Exile Vol. XX No. 1

1974

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Recommended Citation

Foufos, Bud; Coccimiglio, Vic; Bader, Catherine; Burkhard, J. Frank; Porteous, Peter; Pound, Ezra; Mercurio, Phil; Purcell, John; Payne, Sue; Graff, Cathy; Singleton, Sharon; Orleans, Alison; Hunt, S.; Wharton, Laurie; Mueller, Mary; Patnode, Dawn; and Schloss, Mary (1974) "Exile Vol. XX No. 1," Exile: Vol. 20 : No. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol20/iss1/1

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The title of this magazine was suggested by the concluding phrase in "The Rest" by Ezra Pound, 1912.

PERSONAE.

THE REST

O Helpless few in my country,
O remnant enslaved!

Artists broken against her,
A-stray, lost in the villages,
Mistrusted, spoken-against,

Lovers of beauty, starved,
Thwarted with systems,
Helpless against the control;

You who can not wear yourselves out
By persisting to successes,
You who can only speak,
Who can not steel yourselves into reiteration;

You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Artwork

Sue Sartarelli 6
Chris Schulze 5, 24, 29
Heidi Yockey 6
Kathryn Riedel 7
Jane Joldersma 10
Jan Mosher 12
Pat Victory 15
Rona Rosen 20, 31
Arthur Ernst 21
Kim McMullen 24

Fiction

First Time 3
Bud Foufos 21
Father's Last Party 11
Vic Coccimiglio 21
Catherine Bader 16
God and Sergeant Mays 22
J. Frank Burkhard 27

Pages of a Story 27
Peter Porteous

Poetry

The Rest 1
Erie Pound 4
In the Midst of an Echo 5
Phil Mercurio 4
Sierra Madre Prose 5
John Purcell

Photography

Bruce Andre 18
Jane Joldersma 4, 23, 25
Breece Olander 8
Pam Purcell 8
Lorre Ruman 13, 14
Foster Schmidt 19
Chip Andre 19, 23
Nancy Pickenson 26
Nancy Chornenning 32

Sue Payne 6
Cathy Graft 6
Sharon Singleton 7, 12
Big Al 9
Phil Mercurio 13
Alison Orleans 13
S. Hunt 14
Laurie Wharton 18
Peter Porteous

What is she to you? 18

"Projects" 21
Mary Mueller 25
Dawn Patnode
The Barn 25
Mary Schloss

Sue Payne 6
Nancy Adams 18
Bruce Andre 25
Vic Coccimiglio 13
Valerie Evans 13
Mary Mueller 14
Sue Payne 18
Pat Victory 18

They're very clean, I'm telling you. You'll enjoy it.
There's no doubt in my mind. You'll enjoy it.
Larry, forget it. What do you need me for anyway? I just
don't want to do it. Clear?
"Not it's not clear. Why don't you want to go? Really, I
mean. I think it. Think of the benefits it's brought Lewbank.
Business has gone from bad to booming -- practically
overnight.
"Oh come on, Markham. Bud to booming?"
"Yeah. Bad to booming. Look at the area surrounding the
parlor, a new mall, everything modernized. And it's not just
in Lewbank. Every town that's had the common sense to start
up has flourished financially. Dewy that.
"Why do I have to deny it? I told you. It just doesn't
interest me. Now let's change the subject."
"Look, Smitty. Anytime I saw Smitty I knew I was in for a
debating argument. "Look. If there's one thing I've
always said to myself it's that Smitty is an open minded guy
-- he's liberal minded by any means—but open minded. Why is it
we're so close minded about the parlor?"
"I'm not close minded."
"Narrowminded, then."
"For Chrissakes. I'm not narrowminded either."
"Jesus God. What do you call it when a guy refuses to
participate in a community function that's not only materially
beneficial but altogether moral and...wholesome?"
"Larry, if that's a definition of narrowminded...
"Look Smitty. It's not like you're deflowering a fucking
virgin. You're merely releasing tension through an external,
liberally unprepared we were. Two hostesses—both very bland and very nude. They stood amidst bottles and sponges and small wash basins.

"Is this it?" I demanded. "For Chrissake, we don't do it
here we do it?"

"Schmidt, please. Just take off your clothes and sit on that
upholstered table.

Larry, you didn't tell me...

"It's not. Just take it easy. They're just gonna make sure
we're clean. This is a very sterile parlor."

"Ha-ha. Very funny." I took off my clothes and sat on the
upholstered table. I was thoroughly unprepared. There to greet us were two
hostesses–both very bland and very nude. They stood amidst bottles and sponges and small wash basins.

"Oh my God. I had no idea, Larry. Larry?"

Larry glanced at me and smiled. "Two rooms, please," he
said. "I thought I had more."

He turned to the opening in the wall. "We'll take two--
what do you want blond, red head, what?"

