They are centered within a dark, textured rectangular area. A bright lens flare effect emanates from the left side of the 'X', casting a soft glow across the background.