I was momentarily stunned. "Jesus. I don't care. Blond's
okay."

"Two BL 610's, please."

"Fine," the voice responded. "Please follow the corridor to
your right to the room marked Preparatory. Thank you. Pay
upon culmination.

"Did you hear that?" I blurted as we paced down the
corridor. "Pay upon culmination. Jesus Christ. Culmination of
what? What's a BL 610, anyway? The least you could do,
Markham, is forewarn me a little. Give me a few details. What is a BL610?"

"Take it easy, Smitty. BL are the call letters for hair color,
obviously. 610 is the model number.

"How many models are there? What's the difference
between a 610 and a 310 or a 210 for Chrissake?"

"A 610 is the more advanced model here in Lewbank. If
her battery's well charged she's capable of a hundred words
and multiple orgasms. The great thing though are the sounds."

"What sounds?"

"Christ, you are green. A 610 is equipped with a full genre
of gutteral sounds—sighs, pants, moans, grunts, you know. All
the sexual sounds."

"My God."

As we entered the preparatory room I realized how
thoroughly unprepared I was. There to greet us were two
hostesses–both very bland and very nude. They stood amidst bottles and sponges and small wash basins.

"Is this it?" I demanded. "For Chrissake, we don't do it
here we do it?"

"Our cleaning lady took my hand and led me down a brightly
illuminated corridor. I was quivering too much to notice how cold
it was to my bare flesh. One of the 'hostesses' came up, sponge in hand and a wonderful smile on her plastic face. She
soaked the sponge in some medicinal smelling liquid in a
nearby basin then thoroughly covered me with the fluid.

"Oh my God. I had no idea, Larry. Larry?"

Larry was gone as was the other preparatory girl. My
cleaning lady took my hand and led me down a brightly
colored carpet.

"Here's your room, Sir. It was the same fascinating,
bewitching voice.

I walked into the room wearing an involuntary, embarrassed
smile, and met my 610. She was lying in horizontal grandeur
upon a circular shaped bed. Hourglass proportions, lovely face.

"Come. I am Jeannette. Come to Jeannette."

She enunciated each syllable slowly; precisely.

"Come."

Not seeing any feasible alternative, I went.

Near her, there was nothing that my untrained eye could
notice that indicated that Jeannette was not human. Her hair
was silky, hanging in little girl curls along the sides of her
face. Her body was warm and soft and supple. Her movements
were smooth and flowing. Every physical gesture seemed
human. Every area of her anatomy was flawlessly designed to
appear human. Her only imperfection was, in fact, her
flawlessness.
During our play, Jeanette contributed a vast amount to the mood with her soprano sighs and pants and moans. She lived up to all the expectations I didn’t have time to previously form.

“Jeanette,” I muttered wistfully, realizing her inability to understand, “you are one beautiful creature.”

“I am capable of multiple orgasms,” she smiled.

“I am capable of multiple orgasms,” I whispered. "Does this mean I’m not a virgin anymore?"

"O-oo-oo," she cried. "Once more, Handsome."

Laughing-hysterically-I skipped out the door and followed the brightly colored carpet to the preparatory room.

IN THE MIDST OF AN ECHO

for Trena

I move hands through slow, thick air
leaving trails and traces.
Do you watch with intent?
I long to look at you.
I long to linger over each silken vertebrae
to knead the muscles of your soft back.
I long to be strangled.
I long to try on your pants to see if they will fit.
I long to kiss your neck until I long not to repeat myself.
Do you feel the heat of suffocation?
I wait not to touch your hair and touch your hair.
I long for ends and find there are none.
I long to smooth your nose
so that we may breathe again, and
I long to leave myself for your eyes
which are black wildernesses with ebbing irises.
I long for an open mouth which is speechless.

Phil Mercurio

SIERRA MADRE PROSE

Sat in the back of a second class bus and watched

dusty Mexican towns with dirt streets

Women in long, multicolored skirts
and shawls

Through the swinging doors,
Men sitting in saloons,
the fans, suspended from the ceiling,
moving just as slow as the drinkers

(some are singing.)

Men, with two hundred year old faces,
pulling their carts down sun hard clay streets.

little girls selling

little girls watching me

a little girl in the middle of the store floor, playing,
quietly, talking to herself

farther inland, the land rises

Villages full of burros and barefoot children running to meet
the bus and sell fruit, tortas, and hand-made goods, cheaply.

No clay houses, just stilt houses
with thatched roofs. Some hidden
by scarce desert forest.

All in twilight, tired and big
and rolling back towards the mountains, over dry, brown hills.

I saw the mountains,
miles of shrubbery running
faster and faster and then
leaping towards the sky in great grey mountains

a five year old senoretta lying on
my lap, shared with a friend.
that same senoretta sleepily
grab my arm, pull herself
up, look into the
mountain night, nodding,
and then crawl down from the window.

and darkness coming, covering my view
and leaving me to look at
that sleeping child on my lap, clutching
my jacket as a pillow.

John Purcell
The morning glories climb the house on strings.
Closed now.
Their blossoms are as pale as skin
Stretched tight across clenched fists.
In my room
The light comes green
Through the curtains of late afternoon.
Gentle as air turning warm,
Your arms
Would draw me out.

Sue Payne

today's bleakness
made sad sounds in the air
as if a moaning cow had lost his lover
no longer does naked sunshine
erase the gray of dismal
broken fences and bent rusted nails
compete for the suicidal victory
only to deteriorate and emerge silenced and defeated.

Cathy Graff

A rock is growing in me.
Strange, how once I trusted
the certainty of its size.
But now, defying me,
it grows.
I must adapt to the expansion
I avoid water,
knowing I would sink.
I must not remain still
for I settle quickly into the earth.
I try moving
and hope that the motion
will slow the permanent growing
of the rock.
Each step is a difficult distance.
The rock increases
forcing my blood
through the surface of my body.
My legs stiffen
and refuse all living motion.
I watch my blood dry
like paint on a statue.

Sharon Singleton
We have a hinting household here.

Hideous flies buzz between
winter windows
and inner windows,
they buzz insomnia at night,
and in the day they --
fat and black --
will lick their sneers
and rub their spindled appendages.

We open screens to shoo them
when the sun is screaming summer,
but neighbors send us hurrying messages
enriched in martinis
and 'going-homes to mother.'
So we decently slam our windows shut.

And we indigest in uncomfortable
glance at dinners. Crunching
and squashing and slopping
and smack.
Glances of suspicion pour around
like spilling milk.
And we lower our eyes
to avoid the invisible mirrored-maze
of insistent monotone humming on windows.

Dawn Patnode

The Barn

Cobwebs laced on bulging beams
grasp bits of straw and dust.
Heavy, hot smells of animal breath
and the cool musty hay.
Horses' hoofs shuffle soundlessly under dirt floors.
We look long, very long at the birth of a calf:
the silence of life's emergence lays softly in the stall.
Her wet wisps of hair warm with the mother's blood.
Slowly in the night the crystal casing is gone
and the cow nudges to stand the delicate bones
of her new companion.

Mary Schloss
BIG AL

I You will be born with a big nose
and black kinky hair.
It will be all right because your parents are Jewish
because you have a strong left arm
and because your grades are high.
You will play ping-pong until you are good enough
to quote obscure rules.
You will play RISK with your friends
and you will lose.
You will play football on gravel
and you will lose even if you win.
Your friends will laugh
and point at your bloody knees.
They will call you “boogy”.
Your mother will yell at them almost as much
as she yells at you and your new name.
You will not disobey her strong right arm.
Your father will crouch and split his seams;
he will feel sorry for you.

II When you come home from school
you will do HOMEWORK
go to Hebrew school, come home again
and do more homework.
In stolen moments, with food warming in your bed
you will watch the Yankees
and old movies on t.v.
Women will make love passionately
to men in the dark
and you will idolize women.
At sixteen you will not get your learner’s permit
because driving is serious business;
and your chance to make love to women
will diminish with the upsurge of your thoughts.
You will mow the lawn
and the next day
your father will remow it.
Your thoughts burn like cigarette smoke.
They will try to divide you.
They will try to tell you
not to be divided.
They will push you further.

III You will go to teachers in school
and they will consider you strange.
You will chase girls in the halls
and ask them to marry you.
They will consider you strange.
You will read many books
and you will consider yourself strange.
You will then beat your sister
in hopes that she will understand your strangeness.
Inside your head sounds are reverberating
to your pulse.
Inside your head you will hear
a ping
It will be a quiet gentle sound.
Inside your head there is no sound.
The door to your room closes
with a hush of wind.
Your heart flutters and slows
to a murmur.
IV Hospitals, yes. And doctors. 
OUR SON HAS A COLD. 
Medication, yes. 
HE WILL GET BETTER SOON. 
Money, money, money, yes, yes 
No. OUR SON IS NOT INSANE. 
You will come home 
and your friends will be in college. 
You will play with their younger brothers 
and their younger brothers' friends. 
They will not call you "boogy". 
They will grow up too soon. 
You will mow your lawn 
eying pretty young girls 
returning from school. 
You will invite them up to your room 
and show them your graduation picture, 
but they will not know you. 

V Your friends will come back from college 
and your eyes will glow. 
This black glow of the pupil 
will speak to them 
but they will scatter like leaves in the wind. 
They will no longer play RISK. 
but they will scatter like leaves in the wind. 
This black glow of the pupil 
You will invite them up to your room 
and your eyes will glow. 
Where is the music in the dark to comfort me? 
Headlights will pour into the window 
It will hint at leaving home 
At night your bed will address itself 
They will no longer play RISK. 
They will grow up too soon. 
You will mow your lawn 
eying pretty young girls 
returning from school. 
You will invite them up to your room 
and show them your graduation picture, 
but they will not know you. 

Phil Mercurio
My father is a dreamer
and I but a thought
conceived in a night
when sleep proved fertile.

Night contains me in its womb
yet I am free as sleeper’s thoughts
contained by nothing but the edges
of the mind.

But I am cautious, silent
and my life rages in quiet
lest my father be wakened
by something cruel as morning.

Sharon Singleton

FOLKSINGER

Hey, pretty girl
half hidden by that brown felt hat.
Your carnal eyes
entice me,
Your carnal tongue
invites me.
You’re raping me
with laser beams
from cobalt eyes.
Your words are peace and freedom
but your lips shape them so sensually
it all sounds like pornography.

After the show is over
I will smash your guitar
and lay you down
under the red lights
of smoky coffee houses.
You will give in to me.
I will make you give me
everything,
you promised with your eyes.

Alison Orleans

Sweat Rebellion

My clothes drip off,
sweat replacing them;
there is no nakedness in this heat.
Dampness moves over my body,
slipping under the skin
to touch the base of my skull
and send a thrilling message of rebellion
down my spine.

S. Hunt
blackgrey

the colors of your world.
child of dark
grasping shadow-motion.

hold tighter to emotion
that violent inside
fireworks coloring skies.

we flew a kite together, child
and i could see it
pinned against blue.
you felt its strength against yours
and held
to understand the wind.

Laurie Wharton
They dwelte too longe on independence.
Sikerly hath I ne'er bifor yelde!
Of othere sely maides swich as she.
Al of hir time was spente in compaignye
And sondry sciences and historye.
This sely maide a virgin was I trowe.
Aloof fro man's gentil commraderye.
Ne thoughte hadde they on temperaunce;
To swink on worthy causes was hir lust.
She coude wield a pen whan that she must.
So proud she was a womman for to be,
She hath an herte as hard as is a stoon.
And swich as oon wil find with housbonde.
Was hir entent, fro homely bondes
And seeke experience. Libertee
She woude straunge londes for to see
Was sikerly for not to ben a wif
I be not certain, as I do not knowe.
No man woude she love, not an oon;
Nor yive an housbonde hir obeisaunce.
Nor for to be beneathh man's governaunce
Of age, she was but twenty yeer old.
On fingres and in earres rings of gold.
Two lippes reed and sweet as a berry.
With his sclendre body and yen merry,
Hir skin was white and smooth as morwe milk.
Longe was hir heer, brown and thikke as sitk;
Ful many a man's ye coude she begile
For to lernen and liven al the while.
Fro a smale town hadde she her came
Upon the hill. Fair Katie was hir name.
Wei lerned was fair Kate in poetrye
And al of hir philosophye of lif
maide then was of Denison, so,
airer was than al the flowres that grow:
clerk ther was at Denison, also,
Hende Richard was this yonge clerk cleped.
With the brothers of his fraternitee.
At the coming time of celebration.
Thikke the air with anticipation
To see. Swich merriment did merke eek day
And Denison was swich a joly sight
To see. Swich merriment did merke eek day
That students coude not holpe but play.
And thus in April passed it by chaunce,
Venus' son with his arwe did blesse
That bothe of hem so suddenly did change.
Sikerly might it seem so very straunge
And thus did hende Richard with hir stay
That she woude him have al through longe night.
And kissed hir ful sweetly by the stair.
Richard walked home his lady fair.
For I have reached at last my tale's ende.
Sprightime hadde come as ever it will,
Infragrant flowres blooming on the hill
Upon the hilles making metatolye
For leary branch of eek and evry tree.
And in the midst of spring, there was a kveld
And Denison was swich a joly sight
To see. Swich merriment did merke eek day
That students coude not holpe but play.
And thus in April passed it by chaunce,
That bothe of hem so suddenly did change.
Sikerly might it seem so very straunge
And thus did hende Richard with hir stay
That she woude him have al through longe night.
And kissed hir ful sweetly by the stair.
Richard walked home his lady fair.
For I have reached at last my tale's ende.
What is she to you?

"A long hair I pull from my coat,
let fall and disappear
like lint. And you?"

"Yes, a hair; but in the pulling
my coat unravels,
and is soon a pile of string.
I am left naked and cold."

I enter the room silent-
enter to weave a hair into my coat;
to weave it in, to tie the ends
deep within warm cloth.

Peter Porteous
"Projects"

The old Spaniard,

sitting in bed,

passes peas from one pan to the other.

The man,

across the way,

spits on cats.

People,

standing on street corners,

wait for revelation.

Mary Mueller
When Y-San got to his knees to pull the big American fourteen year old boy soldier, pouring fire toward the gooks, when he looked over his shoulder, he saw Y-Nhiem, the gook bastard yelling and laughing like kids on a playground. He saw a movement to his side and rolled to fire but it was Y-San. San's fatigues were soaked with sweat as he crawled backwards, firing like a child would a rag doll, and when his body finally fell to the ground about ten meters away, Mays couldn't look. He saw a dark stain was spreading over his lower abdomen and groin, and he knew he was bleeding bad.

"Oh God! Please, please, please, God! They'll kill me God! Please!"

Mays tried to crawl backwards but found he couldn't move his legs. He couldn't even feel them. Rolling on his side to look at his wound, he saw his legs sprawled up under him. A dark stain was spreading over his lower abdomen and groin, and he knew he was bleeding bad.

"Oh God! Please, God! Help me, God! Please!"

He saw a movement to his side and rolled to fire but it was Y-San. San's fatigues were soaked with sweat as he crawled backwards, firing like a son of a bitch.

"San! Ha riet en nae! Over here!" San laboriously worked his way over to Mays, firing then crawling firing then crawling. When he reached Mays he gripped him by the legs and began dragging him back, stopping only to slam a fresh clip into his weapon. Then Mays heard someone firing an automatic rifle behind them and was afraid they had been flanked. But when he looked over his shoulder, he saw Y-Nhiem, the fourteen year old boy soldier, pouring fire toward the gooks. When then finally reached the mound of dirt that Nhiem was using for cover, San got to his knees to pull the big American behind it. A machine gun ripped his chest apart.

The gooks were firing as before but they had stopped all the yelling and laughing. Y-Nhiem finally managed to drag Mays behind the clump of dirt. He sat him up with his back to the dirt and then took a W. P. grenade from May's belt, pulled the pin and threw it towards the North Vietnamese. A few seconds later, they heard a hollow "whump" and then the screams of the gooks who had been hit with the burning phosphorous. Nhiem became excited and yelled at the commies, but Mays didn't give a damn.

"All I want is out of here, God! Please, God! I'll never come back. Never! Just get me outa here! Please God, please!"

Y-Nhiem used his knife to cut open May's pants and inspect the wound. "Ma jackou," he muttered. It was bad. Mays looked down and got sick to his stomach. Nhiem held a bandage to the wound and applied pressure but the blood kept pumping out in steady spurts and Mays knew he had a severed artery deep in his guts.

"Oh God! Please God! I don't want to die! Please, please, God! Not here! Not now! Please!"

"Mai, you call wop-wop, no sweat."

"No can do, Nhiem. The radio is fini."

"Fuck'n Vetnamese! Mou a breme eh, Mai."

Nhiem picked up his gun and inserted a fresh clip into it. When he had just said good-bye, Mays thought he was going to run out on him. But when he saw the hate in Nhiem's eyes, he knew what the yard was going to do.

Shouting "Y-yok ei louha!" the little guy assaulted the woodline. He got about thirty meters before the automatic weapons zeroed on him. They picked him up and shook him like a child would a rag doll, and when his body finally fell to the ground about ten meters away, Mays couldn't look.

Everything was quiet. Mays was alone now. But it was starting to get dark! If he could just hold them until it was dark, he might be able to crawl into the jungle and hide until morning and then the Brightlight team would come in and...Oh God, no! It couldn't be getting dark...it was only noon and it couldn't be getting...Mays grabbed his groin with both hands and tried to hold his blood in. But it wasn't any use. It was pumping out in steady spurts and Mays knew he had a severed artery deep in his guts.

"Oh God! Please God! Not here! Not now! Please!"

"Oh God! Please, God! I don't want to die! Please, please, God! Not here! Not now! Please!"

GOD AND SERGEANT MAYS

Evans got it in the head when they first opened up. The bullet left only a small hole in his face but blew the entire back of his head off, splattering pieces of skull and brain all over Mays. As he dove for the ground, Mays felt a sharp pain in his groin, as if someone had hit him very hard with a fist. By the time he hit the ground and began returning fire, it had already grown numb and he knew he had been hit.

Evans was still twitching convulsively on the ground but Mays knew he was dead. Ha Khong, the montagnard point man, was laying on his back just in front of Evans with his head bent back awkwardly. He was staring directly at Mays; his eyes still showing the fear and surprise with which he had died a few moments before. Mays wanted to wipe Evans off of his face and arms, but he was too busy returning fire. It burned like hell wherever Evans had landed on him, and Mays wanted more than anything to wipe him off...No, more than anything he wanted out of there.

"Oh God! Please, God! Get me out of here, God! Please, God! I'll do anything, just get me out of here!

"The noise was terrific and frightening. There must have been a hundred of them blasting away, Mays could hear the gook bastards yelling and laughing like kids on a playground. Their fire seemed to be coming from everywhere. The B-40 rockets made a hell of a racket coming in and then landed with a deafening "kawumpf" that shook the ground under him. The grenadier, Y-Sok, wasn't returning fire, so Mays knew he was either dead or near dead. He wondered how many of the six man team were left. He wondered if he was all alone.

"Oh God! Please, please, please, God! They'll kill me God! Please!"

Mays tried to crawl backwards but found he couldn't move his legs. He couldn't even feel them. Rolling on his side to look at his wound, he saw his legs sprawled up under him. A dark stain was spreading over his lower abdomen and groin, and he knew he was bleeding bad.

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The gooks were firing as before but they had stopped all the yelling and laughing. Y-Nhiem finally managed to drag Mays behind the clump of dirt. He sat him up with his back to the dirt and then took a W. P. grenade from May's belt, pulled the pin and threw it towards the North Vietnamese. A few seconds later, they heard a hollow "whump" and then the screams of the gooks who had been hit with the burning phosphorous. Nhiem became excited and yelled at the commies, but Mays didn't give a damn.

"All I want is out of here, God! Please, God! I'll never come back. Never! Just get me outa here! Please God, please!"

Y-Nhiem used his knife to cut open May's pants and inspect the wound. "Ma jackou," he muttered. It was bad. Mays looked down and got sick to his stomach. Nhiem held a bandage to the wound and applied pressure but the blood kept pumping out in steady spurts and Mays knew he had a severed artery deep in his guts.

"Oh God! Please God! I don't want to die! Please, please, God! Not here! Not now! Please!"

"Mai, you call wop-wop, no sweat."

"No can do, Nhiem. The radio is fini."

"Fuck'n Vetnamese! Mou a breme eh, Mai."

Nhiem picked up his gun and inserted a fresh clip into it. When he had just said good-bye, Mays thought he was going to run out on him. But when he saw the hate in Nhiem's eyes, he knew what the yard was going to do.

Shouting "Y-yok ei louha!" the little guy assaulted the woodline. He got about thirty meters before the automatic weapons zeroed on him. They picked him up and shook him like a child would a rag doll, and when his body finally fell to the ground about ten meters away, Mays couldn't look.

Everything was quiet. Mays was alone now. But it was starting to get dark! If he could just hold them until it was dark, he might be able to crawl into the jungle and hide until morning and then the Brightlight team would come in and...Oh God, no! It couldn't be getting dark...it was only noon and it couldn't be getting...Mays grabbed his groin with both hands and tried to hold his blood in. But it wasn't any use. It was pumping out in steady spurts and Mays knew he had a severed artery deep in his guts.

"Oh God! Please God! Not here! Not now! Please!"

F. Frank Burkhard

J. Frank Burkhard
As Jeff entered the locker room he caught sight of Ron, his formidable opponent, examining his face in the mirror.

"I'm here, Ron."

"About time."

"Yeh, well. Had to finish some work." He hurriedly peeled off his gloves to the point of bursting. He rubbed them hard against his palms, an image interrupted his light concentration as if his mind had the four corners of the handball court and someone had looked in at the door, demanded a wave of recognition and moved on. He saw Mrs. Greer on her couch, beaming at the TV set. She lay still, a handwoven shawl to her neck, her wispy hair caught in its cob-webbed design.

"What? Yet, I'm ready." His hands were hot and filled his palms, an image interrupted his light concentration as if his mind had the four corners of the handball court and someone had looked in at the door, demanded a wave of recognition and moved on. He saw Mrs. Greer on her couch, beaming at the TV set. She lay still, a handwoven shawl to her neck, her wispy hair caught in its cob-webbed design.

"Jeff... Jeff. You ready?"

"Yeh."

They ducked, slammed the door, and attacked the end wall of the stuffy-white cell. Jeff smacked the ball whenever it came near him, concentrating on the sensation in his hands, rubbing them between shots to get the blood flowing. As he hit straight off the wall, taking the smacks in his padded gloves, the image interrupted his light concentration as if his mind had the four corners of the handball court and someone had looked in at the door, demanded a wave of recognition and moved on. He saw Mrs. Greer on her couch, beaming at the TV set. She lay still, a handwoven shawl to her neck, her wispy hair caught in its cob-webbed design.

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"Jeff... Jeff. You ready?"

"Yeh."

The glare reminded him of the first time he had been inside the house—in early September, when the house was light and open.

"Hello, Gregory." Mrs. Greer called from the couch. "How's the landlady? You down there much?"

"Yeh. It's a good place to study, pretty quiet."

"I knew you would."

Jeff started to say something else, but with the first flip of a page he lost the thought and walked upstairs. Grey paint broke from the walls as he walked, stepping slowly, tasting the air that seemed just an aged version of the sweaty air that had choked the handball court. The hall light that had never worked before was on now and he could clearly see the walls and the widening cracks crossing them like the crew's feet of tired eyes. The glare reminded him of the first time he had been inside the house—early September, when the house was light and open.

Mrs. Greer had shown him the bedrooms and the front and back porches, after giving him tea and cookies. The slight nervousness he had felt on the porch, as he formulated a sentence in his mind, was quickly dissolved by her casual manner. As his visit lengthened, though, she grew increasingly informal and interested in him. He had noticed the dusty pictures of her sons and husband over the bureau and accepted her familiarity, for the moment, as part of her apparent senility. But the irritation stayed with him as he walked back to campus—the way she tangled his name (she didn't seem hard of hearing), the way she hovered solicitously over him. Had it not been for his aversion to the constant, blaring noise he would have willingly settled for the security of the dorms. But she was pleasant and open-minded, it seemed, and there was no better location.

Jeff continued along the hallway and into his room, thinking of the family pictures he had seen that day, recalling the relaxed afternoon weeks later when she had finally mentioned having any family at all. It had done little to ease his apprehension.

He had been on the front porch, stretched on a lawn chair struggling to fit together bits of writing from pages of forced words. He glanced up occasionally, finding solace in the trees that hid doorways, swingsets and gardens.

"Hello, Gregory." Mrs. Greer had sighed as she eased herself into her rocker.

"Oh, hello, Mrs. Greer."

She wiped some crumbs from the stained apron that covered her lap with loud letters: Chef Cook; Move or I'll bake your buns. "Anna, Anna. You should call me Anna. You're just too stuffy, Gregory."

"It's Jeff, Mrs. Greer. Jeff."

"Oh, you are difficult, but I appreciate your coming home. I know your father does too. The other boys call me Anna. You're just too stuffy, Gregory."

"It's Jeff, Mrs. Greer, Jeff."

"Oh, you are difficult, but I appreciate your coming home. I know your father does too. The other boys call me Anna. You're just too stuffy, Gregory."

"It's Jeff, Mrs. Greer, Jeff."

"Oh, you are difficult, but I appreciate your coming home. I know your father does too. The other boys call me Anna. You're just too stuffy, Gregory."

"I...I just wouldn't feel right about it. She could just see you. You want more sugar for your cake? I knew you'd need more."

"Ah, it's you, Mindy. Nice to see you. You want more sugar for your cake? I knew you'd need more."

"Yeh, it's going to be a big one," Mindy said as they entered the kitchen. "My mother says you work too hard in the yard. Says you need someone to take care of you."

"How do you like my apron?" She was suddenly standing with her arms out, circling slowly.
He just isn't around enough.

"Yes, yes, a wonderful family we are. You should meet your father soon I think. Oh, I love this apron." She began laughing again, her voice rapidly becoming gruff, cracking into coughs as she went inside. Jeff searched the pages, listening to the cough slow to wheezing and then die away. The sound was replaced by the shuffling of pages, back and forth, back and forth. He waited until that too slowed and stopped; and then, quietly gathering his papers, he eased the door open and creased along the hall.

"Gregory, come sit down for a moment."

Jeff saw no way out, no excuse that would put her to sleep. His arm pits and crotch were hot as he sank into the green love seat recessed into the living room wall. Dark curtains hung behind him, hiding most of the sunlight. Two tall planters framed the short couch, green ivy stringing down its arms. What should be say? He felt as if he had been called upon to give a short talk on the virtues of the long life that now lay curled on the couch. So natural. Just like she was asleep. He felt underdressed, having forgotten his eulogistic collar and Bible. But she moved. She sat up and pulled her frown into a slight smile.

"Gregory, have you been writing a lot lately?"

Unsure what she would make of his words, he coughed.

"I'd better go do some studying." There was no response.

"Come on, Jeff. She's driving me nuts."

"It'll be worth it, paying double for a while. This new place won't be any hassle."

"Can't you get some back?"

"I don't want to talk to her about it. I couldn't even take it, really. She needs it more than I do."

"Well, she can probably get someone else to take your room."

"I doubt it. Not now, that's for sure. Maybe not even next semester. Not that many people move off in the middle of the year...I hope she finds someone, though."

"Yeh."

"Did you hear about her substitute teaching? I heard some old bags in Jenson's Market saying she might lose her job if there were any more complaints."

"Wow. I didn't know that. She'd really be hard pressed. As it is she has to pinch for hotdogs and lettuce."

"Yeh, I know. Social Security isn't much."

"About Cindy sleeping with you?"

"I'd like to read some of your things if you'd let me."

"No, you've got your studies, Gregory. We'll have a repairman come. There's no problem with money now, no problem."

"But why?"

"Gregory, have you been working on your short story writing lately? Doing a little poetry too, but mainly short stories."

"I'd like to read some of your things if you'd let me."

"Yes, I've been working on my short story writing lately."

"Maybe I could look at it."

"No, no, not right now. I'm too tired. Just put them on the chair sometime. I do wish your father would fix that darn TV."

"I'd like to read some of your things if you'd let me."

"No, you've got your studies, Gregory. We'll have a repairman come. There's no problem with money now, no problem."

"No, no, not right now. I'm too tired. Just put them on the chair sometime. I do wish your father would fix that darn TV."

"Yes. I've been working on my short story writing lately."

"Unsure what she would make of his words, he coughed."

"It was as though the problem were solved, now that he had defined it and was determined to deal with it somehow. It was a tiresome performance, this reader's theatre he was caught in, reading a part he had no desire to read. It was in large part the comforting thought that he could, in fact, change the script that kept his spirits from deflating whenever the front door of her house closed behind him.

Since he had moved in he had been into her apartment several times; had helped with her laundry and seen her few family histories and scrapbooks in the basement, behind therickety staircase than ended on a dirt floor. He had eaten a meal with her in the cramped dining room just off the kitchen. There had been the dishes to wash and put away and the lettuce and bread to put back in the purring refrigerator. The more he was around her, the more persistent he became in his efforts to direct their conversations. He spoke of what was happening on campus and asked what the college had been like before. There were times when their conversation flowed,
But as he searched, it was none of the obvious places. He looked under the couch, through the stack of papers below the TV, behind the love seat. The more he looked the more he ran to the window and glanced down the street. She said she was going to mail some letters and buy some things and be right back. Maybe she stopped to talk to someone. Highly unlikely, Where was she? It's been fifteen minutes. He ran to the basement, to the row of dusty black volumes along the wall. He listened for the door. He had to do this. Sweat ran down his side. As he pulled a volume from the row a cockroach crawled over his hand. He listened for the door. Goddamn, and shook his hand until the bug dropped and disappeared. He ran back upstairs into her room, opened every drawer, checked the closet. Twenty minutes. He felt along the bed, pushed the pillow aside. There it was, heavy, loosely bound. He carefully turned the cover and the first pages. "Carlyle Brightton." He read out loud. "From the Shoreline." MCMXXVII, one thousand, nine hundred...nineteen twenty-seven. The front door opened and the door to the living room...Jeff walked out of the room, his face set, the book dangling at his side.

"Oh, Gregory. Come help me with this package." "I have to talk to you." He swallowed and held out the book. "You stole it. You stole it, damn you." Jeff caught her wrist as she reached for the book. He squeezed it unconsciously, feeling the thin muscles like a bundle of strings. He drew back again and pointed the book at her. "You stole it. You stole it, damn you." "You can have white, like the snow and I'll take black, like all the crazy printed words I've been reading lately." He noticed her mouth twist almost to a smile and he pushed the book out slightly, closer to the game. The snow deepened. It swirled about the house and whirled occasionally against the thin windows. At the end of the game she easily won, Jeff stared at the board. Her remaining white piece was in a corner, boxed in by aggressive black pieces stacked together.

As the Christmas vacation neared, Jeff's work load increased. Papers were due, tests to take, a thousand things to do. Yet he continued to visit her in the evenings before he studied, after he had eaten. The thought of a Christmas tree came to him as he sat with her one evening. His hands were wrapped around a steaming cup of tea when he said out loud, "Of course, that would liven up the place." Mrs. Greer sat across from him, her hands folded on her lap, watching the snow filter down upon her empty bird feeder. She noticed neither his remark nor the spot of tea he spilled.

The next day Jeff bought the smallest tree the Jaygreens had to offer, nailed a square block of wood to it and stuck it on the wobbly table that leaned in front of the window. He hurried up the steps before she could walk from her bedroom, pleased with himself. That night he had a deep strong sleep.

The next evening when he sat down to watch the news, Mrs. Greer was still considering the sloppy street. The tree sat nearly three feet high on the table. It looked flat, like it belonged to the wallpaper. It added neither color nor warmth.

"You know, a string of popcorn might be just what it needs. Want to make some?...Mind if I make more? You have any oil? Do you have any popcorn?" He searched the kitchen. She would probably help when he tried to put the needle through. It must be somewhere. Ah, yes! "Hey! Colored popcorn! Did you know you had colored popcorn?"

He popped a small amount, put it in a bowl, salted it heavily and laughing at salting as he took it into the living room. Mrs. Greer sighed feebly and waved "Pin's on the bureau." She watched as he strung every kernel onto the thread and hung it around the room. Several days went by. The tree still belonged to the wall paper. He thought of ginger-bread men, but if she was her typically taciturn self there was I knew thing to do but wait. He was eager, also, to crack his new course books. They looked good, and he was ready for a change, ready for a little less writing.

"Gregory, come sit down for a moment."

Peter Porteous